

## JONAH

According to the Lord Jesus, Jonah was a real person who was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, - He fully substantiated the Old Testament story, - and out of it He informed the scribes and Pharisees, **Mt. 12:40** For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth [*see also Lk. 11:30*].

Jonah's ministry is also referred to in II Kings 14, **II Kings 14:25** 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 reigned forty and one years. <sup>24</sup> And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat [*reigned c. 793-785 BC*], who made Israel to sin. <sup>25</sup> He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher. ... That sets the scene for the times in which he prophesied. By the way, he prophesied just prior to Amos.

Jonah ('dove'; cf. **Gen. 8:8** Also he [*Noah*] sent forth a dove [*yownah*] from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground) was the son of Amittai ('my truth'), from Gathhepher ('the winepress of digging' ... 'Gath' [*Geth(... as in Gethsemane)*] means a 'winepress' ... and the word 'hepher' means 'to dig'). It was a town in the northern kingdom of Israel, belonging to the tribe of Zebulun (Josh. 19:13) ... in the Galilee region, three miles to the north of Nazareth. Therefore, Jonah, - like Jesus, - was also a Galilean.

The reign of Jeroboam II was a time of opulent prosperity in the kingdom of Israel. They were managing well living life as they pleased. They had regained lost territory and expanded their boundaries and influence. ... They observed their own form of the worship of God, which differed somewhat from the worship in the temple back in Jerusalem. Spiritually, they were far away from God. As a result, God would judge them by bringing the Assyrians to invade their (which He would later do in 721 BC) ... Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. For fifty years (from 662-612 BC) it was the largest city in the world. Sennacherib had made it especially great ... It was built originally by Nimrod (Gen. 10:11), who had also built Babel. Nineveh's supreme deity was the goddess Ishtar. ... It was to this city Jonah was directed by God to bring the prophecy of Divine judgment.

As we take into consideration the Old Testament was written for the Jewish people, this small book of Jonah has as its first emphasis teaching relating to the children of Israel. It demonstrates God's compassion towards outside nations, even those who were their enemies. Assyria would conquer the ten northern tribes, and Babylon would conquer the two southern tribes ... yet, through Jonah's ministry God would show His love and mercy towards Gentiles. ... And that was how God had instructed Abram, for He told him, **Gen. 12:2** *And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing* ... Jonah was called to go and be a blessing to sinful Nineveh, - a Gentile people, - in keeping with the ancient Abrahamic covenant.

The Pharisees in Jesus' day, though, had long since forgotten they were to be a blessing to other nations, - they considered God had no interest in anyone but them! Also, they did not seem to have a very high opinion of Jonah, - either that, or they forgot about him, - because when the spies came back, - the spies who were spying on Jesus, - and told them what Jesus was saying and doing, they gave quite a favourable assessment, **Jn. 7:46** *Never man spake like this man.* ... Not willing to give Jesus even a modicum of credit the disgruntled Pharisees snarled, **52** *Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.* ... But yes, there *had* been a prophet who had arisen out of Galilee, for *Jonah* had come from Galilee.

Warren Weirsbe gives a good description of what was happening in the Book of Jonah. He commented how "Jehovah is the 'God of the second chance', even for rebellious prophets". ... And that is what Jonah was, - he was a rebellious prophet for when the Lord told him to do something, he rebelled for he didn't want to do it! ... The Lord clearly instructed him to go north-eastwards to Nineveh, but instead, he went the opposite direction, intending to go to Tarshish. He defied God, and what a dangerous course of action he took!

In fact, notice a seemingly insignificant word that is a feature of this prophecy, **Jonah 1:2** *Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.* **3** *But* Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and *went down* to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and *went down* into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. **4** *But* the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. **5** *Then* the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. *But* Jonah was *gone down* into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. ... And notice also how each

time the word ‘but’ indicates how he keeps ‘going down’ ... **11** Then said they unto him [*i.e. they wakened him*], What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous. **12** And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you [*Jonah had come to know it was all his fault*]. **13** Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

Eventually, they decided they had to cast him overboard, **15** So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. ... He went even further ‘down’, into the sea but notice how, - even as a consequence of Jonah’s rebelliousness, - it brought these idol-worshippers to their knees. Previously, they had referred to Jonah’s God as ‘thy God’, in other words, He wasn’t *their* God. That changes though for in v. 16 we are told, **16** Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows. ... God was working *despite* rebellious backsliding Jonah!

And just when Jonah thought it could not get any worse, *it did!* ... He had been consistently going in one direction since he started going *down* from the hills of Gathhepher in Galilee, *down* to the seaside port at Joppa, *down* into the hold of the ship to sleep, over the side of the boat and *down* into the sea ... and then, *down* into the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights (v.17) ... But it was only when the Lord brought him down so far that Jonah remembered, and he called out for mercy, **2:1** Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, **2** And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. **3** For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. **4** Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. **5** The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. **6** I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. **7** When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. **8** They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. **9** But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD. ... What a mighty statement God had reminded him of, Salvation is of the LORD.

