



THE PROPHET JONAH

WILDERNESS CAMP

THE PROPHET JONAH

STUDY NOTES • 2023



WELCOME

Dear Young Person,

Welcome to Wilderness Camp 2023! We are delighted that you have chosen to join us and are looking forward to a motivating study of Jonah followed by an encouraging camp together. Wilderness Camp is designed to help each of us put aside quiet time regularly - away from all the distractions in our lives - and spend time with God and His Word.

As you are no doubt aware, to meet this aim, the Camp involves a personal commitment by each of us as attendees to study Jonah. These notes will help in accomplishing that - they are easy to read yet filled with fascinating insights into the incredible story of the Prophet.

The Camp will be structured around interactive workshops and discussion groups, rather than a series of talks, so the success of the camp relies upon your preparation.

What does this mean for me?

As an attendee at Wilderness Camp, you are expected to:

- Prioritise attendance at the **Preparatory Workshop** and your **Mentor Sessions**.
- Listen to either the series on **The Sign of the Prophet Jonah** by Bro Roger Lewis, OR **Jonah - God's Mercy When We Are Obstinate** by Bro Gary Cousens, available on the website.
- Study Jonah using the **Camp Notes**, as well as any other materials you may find helpful.
- **Mark your study** into your Bible.

With that done, we will all be well prepared for the activities at the Camp!

Of course, there are far more insights into the book of Jonah than could be captured in these Notes. There are many additional resources available from within and without the Christadelphian community; some of these will be placed on our Resources page, should you like to use them, at wilderness-camp.com/studyresources.

We would like to thank the many Brothers and Sisters who have contributed to these notes and pray that God will remember their work for good.

We trust this will be an exciting opportunity for you to study Jonah. We recommend you put aside time regularly for your study. Please get in touch with us early if you would like any assistance planning how you can complete the study.

We look forward to sharing Wilderness Camp 2023 with you, God willing.

In the Hope of our Lord's return,

The Wilderness Camp Committee

April 2023

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RESOURCES

TALKS

- *The Sign of the Prophet Jonah*, Bro Roger Lewis
- *Jonah - God's Mercy When We Are Obstinate*, Bro Gary Cousens

OTHER CHRISTADELPHIAN WORKS

- *Mercy & Judgement - An exposition of Jonah and Nahum*, Bro Geoff Henstock
- *Minor Prophets Study Guide* (The Christadelphian)
- *From Hosea to Zephaniah*, Bro Fred Pearce
- *The Goodness and Severity of God - Jonah and Nahum*, Bro H P Mansfield
- *Salvation is of Yahweh - The Prophecy of Jonah* (Clarendon Study Notes 1985)

KEY ABBREVIATIONS

mg = margin

s/w = same word

Heb = Hebrew

Gk = Greek

Barnes = Barnes Commentary

TDOT = The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament

TSK = Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge

Str. = Strong's Concordance

Cp = compare

OT = Old Testament

NT = New Testament

BDB = Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Definitions

ISBE = International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

Cambridge Commentary = The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges

NIV Study Bible = The NIV Study Bible, Zondervan, 2011 Ed.

ESV Study Bible = The ESV Study Bible, Crossway, 2008 Ed.

LXX = The Septuagint Old Testament

HCSB = Holman Christian Standard Bible

NIV = New International Version

ESV = English Standard Version

LEB = Lexham English Bible

Roth = Rotherham's Translation

RSV = Revised Standard Version

NASB = New American Standard Bible

ASV = American Standard Version

ISV = International Standard Version

YLT = Young's Literal Translation



BACKGROUND



INTRODUCTION

The study of Jonah is a most interesting one. Few and far between are the prophets who turned around and said 'no' to the commission of Almighty God! A man of burning passion and forthright disposition, Jonah's story is one of intrigue from the very beginning. It's not every day that we read of a man of faith booking a ticket to the end of the earth, or a Jew rebuked by Gentiles for failing to pray, or - for that matter - a man enduring a 'near-death experience' of being swallowed by a fish!

