


Article

Imagery and Religious Conversion. The Symbolic Function of Jonah 1:13

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Abstract: Jonah 1:13 has a delaying function in the narrative, introducing a pause between Jonah's demand to be thrown in the sea (1:12) and the event's occurrence (1:15). Most commentators discuss only the events of 1:13 and their causes. In this article, I suggest an interpretation of Jonah 1:13 based on the imagery of the narrative. An analysis of the use of metaphors and symbols does not replace the message of the verse; such an analysis simply augments it with motives of the seamen's conversion. Beside the narrative level, there is a hidden level suggesting a deeper understanding of the story where symbols and metaphors have a consolidating function. Distance, directions, and movement in Jonah 1 describe acts with religious connotation. At the same time, the physical action of rowing is a symbolic anticipation of the seamen's conversion. It contains a message about the inner itinerary that leads to the transformation of the sailors. Thereby, I suggest that Jonah 1:13 not only reveals YHWH's plan with Jonah but it also focuses on the sailors and their conversion.

Keywords: theology; Old Testament; Jonah; biblical imagery; religious conversion

1. Introduction

Jonah is atypical as a prophetic book in the Bible, as it contains not the oracles but the story of the prophet. Jonah is commissioned by God to act as a prophet in Nineveh. Instead of pursuing the divine command, Jonah chooses to flee and boards a ship for Tarshish. God delivers a great storm on the sea. The sailors assume that the storm did not come by chance, but because they had offended some deity (1:7). Jonah is finally forced to confess that the storm is God's reaction to his running away from the prophetic mission that has been entrusted to him. Jonah also offers the solution to the crisis: he suggests the crew hurl him into the sea (1:12). This is what they eventually do and the storm ceases thereafter (1:15). However, the seamen do not immediately obey Jonah's instruction:

"Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more stormy against them." Jonah 1:13 (New Revised Standard Version)

This verse has generally received little attention from interpreters of the Book of Jonah. Limburg (1993, p. 55) comments only on the etymology of the verb "to row" and the description of the worsening of the storm. The well-known commentaries of Bewer (1912, p. 39), Rudolph (1971, p. 344), and Wolff (1977, p. 95) understand the assertion of v. 13 as a desperate measure taken by the seamen to rescue both Jonah's and their lives.

Commentators differ in their explanations behind the seamen's reaction and how this relates to God's plan with Jonah. Good notes, "The crew tries to avoid this solution (i.e., hurling Jonah into the sea), to save the prophet alive," without asking why the seamen behave this way (Good 1981, p. 45; cf. also Watts 1975, p. 80). Other commentators suggest that the sailors fear that YHWH might not wish the death of the prophet. Therefore, they try to keep Jonah alive out of fear that YHWH might punish them further (Bewer 1912, p. 39; Rudolph 1971, p. 344; Person 1996, p. 40). Lux explains why

the first reaction of the seamen (v. 13) is understandable. Jonah's demand that he be hurled into the sea is not the expression of a suicidal wish but that of self-sacrifice. He is prepared to die so that the others may live. This attitude moves the seamen and they decide to save Jonah, even if this means disobeying him (Lux 1994, p. 115). It is understandable that throwing Jonah overboard would be hazardous. Although Jonah's death would be guaranteed, the seamen could not be sure that the storm would cease (Bührer 2015, pp. 33–34).

Simon interprets the sailors' decision as a deliberate rejection of Jonah's logical proposal. Instead, they illogically rely on their technical knowledge about seafaring, which already had proven to be of no help (Simon 1994, p. 89). Person concludes that by disobeying Jonah and trying to fight the storm, the seamen involuntarily oppose God's will (Person 1996, p. 40). Jeremias also underlines the efforts of the sailors to save Jonah but adds an important remark: that the sailors unknowingly act as agents of YHWH, who wants to bring Jonah to Nineveh (Jeremias 2007, p. 88). Magonet goes even further, stating that the sailors try to row to dry land because "they anticipate what should have been Jonah's correct reply—namely to take him back so that he could complete his mission" (Magonet 1976, p. 89). It becomes obvious that most of the interpretations of Jonah 1:13 only discuss the events of the story and why they happen.

