

## 22.1a Jonah and the Whale (Jonah 1; 2)

✓ “*Check*” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows.

[. . .] Brackets indicate a remark to the teacher that will not be read aloud, and they show answers to questions.

### Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional materials. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- (optional) CEF’s “Jonah, Don’t You Care?” flashcard story
- Lots (as in “casting lots”); make six or so 4-inch strips of paper, all with the name *Jonah* written on one side of them

**Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach:** Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print, cut out, and glue to card stock, or just print on colorful cardstock.

- *capital city*: the main city of a country, usually where the king lives and the government is carried on
- *enemy*: a country’s people who do not like another country and want to take over that country
- *exile*: the people of a country are taken away from their homeland to another country against their will
- *cargo*: the barrels and boxes of goods transported by ships, camels, and wagons in Bible times
- *whale or big fish*: [show picture]; tell that people have been swallowed by whales and have survived

### Scripture: (ESV)

Jonah 1:1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” 3 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 down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

4 But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. 5 Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. 6 So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.”

7 And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” 9 And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” 10 Then the men were 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.

11 Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. 12 He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl 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.” 13 Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. 14 Therefore they called out to the Lord, “O Lord, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.” 15 So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

17 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.

2:1 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, 2 saying, “I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. 3 For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. 4 Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’ 5 The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head 6 at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. 7 When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. 8 Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. 9 But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!”

10 And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

### **Introduction/Review:**

Israel had many enemies. The main one we’ve talked about is Syria [locate]. Also known as Aram (as on the map below), its capital city was Damascus [locate]. Elisha had gone all the way to Damascus in order to anoint Hazael king of Syria. By the time of today’s story, Hazael had died and his sons and grandsons ruled over Syria.

### **Story:**

#### ***Assyria’s city of Nineveh***

A new enemy of Israel lived just east of Syria. This land was called Assyria [locate]; just a slight difference from the name Syria, it was Assyria. (Some Bible translations name it Asshur.) It was the strongest nation in the world at that time. Its capital was Nineveh, a huge city, the largest in the known world.

It was a good thing Assyria and Nineveh were a long way from Israel. If they had come against Israel, Assyria could surely have squashed Israel. Yet, even though they were a long way off, there was always a chance they might come against Israel. If so, that wicked kingdom of Assyria with its violent soldiers would torture captives and carry them off to foreign cities. Oh, Assyria was a dreadful enemy.

#### ***Jonah’s call***

Jonah, God’s prophet, lived during this time. He is the one who told Jeroboam II that God would give back to Israel land it had lost. God did give back that land. ✓No doubt Jonah had studied the scrolls in which God had predicted Israel would be exiled from its land if they didn’t stop worshipping idols. Israel would not stop worshipping idols. Would Assyria be the kingdom to take Israel captive?

✓Perhaps Jonah was thinking all these thoughts when the word of the Lord came to him: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because of its wickedness.”

Jonah didn’t want to go to Nineveh. Would you? He decided to run away from God.

#### ***Jonah’s get-away***

Can anyone run away from God? [No.] How do you know? [God is everywhere and knows all things.] Surely, Jonah knew better, but he still tried to run away from God. He went to Joppa [locate on the Mediterranean coast, second map below], bought a ticket to Tarshish (modern Spain), and got on the boat. He walked down the steps to the lower part of the ship and fell into a deep sleep as the ship began its journey.

Jonah might have thought he had escaped God’s plan for him, but God sent a great wind on the sea—a violent storm so strong that the ship threatened to break apart. Water was coming on board. The sailors were terrified. To lighten the ship, they started to throw the cargo overboard. Each sailor prayed to his god, but the storm continued to rage and rage more and more.

The captain of the ship went below and found Jonah. “How can you sleep in this terrible storm? Get up and call upon your God. Maybe He will notice us, and we won’t perish in the sea.”

Still the storm raged. Praying to false gods wasn’t helping. The sailors said to one another, “Someone here is responsible for this dreadful storm. Let’s cast lots to see whose fault it is.” When they cast lots, whose name came up? [Teacher, draw or have a student draw from the “stacked” lots.] Yes, Jonah’s name was chosen. [If students realize all your lots are for Jonah, tell them the sailors’ lots were all different.]

### ***Jonah’s exposure***

“Who are you? Where do you come from? What is your country? Who are your people? Why is all this trouble coming to us?” they demanded of Jonah.