Jonah's account is filled with sensational experiences from the very beginning. Yet this only makes the character of the man all the more remarkable. Jonah's relentless resolve to avert the will of God has filled many Bible students with bewilderment! Why would God preserve the tale of a man whose sole intent was to do the opposite of what God told him?

But as we begin to gain an insight into this man, we discover a story rich with plot and meaning. We find a man passionate for the cause of his people and driven by the example of those who went before him. Beneath the hard exterior of Jonah's stubborn disposition is a man in utter turmoil. That he loves his God is palpable from his prayer inside the fish, yet his desire to save his brethren was just as much the driving force of this man.

It is easy for us to be critical of Jonah. He is often characterized as a contentious man, a man with deep hang-ups and nationalistic preconceptions. His attitude has been described as petty, mean-spirited, and self-righteous. And yet, for all we might think of him, it was Jonah to whom the Lord turned as a sign to the generation of his day!

Doubtless Jonah struggled with the commission given him by God, and he can pale into insignificance in our minds in view of other prophets like Moses and Elijah. But consider the task this man was set. As we will find, the Assyrians were no friend of Israel's. Jonah's mission to preach to Nineveh was akin to Moses appealing to Pharaoh to convert, or Samuel taking a preaching tour of the Philistine cities, or Elijah preaching to Jezebel's Phoenician countrymen! Jonah's call was indeed extraordinary!

Jonah's story has been preserved for a reason. And yet, as we will see, it is a story unfinished. There remains a final chapter to be penned in the account of this man; a chapter that details his response to the lessons God was trying to impress upon him throughout this short book. But while Jonah lays sleeping 'in the heart of the earth' once more, awaiting the completion of his own story, many other accounts are still being written.

Our prayer is that our time together considering the life of this man will help us learn the lessons of his book, and so respond in faith to the sign of the prophet Jonah.

BACKGROUND

THE BIBLICAL BACKGROUND TO JONAH

Dating the Book of Jonah

The dating of the book of Jonah relies upon the chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah, because we know from the historical record of 2Kings 14 that Jonah prophesied during the 41-year reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel (2Ki 14:23-25). Jeroboam's reign has been dated to approximately 793-753 BC¹, placing the book of Jonah at about the same time, in the first half of the 8th Century BC.

The Backdrop: The Northern Kingdom of Israel

The story of Jonah, however, begins centuries before his own day, and is bound up in the events that passed over the Northern Kingdom of Israel (in which Jonah lived - see notes on Jon 1:1).

Since the separation of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, the Northern Kingdom had fallen into complete apostasy. The Kingdom got off to a bad start under the reign of Jeroboam I *'who made Israel to sin'* (1Ki 14:16 etc.) and sank to greater depravity under Omri (1Ki 16:25) and then again under Ahab and his infamous wife Jezebel (v30-33).

It was at this crisis in the nation's history that God sent one of the greatest prophets the nation of Israel ever had. Blazing into the palace of Ahab, Elijah announced in no uncertain terms the Divine punishment upon the nation (1Ki 17:1). The following chapters then illustrate Elijah's hopeful, and then disappointed, dreams of a repentant Israel. The spirit of this man would make a deep impression upon the young mind of Jonah decades later.

Elijah's efforts - though unsuccessful in the prophet's own eyes - were not without effect for the Northern Kingdom. It was through this prophet that God made three very significant appointments in 1Kings 19:

1. **Hazael to be anointed king of Syria** (v15) - The Syrians were to become a thorn in Israel's side in the subsequent reigns of Joram², Jehu³, and Jehoahaz⁴, kings of Israel. It wasn't until the reign of Jehoahaz's son Jehoash, when Jonah was likely a youth, that Israel gained the ascendancy over Syria⁵.
2. **Jehu to be king of Israel** (v16) - This was to be a major event in the history of the Northern Kingdom. The dynasty of Jehu would frame the world into which Jonah was to be born.
3. **Elisha to be prophet** (v16) - This was also to be a most significant appointment, because not only would Elisha take on Elijah's role, but he would further establish the Schools of the Prophets⁶. These gatherings of the Prophets and their families for education in the Word of God would doubtless play an essential role in the early

¹ NIV Study Bible, Zondervan 2011, p544-545

² 2Kings 8:28-29

³ 2Kings 10:31-33

⁴ 2Kings 13:3,22

⁵ 2Kings 13:23-25

⁶ As described in 2Kings 2, 4 & 6

life of Jonah, as he learned from others the importance of God’s revelations to Israel.