Recently, Bührer pointed out that v. 13 and v. 16 illustrate the turning of the seamen towards YHWH (Bührer 2015, p. 34). Whereas I share this point of view, in this article I suggest that the literal understanding of Jonah 1:13 can be augmented by a symbolic one. The physical action of rowing contains a message about the inner itinerary that leads to the transformation of the sailors. I thereby suggest that verse 13 not only reveals the plan of YHWH with Jonah, as Jeremias has pointed out (Jeremias 2007, p. 88), but it also focuses on the sailors and their conversion.¹

In support of my interpretation, I will first discuss the use of imagery in the narrative. Chapter 1 of the book not only hints at the unsuccessful disobedience of Jonah but also to the conversion of the seamen. This theme will be illustrated in the second part. Finally, I will highlight the symbolic imagery in verse 13 and its central position in the development of the conversion theme in Jonah 1.

2. The Use of Metaphors and Symbols in Jonah 1

There has been considerable debate among Old Testament scholars about the genre of this book (Jeremias 2003, pp. 105–9). Questions have been raised on how the author might have intended his book to be read: as a historical account; as traditional exegesis, argued up to the 20th century (Feuillet 1949, pp. 1111–13); or as popular fiction? Is Jonah an allegory (Ackroyd 1968, pp. 244–45), a satire (Good 1981, p. 41) or a philosophical treatise (Levine 1984)? Most scholars see in the Book of Jonah a story with a didactic point, although they have used different terms to define it: as a parable, a midrash, a novella, a didactic story, etc. (Good 1981, p. 40; Rudolph 1971, p. 325; Wolff 1977, p. 60; Gerhards 2006, pp. 68–71; Gerhards 2008). The lack of consensus in designating the proper genre of the book may underline the multidimensionality of this biblical masterpiece (Jeremias 2007, p. 77).

Given the didactic features of the Book of Jonah, I suggest that any interpretation of it should pay attention to the use of metaphors and symbols.

Metaphors are traditionally viewed as substitutes for other words. However, it is from their interaction with the context that metaphorical meaning is revealed. A metaphor is a deviation from the dominant, prototypic meaning of a word or phrase in a given context or situation (Kurz 2009, pp. 7–27).

Symbols are words or acts that represent something else by either analogy or synecdoche; something becomes a symbol because it is perceived in analogy to or as part of a whole. A symbol is an immanent part of the narrative text. There is a necessary contiguity between symbol and symbolized;

¹ "Conversion" (in the current sense of the term) is probably exaggerated in the case of the sailors. They do not become Israelites at the end of the storm scene. I shall use "conversion" as a generic term to describe the act of turning towards YHWH, supplication, and worship (Jonah 1:14, 16).

both belong to the same action context. Thus, symbols can function as signs which indicate or announce future possible meanings in the text (Kurz 2009, pp. 70–89).

The Bible uses metaphors not merely as literary devices but as deeply ingrained cognitive patterns that shape the way we think, act, or conceptualize our environment (Tilford 2017, pp. 1–24). The use of metaphors is foundational in biblical wisdom writings, such as Proverbs, Qohelet, Job, and some of the Psalms (Zabán 2016).

The author of Jonah thus wants to tell more than a simple story of a prophet. Beside the narrative level itself, there is a thematic level that is not immediately apparent to the reader. Only at the end of chapter 1 does the theme of conversion become explicit in the assertion that the seamen fear YHWH and worship Him (1:16). Consequently, a retrospective reading of Jonah 1 will examine the thematic level as a deeper message of the story, where symbols and metaphors have a consolidating function.

2.1. The Metaphor of the Way

The metaphor of the way is widely used in the Old Testament to express human attitude toward God. About a third of the occurrences of the noun *derek* (“way”) in the Hebrew Bible are metaphorical (Zehnder 2009). This makes the figurative use of *derek* a “conventionalized metaphor”, a metaphor that is not new, but not yet lexicalized (Kurz 2009). The metaphoric sense of *derek* was probably so common in Ancient Israel that Bergman (1977, p. 289) prefers to speak about “foreground” versus “background” senses instead of “literal” versus “metaphoric” ones.