“I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land,” answered Jonah.

“Oh, no!!” answered the terrified sailors. “What have you done?” They knew Jonah was running away from the Lord because he had already told them so (Jonah 1:10).

Meanwhile, the sea was getting more and more turbulent. “Jonah, what should we do to you in order to made the sea calm down for us?” the sailors demanded.

“Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” Jonah answered. “The sea will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this storm has come. Go ahead. Throw me overboard.”

Instead, the sailors tried to row to land. But this was impossible, for the storm grew even worse. It seemed inevitable that they were all lost: they must throw Jonah overboard. But that would be like murdering a man. They prayed to the God of heaven, “O Lord, please do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O Lord have done as you please.”

Then they took Jonah and hurled him into the raging sea. Immediately, the raging sea grew calm. Oh, Jonah’s God was obviously the true God. The sailors worshiped Him and offered a sacrifice, making promises to Him.

### ***Jonah’s three days***

Did Jonah die in the Mediterranean Sea? No. God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. ✓Perhaps this fish was a whale. Whatever it was, God spared Jonah from final death in the sea.

No picture could adequately describe what Jonah must have experienced inside that fish. Most pictures show roomy accommodations. That is not likely. The Bible says the “engulfing waters threatened me and surrounded me.” Pictures show a lighted area. It wasn’t. It was pitch black—totally without any glimmer of light. That in itself is terrifying. Add to darkness the acid gastric juices and water in the fish’s stomach. ✓Perhaps those juices stung Jonah’s skin and gave off a terrible odor. Sea creatures the fish had eaten perhaps attached themselves to Jonah. The Bible does say that seaweed was wrapped around his head. Oh, it was a terrible experience for three days and for three nights as Jonah lived—barely—inside that fish.

### ***Jonah’s prayer***

What could Jonah do but pray? So that is exactly what he did: “I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, And He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol (the grave) I cried, And You heard my voice. For You cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the floods surrounded me.

“Then I said, ‘I have been cast out of Your sight; Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.’ The earth with its bars closed behind me forever; Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God. When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; And my prayer went up to You.

“I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; Salvation belongs to the Lord! I will pay what I have vowed” (NKJV).

The last statement of Jonah is so important: “Salvation is of the LORD.” We need to remember this always.

The Lord commanded the fish to spit Jonah out. After three days and three nights in the fish, Jonah was safe on land. He said he would do what God said. Will he? We will find out next week.

### ***Jesus’ illustration***

The story of Jonah is in the Bible; therefore, we believe it. It sounds like fiction, but it is absolutely true. People who do not believe the Bible, however, do not believe this story.<sup>1</sup> If they don’t believe this story, perhaps they do not believe in Jesus either.

Jesus Himself believed this story and gave it as an illustration of His own death and resurrection. This is what He said: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40).

When was Jesus three days and three nights in the heart of the earth? [When He died on the cross and was buried in a tomb.] Christ, who was actually dead those three days and three nights, was resurrected and now ever lives, giving salvation to those who believe on Him. “Salvation is of the Lord.”

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<sup>1</sup>Several Jonah-like encounters have been recorded in history. Here is one. “James Bartley became a believer [in the story of Jonah] in February 1891. He was a seaman on an English whaling ship, *Star of the East*. They were chasing a sperm whale near the Falkland Islands when the whale dove, hit one of the whale boats with its tail, and upset it. One man drowned and another, Bartley, was missing and assumed dead. The whale was killed and dragged to the ship, where the process of stripping off its oily flesh began.

“The morning after, they were still at it. Lifting tack was attached to the whale’s stomach, by then exposed, and it was hoisted up onto the deck for cutting. A slight, spasmodic movement from within startled the sailors. They thought there might be a large fish inside: cases of 12 and 16 ft. sharks swallowed whole are on record.

“But on slitting open the gigantic jaw, they found Bartley, doubled up, drenched and in a coma, but still alive. Doused with sea water, he began to come around. But his mind wasn’t clear, and he was taken to the captain’s cabin and kept there under lock and key for two weeks. He was a half-human, gibbering lunatic.