The Dynasty of Jehu

As mentioned, Elijah instigated a change in the governance of the Northern Kingdom of Israel with the anointing of Jehu as king (1Ki 19:16). This paved the way for the eradication of Ahab’s evil line (2Ki 9:6-10). Because of his role in removing the house of Ahab, God promised Jehu a stable dynasty, saying *‘thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel’* (2Ki 10:30). It was during the reign of the third of these kings, Jeroboam II, that Jonah served as a prophet.

The dynasty of Jehu was of the greatest importance to the Northern Kingdom. As can be seen on the chronology chart in Appendix 1 (p 82), the entire Northern Kingdom only lasted for approximately 220 years (930-710 BC), and of that time, the dynasty of Jehu would take up over 100 years. The dynasty comprised of the following kings:

# in Jehu’s Dynasty	King	Length of Reign	Dates (BC)	Recorded
1	Jehu	28 years	841-814	2Ki 9:30-10:36
2	Jehoahaz	17 years	814-798	2Ki 13:1-9
3	Jehoash	16 years	798-782	2Ki 13:10-25
4	Jeroboam II	41 years ⁷	793-753	2Ki 14:23-29
5	Zachariah	6 months	753	2Ki 15:8-12
Total		102.5 years		

Despite his early favour with God, Jehu fell into disrepute because of his own wickedness, and as a result God inflicted harm upon Israel through the Syrians, who *‘smote them in all the coasts of Israel’* (2Ki 10:31-33). But it was not only the Syrians who oppressed Israel: the Assyrians also attacked. An Assyrian engraving, known as *The Black Obelisk of Salmanser III*, shows Jehu kneeling before the Assyrian King Salmanser III offering him tribute⁸. After Jehu, however, nothing more is heard of the Assyrian threat for almost a century, well after the conclusion of Jehu’s dynasty, for reasons that will be discussed a little later.

As noted earlier, the Syrian threat continued throughout the reigns of Jehu and his son Jehoahaz, but was overcome by Jeroboam’s father, Jehoash. God *‘was gracious unto Israel, and had compassion on them’* by finally allowing them to throw off the Syrian yoke with Jehoash’s three victories over Ben-hadad, king of Syria (2Ki 13:23-25). It was against this backdrop that Jeroboam II came to power.

The Reign of Jeroboam II

Jeroboam II reigned between approximately 793-753 BC, and it was under his 41-year rule that the Northern Kingdom of Israel rose to greater heights than it had ever seen. 2Kings 14 describes the military successes of Jeroboam II in language reminiscent of the glory and peace of Solomon’s reign:

- Jeroboam *‘restored the coast of Israel’*, which had been lost under Jehu and his successors⁹, *‘from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain’* (2Ki 14:25).

⁷ NIV Study Bible (Zondervan 2011, p545) suggests a co-regency with his father Jehoash from 793-782 BC

⁸ *Three Assyrian Inscriptions About Hebrew Kings*, Bible Archaeology Report, 15/03/2019. Sourced from biblearchaeologyreport.com.

⁹ 2Kings 10:32

- In the days of Solomon, Israel extended *'from the entering of Hamath unto the river of Egypt'* (2Chr 7:8).

Thus, the reign of Jeroboam II, into which Jonah enters, was a time of unparalleled fortune in the history of the Northern Kingdom.

But the good fortunes of Jeroboam II's reign had greater implications for one particular man in Israel. There was a prophet who had foretold the successes of this king, and the prosperity of the Kingdom under his rule, and that prophet was *'Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet which was of Gath-hepher'* (2Ki 14:25). And so, having correctly forecast this time of incredible success, Jonah would have become a national hero. Everybody would have known about the famous prophecy of the man from Gath-hepher!