Used metaphorically, “the way” describes a religious and/or ethical behavior of an individual (Koehler and Baumgartner 2001a, p. 232). To trespass the commandments of the Law is similar to turning aside, out of God’s way (Deut. 11:28). Deuteronomistic ideology uses the metaphoric sense of the way when evaluating the kings of Israel and Judah. A king should “walk in the ways of the Lord” (1 Kgs. 2:3; 3:14). Kings who “did not walk in the ways of God” (2 Kgs. 21:22) but followed the “evil way” instead (1 Kgs. 13:33) and “walked after other gods” (1 Kgs. 18:18) are made responsible for the collapse of Israel and Judah (2 Kgs. 17:7–17). *Derek* often has a religious connotation in biblical wisdom literature (Sauer 1971, pp. 458–60). The “two ways doctrine”, one way leading to happiness/life and the other to perdition/death, is a specific topic in biblical wisdom (Pss. 1:6; 2:12; 119:29–30; 139:24; Prov. 4:18–19; 12:28).

Derek is not used verbatim in Jonah 1. It is implicit in the mentioning of Nineveh’s wickedness (1:2) which is later associated with the “evil way” of the Ninevites (3:8, 10). However, the imagery of the way resonates in the unfolding of Jonah’s itinerary.

2.2. Distance and Direction as Symbols

Physical distance can also have a symbolic meaning in the Bible. The experience of God’s absence is expressed as a lament for His being far (*רחוק*): “Why, O Lord, do you stand far off?” (Ps 10:1); “Why are you so far from helping me?” (Ps. 22:2); “O Lord, do not be far from me” (Ps. 35:22).

Alienation of man from God is also suggested by physical distance in Genesis. After the fall, God banishes Adam and Eve from Paradise, at the east of Eden (Gen. 3:23–24). After murdering his brother, Cain went away from the presence of God and settled east of Eden (Gen. 4:16). Both episodes suggest that sin deepens the distance between man and God (cf. Prov. 15:29). Jeremiah and Ezekiel describe the state of those who have abandoned YHWH as “having gone far from him” (Jer. 2:5; Ezek. 44:10).

Geographical locations and directions in Jonah also have an emblematic function. Nineveh stands for the Assyrian Empire in the Book of Jonah. The city became capital of Assyria in the times of Sennacherib (705–681 BCE). It was situated in the environs of modern Mosul (Bewer 1912, p. 28). If Jonah was in Israel when he received God’s mandate (1:2), he would have had to travel northeast in order to reach Nineveh.

Jonah chooses to flee to Tarshish (1:3). The location of Tarshish or its direction in relation to Israel is not univocal (Baker 1992, pp. 331–33). Josephus identified it with Tarsus in Cilicia, north of Israel (Simon 1994, p. 76). The fact that Jonah embarked in Jaffa (Jonah 1:3) and that Tarshish is associated

with maritime areas (Ps. 72:10; 2 Chr. 9:21; Isa. 23:6) suggest a location west of Israel. Associations of Tarshish with Asia and Greece occur sometimes (Gen. 10:4; Isa. 66:19), whereas links with the south (Ezek. 38:13) are weaker (Baker 1992, p. 332). Most commentators identify Tarshish with Tartessos in southwest Spain, near the mouth of the Guadalquivir River, an area known in Antiquity as a source for metals and precious minerals (Bewer 1912, p. 29; Baker 1992, p. 332; Simon 1994, pp. 75–76; Wolff 1977, pp. 78–79; Rudolph 1971, p. 333; Jeremias 2007, p. 84). In going to Tarshish, the author depicts Jonah's plan to flee in a direction opposite of Nineveh (Wolff 1977, p. 78). To stress that Jonah's intention is firm, Tarshish is mentioned three times in v. 3, whereas Nineveh is only mentioned once in v. 2.

The assertion of Jonah fleeing “to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord” can suggest that Tarshish is geographically far from Israel. It took three years for Solomon's “ships of Tarshish” to return to Israel (2 Chr. 9:21).² Tarshish is known as a very distant place, where God's fame and glory are still unknown (Isa 66:19). For the author of Jonah, Tarshish is the end of the world (Wolff 1977, p. 78).

Simon (1994, p. 76) pointed out the difference in the Hebrew Bible between fleeing from someone's presence because of fear (*brḥ mṣny*) or because of the wish to break up with someone (*brḥ mlṣny*). Jonah wishes to flee as far as possible from God (Simon 1994, pp. 75–76). Thus, geographical distance suggests spiritual remoteness. With Tarshish being “(far away) from the presence of the Lord”, the journey thither is a symbol for Jonah's distancing himself from God's mandate.