“By the end of the third week he had recovered his senses and gone back to work. The acidic gastric juices of the whale had bleached his face, neck, and hands to a dead white, with the look and feel of old parchment. He could clearly remember the ordeal: the sensation of being thrown into the water, followed quickly by a rushing sound and then, ‘a great darkness.’ He felt himself slipping along a smooth passage that seemed in motion itself, carrying him with it. Then a short time later, he realized he had more room. He felt around in the blackness for the walls of his prison and found them thickly slimy and soft.

“When he realized where he was, he was overcome with fear. There was a terrific, oppressive heat inside the stomach (a whale’s body temperature is 104° F). He had no difficulty finding air to breathe, but fought a terrifying, absolute silence. Eventually he passed out and woke up in the captain’s cabin. On last report, he was ‘in splendid spirits and enjoying life’” ([www.eagleflight.org/characters/jonah2.html](http://www.eagleflight.org/characters/jonah2.html), quoting “Journey to the Center of the Digestive System” (from *Best, Worst and Most Unusual*, by Bruce Felton and Mark Fowler)).

### **Lessons from This Lesson:**

- We see Jesus:

The sign Jesus gave of His resurrection was the sign of Jonah—dead raised to life after three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40).

Jonah said, “Salvation is of the Lord.” Paul said to the Philippian jailer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

- Obey God right away.

- Believe the Bible, no matter how strange some of its stories may seem. God is true and righteous and does not lie.

### Activities:

- Play dough: fish (whale); ship; cargo barrels and boxes
- Snack: Goldfish® crackers; dried seaweed
- Play a game like “London Bridge”: Partners face each other and join hands, raising their hands high to look like the ribs of a whale. The first pair in line is “Jonah.” These two students crawl under the fish ribs as if they were inside the giant fish. When the “Jonah” students get to the end, they stand up and join the line. Then the next pair becomes “Jonah.” Station an adult at the beginning and end of the line to assist students (Group Publishing).
- Obedience Tag: “It” and students sing “Row Your Boat.” “It” unexpectedly says, “Obey God.” That is the signal for students to run to the “safe” circles, outlined by rope, string, or chalk on the floor. A person tagged before entering the circle is “It” (Group Publishing).
- Taste salt water.
- With a whale puppet and a partner (another adult or older student), present the “Willa Whale” puppet show. This script may be found on the “Extras” page at [teachingthebibleto kids.org](http://teachingthebibleto kids.org).
- Sing Jonah songs found on these internet sites:  
<http://www.biblesongsandmore.com/songs/old-testament-songs/jonahsong/>  
[Jonah and the Whale Song \(dltk-kids.com\)](http://dltk-kids.com/jonah-and-the-whale-song/)  
[Jonah and the Whale \(dltk-kids.com\)](http://dltk-kids.com/jonah-and-the-whale/)  
[Who Did? \(A Jonah song.\) \(dltk-kids.com\)](http://dltk-kids.com/who-did-a-jonah-song/)
- Sing the third stanza of “The Hornet Song”:  

When Jonah was sent to the work of the Lord, The outlook was not very bright;  
He never had done such a hard thing before, So he backed and ran off from the fight.  
But God sent a big fish to swallow him up, The story I’m sure you all know.  
He did not compel him to go ‘gainst his will, But He just made him willing to go  
Chorus:  
He does not compel us to go (no, no), He does not compel us to go;  
He does not compel us to go ‘gainst our will, But He just makes us willing to go.
- Review questions: (Game: Cover a table [the whale] with a sheet. Let each student who answers a question correctly go into the “whale” and then come back out [Group Publishing]).  
  1. Why didn’t Jonah want to go to Nineveh? [It was a city in a wicked, idol-worshipping, enemy country, Assyria.]
  2. How did Jonah try to run away from God? [He boarded a ship for Tarshish, in the opposite direction of Nineveh.]
  3. What happened while Jonah was asleep? [A terrible storm came up.]
  4. How did the sailors know Jonah was the cause of the storm? [They drew lots; Jonah was picked.]
  5. What happened when Jonah was hurled overboard? [A great fish swallowed him.]
  6. What did Jonah do in the belly of the fish? [Prayed.]
  7. How did Jonah get out of the fish? [God caused the fish to vomit Jonah out on dry land.]