2Kings 14 goes on to relate God's consciousness of the hard times his people had been through at the hand of their enemies:

'For Yahweh saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter: for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel.' (v26).

Israel were in a helpless plight. There was nobody they could look to for help. And so, in accordance with Jonah's prophecy, *'Yahweh saved them by the hand of Jeroboam'* (v27). So successful was Jeroboam, that he even conquered Damascus, the headquarters of their Syrian rivals (v28). Jonah's name and reputation truly would have been proverbial.

It may be that there is another little detail implied in the text of 2Kings 14. The narrator states in v27, that *'Yahweh **said not** that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven'*. This appears to be an odd expression, given that if God did not say it, there is no need to mention it; however, the mention of it implies that there was reason to consider it. Indeed, ever since Jeroboam I the Northern Kingdom had *'done that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh'*.

This was not the first time in recent history that the longevity of the nation had been questioned. In the reign of Jeroboam II's father we are told that *'Yahweh was gracious... and would not destroy Israel, neither cast them out from His presence **as yet'*** (2Ki 13:23).

Any spiritual man or woman knew that Israel's position was precarious at best. They knew the prophecies of Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26, and that blessing in the Land was contingent upon obedience.

Israel had fallen far short of what was required of them and given the mention of God's decision *not* to blot out the name of Israel, it is possible that someone had interceded on behalf of the nation - appealing for the mercy of God. If that were the case, then who would be more likely to make that appeal than the prophet who had spoken of the nation's prosperity? Israel's sins threatened to undermine Jonah's life work, and it may be that it was in response to Jonah's prayer and the prayer of others like him, that God withheld judgement on His people for a time.

But Jonah knew that God would not destroy His people *'as yet'*. There was an urgent work of spiritual reform required.

NINEVEH - THAT GREAT CITY

It was to Nineveh, the chief city of the Assyrian Empire at the time, that Jonah was sent to deliver the message of God.

1. The Location of Nineveh

Nineveh is located along the upper reaches of the Tigris River, along with all the other great cities of Assyria.



Figure 1: Location of Nineveh

2. The History of Nineveh

The origins of the city of Nineveh demonstrate both its grandeur and its depravity from the very beginning. The city was built by Nimrod, a *'fearless hunter in defiance of Yahweh'* (Gen 10:9 ISV), who is also described as *'the first on earth to be a mighty man'* (Gen 10:8 ESV). The founding of Nineveh is described in Genesis 10:10-12 (ESV):

'The beginning of his [Nimrod's] kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.'

In founding these great cities of antiquity, Nimrod laid the groundwork for the development of the kingdom of men, as represented in the image of Daniel 2. Although Babylon was founded first, Nineveh, it appears, exceeded it in grandeur at first. The historian Charles Rollin writes,¹⁰

'Among other cities, he [Nimrod] built one more large and magnificent than the rest, which he called Nineveh, from the name of his son, Ninus, in order to immortalize his memory.'

¹⁰ Rollin's Ancient History, 18th Ed., Vol 1, Bk 3 *History of the Assyrians*, p 266.

This son, Ninus, after his father's death, set out to 'make Nineveh the largest and noblest city in the world and put it out of the power of those that came after him ever to build or hope to build another like it.' (Rollin, p 267).

He was not altogether unsuccessful in this. Even the prophet Jonah acknowledges that 'Nineveh was an exceeding great city' (Jon 3:3). Although Nineveh was not always regarded as the capital of Assyria, it was the most populous, prosperous and grand of all the cities of Assyria. All the Assyrian kings maintained palaces there and the architectural additions to the city by each of the kings were magnificent.

Notwithstanding the warning of Jonah (which for a short period of time brought humility and repentance from the inhabitants of Nineveh), later kings of Assyria further developed it in glory; a development which brought with it pride in their achievements. In particular, the reign of Sennacherib saw Nineveh develop into an architectural wonder.