Distance as an image of spiritual remoteness is also encountered in Jonah 2. In his psalm, Jonah laments his being far from YHWH because he has been cast by God in the “deep sea”, in the “belly of Sheol”. From his location, he cannot see the Temple of YHWH (Jonah 2:4–5). Therefore, the prayer of Jonah expresses his wish to be at the place of YHWH's dwelling, where Jonah would be again “in the presence of the Lord”.

2.3. “Descending” (*yrd*) as a Symbol

Repetition of verbs is a proprium of the narrative in Jonah 1 (Magonet 1976, pp. 16–19). It can serve to describe the dramatic atmosphere, as in the case of “to hurl” (*ṭwl*). God hurls the storm (1:4), the seamen hurl cargo overboard (1:5), Jonah brings up the hurling of him (1:12), and finally the seamen hurl Jonah into the sea (1:15).

However, repetition of words in a text can be an invitation to symbolic understanding (Kurz 2009). The itinerary of Jonah is described by repeating the verb “to descend” (*yrd*, 1:3, 5). He descends first in the Mediterranean port of Joppa. Here, he finds the ship to Tarshish and descends within it (1:3). Before or during the storm, Jonah descends into the lowest side of the ship and falls asleep (1:5). In this case, repetition of the action suggests progress.

The author of the book thus gives a metaphorical sense of Jonah's way. Jonah's rise to flee from the Lord is the starting point of a spiritual descending, indicated in the text through a series of physical descents.

The figurative sense of Jonah's way is also suggested by an assonance. While Jonah flees from God's mandate, he first descends (*wayyēred*, 1:3) to Joppa, then he descends (*yārad*, 1:5) into the deep of the ship where he falls asleep (*wayyērādam*, 1:5). The assonance of “he descended” with “he fell asleep” underlines the unconsciousness of Jonah's flight.

Descending as the continuation of fleeing from God is also associated with death. The terminology used in 1:5 to mention Jonah's descent into the depths of the ship (*yrd 'el-yarkē tē*) describes the descending “to Sheol, to the depths of the pit” in Isa 14:15. Similarly, death is suggested by the image of “descending (*yrd*) to the bottoms of the mountains” in Jonah 2:7. The mention of Jonah's “lying

² “Ships of Tarshish” might be just a designation for a kind of commercial ship, able to make extended trips (cf. Bewer 1912, p. 30; Wolff 1977, p. 79).

down” (*škb*) after descending (*yrd*) augments the death imagery (cf. Ezek 32:21). The verb used for Jonah’s falling asleep (*rdm*) precedes the death of Sisera in Judg 4:21 (Wolff 1977, p. 89).

3. The Theme of Conversion in Jonah 1

Parallel to the story about Jonah’s fleeing from God, but following in a different direction, there is the story about the conversion of the seamen (Krüger 1997, p. 45). The “descending” of Jonah occurs simultaneously with the sailors’ approaching the Lord.

Between the beginning and the end of the storm lies a process of transformation of the seamen. The following structure of the storm scene underscores the idea of conversion:

Sailors = “They” (v. 3)

Beginning of storm (v. 4)

Prayer to “their gods” (v. 5)

[...]

Prayer to YHWH (v. 14)

End of storm (v. 15)

Sailors = Worshipers of YHWH (v. 16)

The beginning of the sea scene contains the first mention of the sailors with a pronominal and therefore ambiguous reference: Jonah goes to board “with them” (*‘immāhem*) to Tarshish (1:3). By “they”, the reader is left to identify the crew of the ship. However, the vague shaping of their identity subtly describes their relationship with the Lord: “they” are unknown because they are far from the God of Jonah.

At the end of the storm, the sailors confess YHWH as their God:

“Then the men feared the LORD even more, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.” Jonah 1:16

The seriousness of their conversion is stylistically suggested in Hebrew by the threefold use of verbs followed by nouns with common roots, putting strong emphasis on their actions: *yr’ yir’ āh* (fear) / *zblh zebah* (sacrifice) / *ndr neder* (vow).