### Memory Verses:

- Psalm 139:1–18, 23, 24 (NKJV)  
(A very nice song book with black-and-white visuals [I water colored mine] and a CD is available as a

learning tool at [Psalm 139 - NKJV \(thywordcreations.com\)](http://thywordcreations.com). Learning this psalm may take six months or more. Some teachers think saying/singing the whole psalm every week is a good way to learn it. However, this Psalm 139 song book breaks the passage after verse 13; therefore, a suggestion is to work on verses 1–13 for thirteen weeks and then the rest of the psalm for an additional eight weeks or more. Take one or two lessons to say/sing the whole psalm.)

<sup>1</sup>O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*.

<sup>2</sup>You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off.

<sup>3</sup>You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup>For *there is* not a word on my tongue, *But* behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.

<sup>5</sup>You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup>*Such* knowledge *is* too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot *attain* it.

<sup>7</sup>Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?

<sup>8</sup>If I ascend into heaven, You *are* there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You *are there*.

<sup>9</sup>*If* I take the wings of the morning, *And* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

<sup>10</sup>Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me.

<sup>11</sup>If I say, “Surely the darkness shall fall on me,” Even the night shall be light about me;

<sup>12</sup>Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light *are* both alike *to You*.

<sup>13</sup>For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb.

<sup>14</sup>I will praise You, for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And *that* my soul knows very well.

<sup>15</sup>My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, *And* skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

<sup>16</sup>Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When *as yet there were* none of them.

<sup>17</sup>How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!

<sup>18</sup>*If* I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You. . . .

<sup>23</sup>Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties;

<sup>24</sup>And see if *there is any* wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

- Alternative verse: “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

### Handwork:

- Many coloring pages are available.
- Make a whale origami; see instructions at [Origami Whale Folding Instructions \(origami-instructions.com\)](http://origami-instructions.com).