It wasn’t to do with Jonah who the Lord would save! If God chose to save the Ninevites, He had every right to save them! Yes, the pagan Ninevites deserved the wrath of God, - they didn’t deserve God’s mercy ... but salvation is of the

Lord, and it is *His* business who He saves!! But Jonah saw no point in going to them, - God had no place in His plan for a people such as them ... Oh yes, He had! ... And God showed it to him when he was incarcerated within the belly of the fish!

God has a reason in everything He does ... and He had a reason for sending Jonah to Nineveh. It was not up to Jonah to judge what the message should be, or why that message should be preached, - he should simply have left all, and gone and preached it! ... The message is *God's* message, and the messenger is simply sent to deliver it! ... And if Jonah would have done that at the beginning, he would have saved himself from so much fear, anxiety, pain, and hardship! ... How foolish he was in tempting the will of God!

The Lord did not give up on him ... The Lord does not give up on His people, for which many of us are extremely grateful! ... It's the lesson He often repeated through the prophets to Israel and Judah to return ... for He continued to have plans for them!

And that is how He was dealing with Jonah, - He hadn't given up on him, no matter how many attempts the prophet tried to abscond ... And just think of the heartache Jonah brought upon himself because he tried to run from God. It would not have been pleasant for him during those times ... especially those three days and three nights in the fish's belly ... And even when he was vomited up onto the dry land, he would not have been a pretty sight ... or a pleasant smell! Often we suffer what we bring upon ourselves!

**3:1** And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time ... there is grace ... grace beyond what we are worthy, for the Lord to give Jonah a second 'chance', - another opportunity. The Lord could have set Jonah aside and called someone else, worthier and far more prone to obedience ... but He returned to Jonah with the same message, **2** Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee [*cf. 1:2* Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me].

This time, he *did* go and preach and, - lo, and behold, - the people of Nineveh repented of their sins and averted the judgment of God, at that time ... **3:5** So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. **6** For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. **7** And he caused it to be proclaimed and

published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: <sup>8</sup> But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. <sup>9</sup> Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? ... *Fantastic!* ... <sup>10</sup> And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not. ... He postponed His judgment of Nineveh to a later date ... It was actually destroyed in 612 BC, as further prophesied by Nahum (cf. 1:14; 3:19, etc) and Zephaniah (2:13-15). It is in ruins on the outskirts of modern-day Mosul in northern Iraq, on the eastern bank of the River Tigris.

However, anyone else would have been elated at the sinners, - Gentiles, - repenting and turning to God, **Jonah 4:1** But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. The word for 'displeased' (*yara*) indicates he was *trembling*, he was so angry (*charah*, burning with anger)! ... How? Why?! Why wasn't He glad these people had accepted his God as their God?! ... He didn't think they deserved it! And also, he 'had an inkling' God would forgive them, and, - in trying to justify his earlier behaviour, in running off, - he told God that's why he did what he did! <sup>2</sup> And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. ... Instead of praising the Lord, the salvation of Nineveh upset him! ... He went away off, like a spoiled child who hasn't got his way, but the Lord followed him, - the Lord doesn't give up - ... <sup>5</sup> So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city. <sup>6</sup> And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. <sup>7</sup> But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. <sup>8</sup> And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. <sup>9</sup> And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. <sup>10</sup> Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: <sup>11</sup> And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

Jonah was hard to fathom! Remember, though, the greater lesson of this true story was to the children of rebellious Israel. Jonah was chosen and commissioned by God to be a witness, but he rebelled against God's will. Nevertheless, God brought him back ... and He (God) miraculously preserved His underserving people, - as He preserved Jonah also. He kept Jonah, as He also promised to keep Israel

God never casts aside those whom He chooses. His choice is always made in keeping with His will. His will is eternal, therefore, the decisions He makes have their fulfilment in eternity. Time can neither erase or reverse God's will. Time cannot change what God has prepared in eternity. ... God chose Jonah, and He would not dispense with him. God chose Israel, and He would never set them aside either ... and that is why they are continuing to this day, and why they will keep on continuing until Jesus returns. ... And God chose you and me also, - not as an afterthought, - but He chose us in eternity ... Therefore, like Jonah and Israel, He will never cast us off for we are eternally His ...

Loved with everlasting love,  
Led by grace that love to know ...  
In a love which cannot cease,  
I am His, and He is mine.

## OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF JONAH

### **I. God's Patience with Jonah ... Running from God's Will (1:1–17)**

- A. Jonah's Commission (1:1, 2)
- B. Jonah's disobedience and defiance (1:3)
- C. Jonah's apathy (1:4–16)
- D. The Preservation of Jonah (1:17)

### **II. God's Mercy towards Jonah ... Submitting to God's Will (2:1–10)**

- A. The Helplessness of Jonah (2:1–3)
- B. The Prayer of Jonah (2:4–7)
- C. The Repentance of Jonah (2:8, 9)
- D. The Deliverance of Jonah (2:10)

**III. God's Power through Jonah ... Fulfilling God's Will (3:1–10)**

- A. The Commission Renewed (3:1, 2)
- B. The Prophet Obeys (3:3, 4)
- C. The City Repents (3:5–9)
- D. The Lord Relents (3:10)

**IV. God's Ministry to Jonah ... Questioning God's Will (4:1–11)**

- A. The Prophet Resentful (4:1–5)
- A. The Prophet Rebuked (4:6–11)