A more detailed structure of the storm scene, following a seven-stage symmetry, has been proposed by Cohn (1969, p. 51) and Magonet (1976, pp. 56–57):

(1)	4,5a	Narrative—Fear
(2)	5b	Prayer of Sailors
(3)	5c, 6a	Narrative
(4)	6b	Speech of Captain
(5)	7a	Speech of Sailors
(6)	7b	Narrative
(7)	8	Speech of Sailors
(C)	9, 10a	Proclamation by Jonah—Fear
(VII)	10b	Speech of Sailors
(VI)	10c	Narrative
(V)	11	Speech of Sailors
(IV)	12	Speech of Jonah
(III)	13	Narrative
(II)	14	Prayer of Sailors
(I)	15, 16a	Narrative—Fear

The narrative is carefully constructed and has the confession of Jonah as its climax. This confession answers the question of the seamen about Jonah’s origins and occupation, but it tells them more than

they expected. For the first time, they find out (*yḏ* ') about YHWH as the creator of heaven, sea, and dry land. The message of Jonah is intended to share knowledge about YHWH.

The transformation of the sailors is gradually evoked by means of the repetition of "to fear" (*yr* ') in the storm scene. The fear of the seamen caused by the storm is not without religious connotations. In the middle of the raging storm, "they were afraid" (*wayyîr^e 'û*, 1:5) and each man cried unto his god. It is Jonah's confession of faith, "I fear the Lord . . ." (*yr* ' , 1:9), that turns the fear of the seamen into a "great fear" (*wayyîr^e 'û yir 'āh g^edōlāh*, 1:10), precisely because they have come to know (*yḏ* ') about YHWH. In his confession, Jonah presents YHWH as the God whom one should fear, because as creator He has absolute power over the sea. It is formally the same extreme fear that reaches them in the end (*wayyîr^e 'û yir 'āh g^edōlāh*, 1:16), but this time it occurs after the sailors have acceded to the knowledge of the Lord. The extreme fear is now the expression of their powerful, new faith. In the case of the sailors, fear is a way that leads them towards the Lord.

4. Jonah 1:13 as a Symbolic Description of the Seamen's Conversion

Although Jonah suggests to the seamen that they throw him into the sea in order to solve the crisis (Jonah 1:12), the seamen hesitate to follow his instruction:

"Nevertheless, the men rowed hard (*ḥtr*) to bring back (*l^ehāšîb*) to land (*hayyabbāšāh*), but they could not, for the sea grew more and more stormy against them." Jonah 1:13

Their reaction can be explained in multiple ways, as shown in the introduction of this article: the seamen might show compassion and human solidarity; they might fear throwing into the sea a man whom they consider close to YHWH; they might think that YHWH wants Jonah to arrive in Nineveh alive, etc.

4.1. The Symbolism of "To Row Hard"

The verb used for rowing (*ḥtr*) means to dig in the earth (Amos 9:2) or to break through a wall (Exod. 22:1; Ezek. 8:8). Koehler and Baumgartner render the meaning of the verb in Jonah 1:13 as "to work one's way through rowing" (Koehler and Baumgartner 2001a, p. 365). The action requires an appreciable effort to overpower the resistance of a hard material. Since water cannot compare with earth or wall in this respect, the use of the verb in Jonah 1:13 is figurative (Simon 1994, p. 89). "Digging the sea" or "breaking through the walls of waves" describes the desperate efforts of the seamen to escape from perishing.

The action also suggests the efforts of the seamen to undertake a radical change with consequences for their lives.

4.2. "Land" as Symbolic Direction

This change implies choosing a new direction of navigation and by this, a new destination of the seamen's way. Tarshis as a destination is given up. The crew rows in the effort to turn towards "dry land" (*hayyabbāšāh*). Although there is no mention of this specifically, they are probably trying to reach the Israelite shore where they departed. Nevertheless, the term "dry land" connects verse 13 with Jonah's mission in Nineveh. The fish will spit Jonah out on the "dry land" (Jonah 2:11), where his mission to Nineveh, which he first fled, restarts (Jonah 3:1–2). By rowing towards the land, the seamen actually turn Jonah towards Nineveh.

Moreover, the "dry land" (*hayyabbāšāh*) has religious connotations. In 1:9, Jonah confessed YHWH as God of "the sea" (*hayyām*) and of the "dry land" (*hayyabbāšāh*) before the seamen. By trying to reach the dry land physically, the sailors consequently try to approach YHWH. Given the critical situation, both attempts to reach the dry land and YHWH would imply their rescue.

4.3. The Sense of “To Bring Back”

The basic meaning of the verb *šûb* is “to turn back, return” (Koehler and Baumgartner 2001b, p. 1429). The Hiphil form *ʾhāšîb* occurring in 1:13 means “to bring (turn) someone or something back”. It usually requires an object of the action in Biblical Hebrew, but this is omitted here (Wolff 1977, p. 95). The object is missing when the verb is used intransitively, meaning “to reply” (cf. Esth 4:13, 15), which is not the case here. Consequently, the object of the returning must be the ship, Jonah, or the seamen themselves.