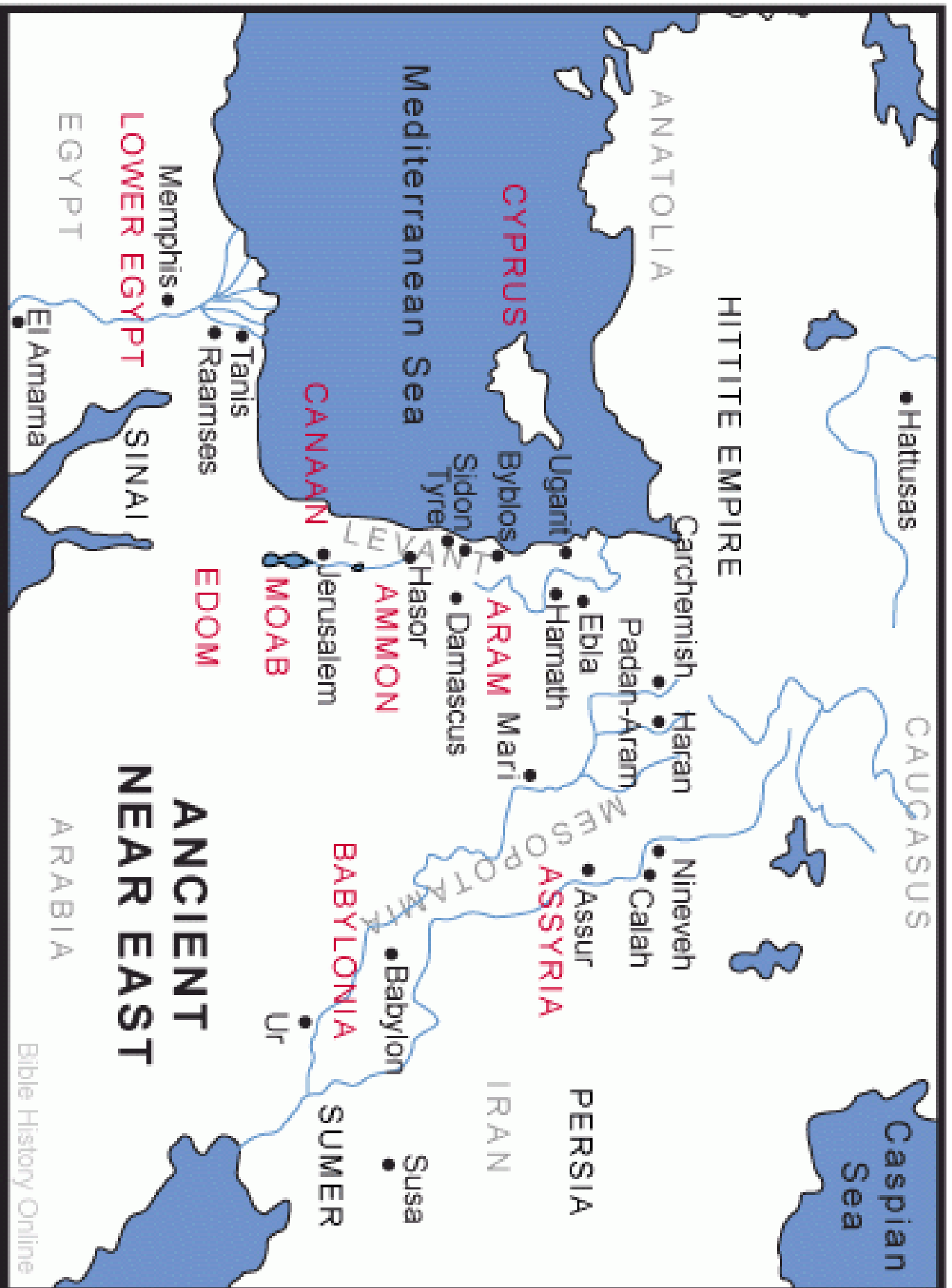
*capital city*

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*whale/big fish*