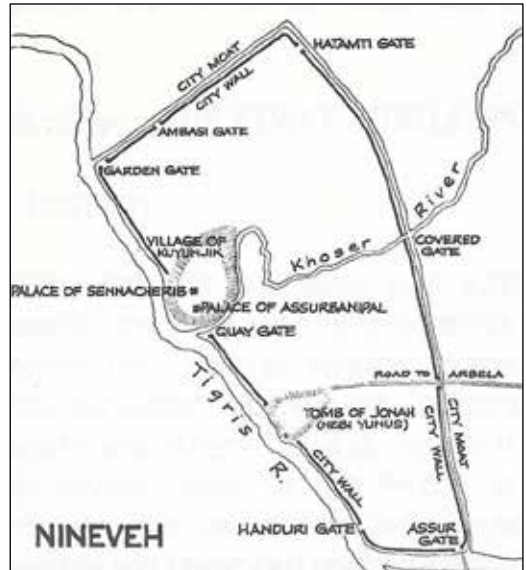


Figure 2: The City of Nineveh

Despite all the labour of these kings, the Bible predicted through the prophets Nahum and Zephaniah that it would fall into a heap of desolate ruins (Nah 3:7) and become a pasture for sheep (Zeph 2:13-15). Interestingly, the destruction of Nineveh was so great that for many years critics maintained the city never existed. But in actual fact, there exists to this day a hill near the city of Mosul in Iraq called *Tell-Kuyunjik* or 'mound of many sheep', and it was beneath this mound that the ruins of the ancient city of Nineveh were discovered in 1847 by British explorers.

Nineveh was destroyed by Nabopolassar, king of Babylon and father of Nebuchadnezzar, along with Cyaxares the Mede in 612 BC, and totally razed to the ground. This marked the end of the formidable Assyrian Empire.¹¹

3. The layout of Nineveh and its relevance to Jonah

To the country prophet from Galilee, Nineveh would have been an awe-inspiring city. It lay on the Eastern bank of the river Tigris, on a plain with a mountain range running down behind it. The walls of the city, which spanned a circumference of about 12.5km¹², were over 16m in height and 15m thick¹³ - wide enough for three chariots to ride abreast with ease.

¹¹ www.britannica.com/place/Mesopotamia-historical-region-Asia/Ashurbanipal-668-627-and-Shamash-shum-ukin-668-648

¹² Mallowan, M 2023. *Nineveh*. Encyc. Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nineveh-ancient-city-Iraq>

¹³ www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Nineveh

Nineveh was part of a network of cities, known as *The Assyrian Triangle*¹⁴, or *Greater Nineveh*. This network of cities included Nineveh itself, as well as Khorsabad, Resin and Calah (also called Nimrud), together with the suburbs and fields they enclosed. It is this wider complex of cities that is referred to as 'that great city Nineveh' in Genesis 10:11-12 and Jonah 1:2; 3:2,3; 4:11.¹⁵ The population of Greater Nineveh appears to have been around 500,000; a realistic figure, given the space occupied by the sprawling city.

The architectural splendour of the city has been noted, and it contained the palaces of many of the kings. Sculptured art of winged bulls and lions, portraying the gods, surrounded the city. Marble staircases led the visitors up into the palaces, which themselves were built on elevated platforms of 10-15 metres, and the walls of the city were adorned with carvings describing the victorious battles of Assyria.

Smith's Bible Dictionary comments regarding the Assyrian architecture:¹⁶

'Thus decorated without and within, the Assyrian palaces must have displayed a barbaric magnificence, not, however, devoid of a certain grandeur and beauty, which probably no ancient or modern edifice has exceeded. These great edifices, the depositories of the national records, appear to have been at the same time, the abode of the king, and the temple of the gods.'