In the Hebrew Bible, the verb *šûb* has religious connotations. Used in a theological sense, it refers to a major change in the conduct of individuals or groups. Therefore, *šûb* can mean “to turn away from” if the action focuses on the departing point (YHWH, cf. Num. 14:43; “the evil”, cf. Jer. 15:7) or “to turn back to”, if the destination of the action is envisioned (YHWH, cf. Jer. 4:1). “To turn back to God” means to be devoted to Him, to seek Him penitently (Koehler and Baumgartner 2001b, p. 1429; Soggin 1976, pp. 886–88). It describes the image of turning or returning to God by a person who has been far from Him. The call for “turning from the evil way” is frequently seen in the messages of the Prophets (Jer. 15:7; 18:11; 26:3, 13; 36:2–3, 6–7; Ezek. 3:18; 18:30; 33:8).

All other occurrences of the verb in the Book of Jonah (*lit.* “to turn from the evil way”, Jonah 3:8, 9, 10) have a religious sense, referring to the repenting Ninevites (cf. Fabry and Graupner 1993, p. 1163). Therefore, it is very plausible that the “turning back” of the ship performed by the seamen has also a symbolic meaning, being related to the metaphor of the way. This act may be understood as the seamen’s turning towards YHWH, since their initial destination, Tarshish, was “far away” from YHWH. Their “turning back” is an allusion to their conversion.

4.4. Verse 13 as Preparing Conversion

Alongside the extended conversion structures in Jonah 1 discussed above³, a reduced conversion structure can be revealed in verses 9–16:

- v. 9–10 knowledge about YHWH; fear of the seamen
- v.11 action: demand by Jonah
 - v.13 preparing conversion (turning to YHWH)
 - v.14 prayer to YHWH
- v.15 action: accomplishing Jonah’s demand
- v.16 acts showing conversion to YHWH (fear, sacrifice, vows)

Verse 13 is somehow pivotal in relationship to the preceding and following verses. With respect to the narrated action, verses 13 and 14 have a delaying characteristic, introducing a pause between Jonah’s demand to be thrown in the sea (v. 12) and the event’s occurrence (v. 15).

This delay is necessary to mark the transformation of the seamen. Verse 14 is a consequence of v. 13. Since the measures undertaken by the seamen prove to be useless (v. 13), the seamen pray to YHWH (v. 14). They accept their need to throw Jonah overboard, but first pray that YHWH may not lay upon them “innocent blood” due to a decision which was not their own. The sailors’ prayer ends with a proclamation of faith (“For you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you”, 1:14) which contrasts with Jonah’s flight, underlining that no one can oppose God’s will.

This prayer is noteworthy because it is the second prayer of the seamen, but the first addressed to YHWH. Jonah had shared with them knowledge about YHWH as Creator (1:9), but the seamen prayed to YHWH by their own decision. Thus, the prayer reveals an inner transformation. Finally, after the storm ends, the seamen worship YHWH, thus confirming their conversion (1:16).

Consequently, v. 13 triggered the transformation of the seamen and prepared the conversion of the seamen on a symbolic level of the narrative.

³ Cf. Section 2: “The Theme of Conversion in Jonah 1”.

5. Conclusions

In this article, I suggest an interpretation of Jonah 1:13 based on the imagery of the narrative. The use of metaphors does not replace the literal message of the verse, it simply augments it with motives of the seamen's conversion.

The metaphoric function of the way (distance, direction, movement) in Jonah 1 describes acts with religious connotations. The physical action of rowing is at the same time a symbolic anticipation of conversion. It contains a message about the inner itinerary that leads to the transformation of the sailors. I thereby suggest that verse 13 not only reveals the plan of YHWH with Jonah, but it also focuses on the sailors and their conversion. It is on this level of the narrative where the answer to the question: "Why do the seamen not immediately follow Jonah's instruction and cast him overboard?" should be searched for.

On the profound compositional level, verse 13 functions as a prelude to verse 14 ("turning to YHWH"—"praying to YHWH") and both verses have a central position in the structure of chapter 1: between Jonah's suggestion and its accomplishment; between the seamen's initial fear of YHWH and the final fear and worship of YHWH.

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