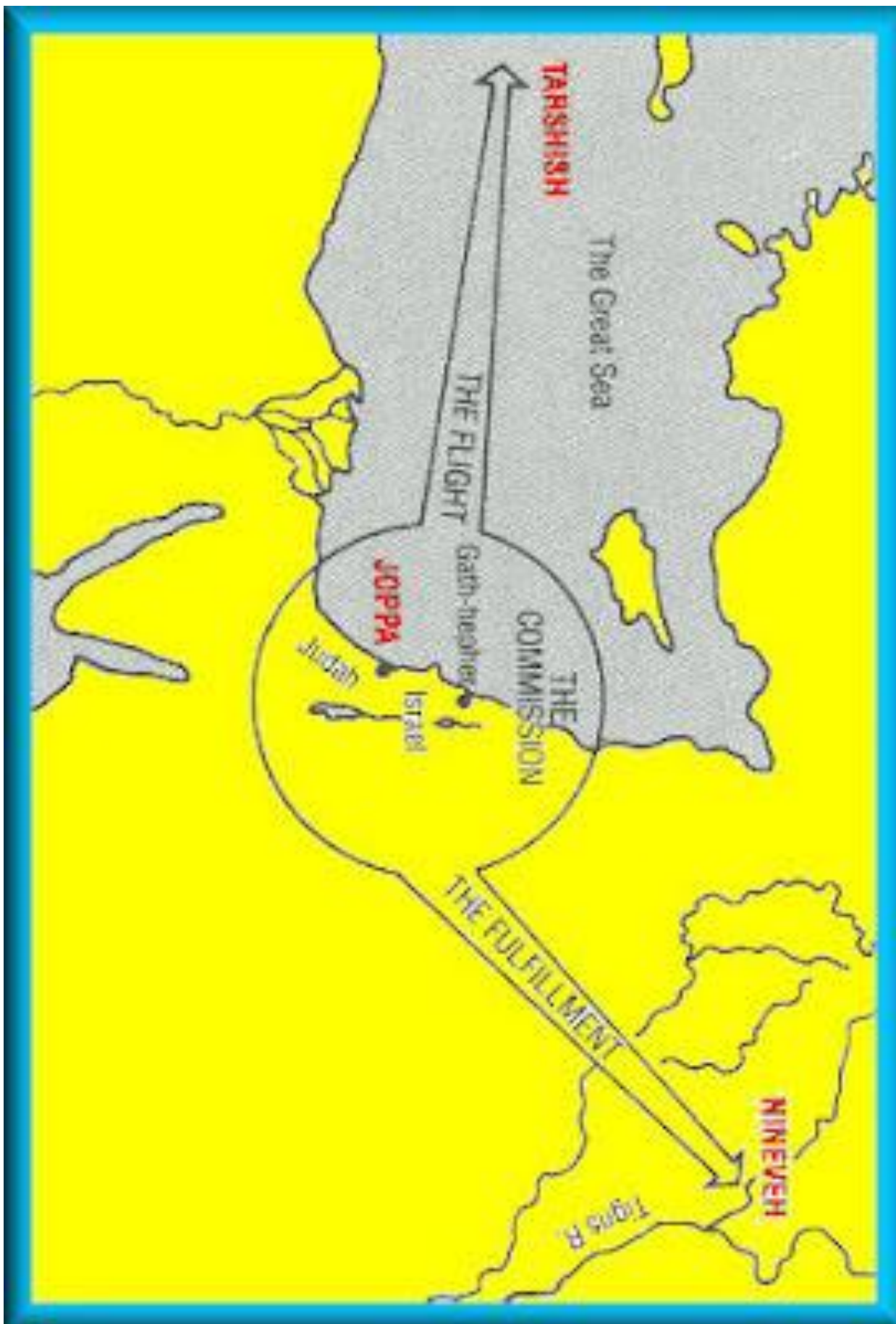


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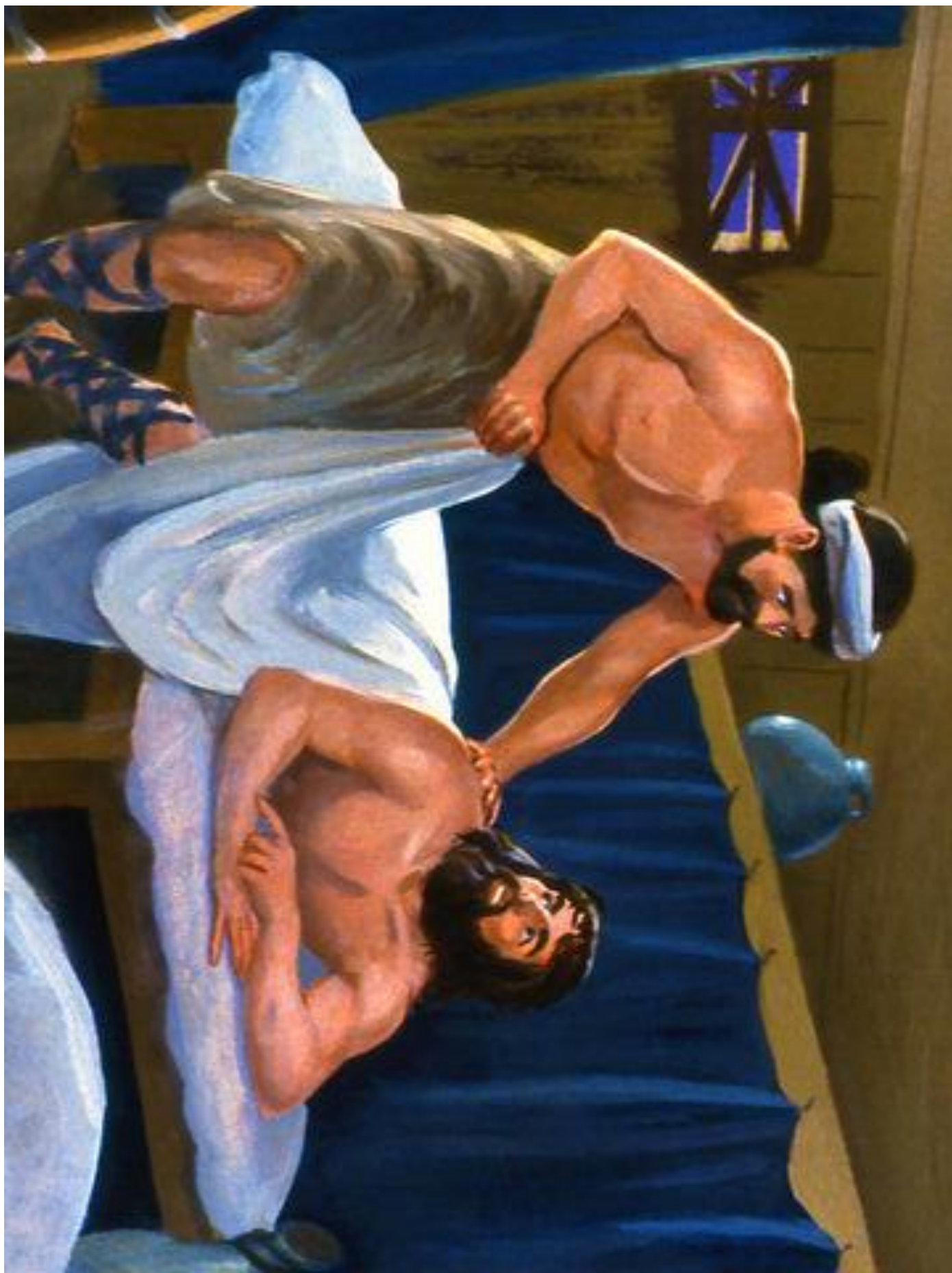






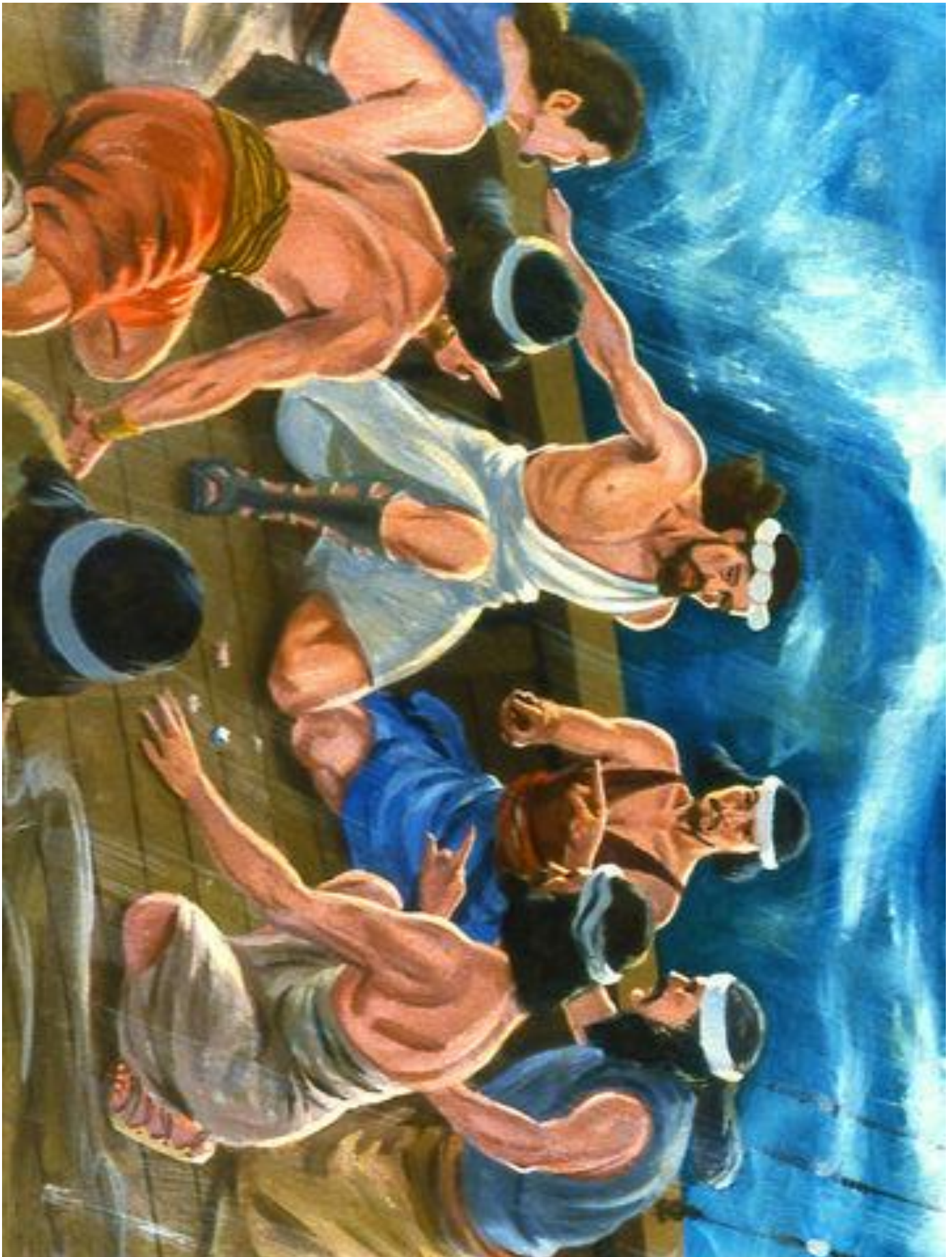
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