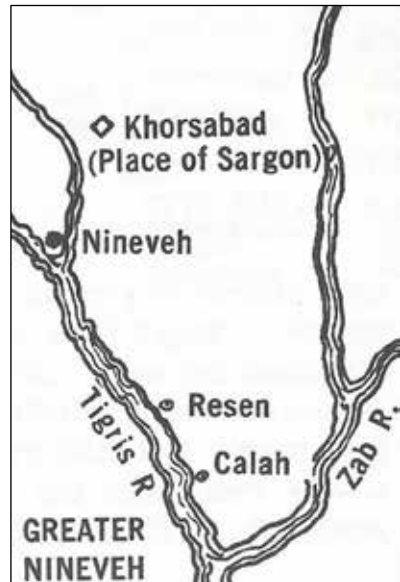


Figure 3: The Assyrian Triangle

The point of this close description of the city of Nineveh is to allow us to step into the shoes of Jonah as he began to traverse the streets of Nineveh (3:4). Although he went there reluctantly, he did not shrink from the task at hand. Despite viewing the colossus of Nineveh, its depiction of war victories and the multitudes of people, he travelled into the heart of the city to fearlessly present God's message that within 40 days it was all to be destroyed.

4. The History of Assyria

The Assyrian Empire has its own fascinating story, a summary of which is given in Appendix 2 (p 83). As noted there, the Assyrians had a fearsome reputation across the then-known world – and for good reason! This no doubt had a bearing on Jonah's desire to convert such a people.

5. The Religion of Assyria

The Assyrians worshipped an array of gods. Of particular note were the gods Ashur and Ishtar, the chief god and goddess of the empire. In a poetic link to the events of Jonah, Ishtar was depicted by both a fish and a dove within the Assyrian culture. This was no doubt disturbing for the people of Nineveh in the arrival of a Hebrew prophet who had come out of a fish and whose name means 'the dove'! For further details, see Appendix 2 (p 83).

¹⁴ See comments by Bro Geoff Henstock in *Mercy & Judgement*, p 42-43.

¹⁵ See the excellent description of the city of Nineveh in *The Cambridge Commentary, Jonah*, Appendix Note B, 'Nineveh'.

¹⁶ Smith's Bible Dictionary, *Nineveh*

CONTEMPORARY PROPHETS

Jonah evidently began his prophetic mission early in the 41-year reign of Jeroboam II, because he foretold the era of prosperity it would herald. The events of *the book of Jonah*, however, may well have fallen in the latter part of Jeroboam II's reign, well into this period of affluence and ease.

Jonah says little in his book of the spiritual state of his own nation in his day, but the void is quickly filled with the insights of his contemporaries, Hosea and Amos. In commenting on the work of these two prophets, and the successful reign enjoyed by Jeroboam II, Bro Fred Pearce writes,

*The effect of these successes were disastrous in both civil and religious life. Owing to the increased control of important trade routes, wealthy classes emerged in the people of Israel. The worst features of their society appeared first in the Northern Kingdom. Rich men bought up the lands of poorer Israelites, or oppressed them by extortionate rates of interest, or even sold them as slaves when they could not pay their debts. Their lives were full of self-indulgence: in their magnificent houses they feasted with wine and music, in which their women-folk joined. Civil justice was corrupted; the poor could not obtain redress, for the judges accepted bribes and favoured the powerful. A new commercial class in the towns, a product of the growth of trade and the decline of agriculture (how modern all this sounds!), were covetous and dishonest, trading with false weights and shoddy goods. Licentiousness was widespread. But the ruling class were indifferent to the decline in moral standards, intolerant of rebuke, devoted to the outward practice of their religion, offering sacrifices and observing new moons and sabbaths, convinced that Yahweh was with them - surely He must be! Had He not most signally delivered them from Syria? Such is the devastating picture of their own people, the covenant people of Yahweh, which is so vividly drawn by the prophets Amos and Hosea.'*¹⁷

Amos lived just south of Jerusalem in the region of Tekoa and prophesied concerning both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms in the days of Jeroboam II (Amos 1:1). Hosea began prophesying in this same era, but continued on until the end of the Northern Kingdom in the days of Hezekiah / Hoshea (Hos 1:1). Both prophets spoke with an emphasis towards the Northern Kingdom, and as indicated in the citation above, between them they paint an indicting picture of Israel at the time:

Israel's sins	Amos	Hosea	Israel's sins	Amos	Hosea
Violence and robbery	3:10	4:2; 6:9; 7:1	Rejected God's word	2:12	4:1,6; 8:12
Oppression of the poor & needy	2:6; 4:1; 8:4		Rejected God's prophets	2:12; 7:12-13	12:10
Lying & deceit	8:5	4:2;7:1,13; 11:12	Forsook God's covenant		6:7
Perversion of justice	5:10,12	7:7	Contempt of holy days	8:5	
Took bribes	5:12		Trusted in idols	2:8; 5:26; 8:14	2:13; 3:1; 4:12; 8:4; 11:2; 13:2
Swore falsely		10:4	Rebellion		7:14; 13:16
No truth or mercy		4:1; 6:6	Pride		5:5; 7:10
Immorality	2:7	4:2,13; 7:4	Stubbornness	4:6,8,9, 10,11	
Drunkenness / revelry	6:4-6	7:5			
Trusted in own strength / prosperity	6:1	10:13; 12:8; 13:6			

¹⁷ Bro Fred Pearce 1991. 'From Hosea to Zephaniah', *The Christadelphian*. p 50.

JONAH'S GREATEST FEAR

Jonah was not unaware of the spiritual state of the nation. Though we cannot be sure that either Amos or Hosea had commenced prophesying before Jonah was sent to Assyria, the sins of his people would have been observable to the prophet. Yes, they had benefited from the serene rule of Jeroboam II in accordance with his earlier prophecies, but Jonah knew that the nation's response was severely lacking.

Not only that, but when God's commission came to Jonah, he would have been fully aware of the fact that his own people were guilty of some of the very same sins for which he was being sent to warn Nineveh of impending destruction.

Jonah's own nation was in jeopardy. In fact, the prophet's fears would be spelled out in graphic detail in the very near future by his contemporaries.

Because of their sins and their refusal to repent, Hosea would prophesy that God would *'no more have mercy upon the house of Israel, but I will utterly take them away.'* (Hos 1:6). Amos adds that they would be dragged with hooks into captivity (Amos 4:2; 5:5). But in contrast to their previous battles with their Syrian neighbours, this time they would be taken into captivity *beyond* Damascus (Amos 5:27). Everyone knew what that meant: Assyria!

Everything that Jonah had worked for was at stake. Amos says in Ch 6:14:

*'Behold, I will raise up against you a **nation**, O house of Israel, saith Yahweh the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from **the entering in of Hamath** unto **the river of the wilderness.**'*

The word for nation is the Heb *goy*, meaning 'a Gentile nation'. This was exactly what Jonah did not want to happen - He didn't want God to punish His own people with a nation that was *not* His people! But things got worse: This nation would afflict Israel **'from the entering in of Hamath'** (that's the northern boundary taken by Jeroboam II in accordance with Jonah's prophecy in 2Ki 14:25) **'unto the river of the wilderness'** (s/w *arabah* of 2Ki 14:25, meaning the Jordan/Dead Sea valley).

In chapter 6 of his prophecy, Amos foretold the complete undoing of Jonah's work. This was precisely what Jonah had feared. How he must have pleaded for just a few more years to be able to work with the nation; but to no avail. God had very different plans for Jonah, the son of Amittai, the man from Gath-hepher.

ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK

The book of Jonah breaks neatly into two halves, with a concluding section at the end. At first, Jonah rejects his mission, and the first half of the book details the consequences of that choice. God then gives him a second chance, with the latter part of the book recording in stark contrast Jonah’s submission to his second call. But as the structure below illustrates, there’s a final section at the end of the book which stands out because of its lack of parallel.

STRUCTURE

- A. Jonah’s Commission & Flight (1:1-3)
 - B. Jonah & the Gentile Sailors (1:4-16)
 - C. Jonah’s Prayer of Thanksgiving (1:17-2:10)
- A. Jonah’s Recommissioning & Compliance (3:1-3a)
 - B. Jonah & the Gentile Ninevites (3:3b-10)
 - C. Jonah’s Prayer of Resentment (4:1-4)
- D. Jonah’s Lesson about Compassion (4:5-11)**

The table below illustrates the links between the first six sections of the book. By comparing the similarities and *contrasts* it helps to emphasise the journey that God takes Jonah on throughout the book. The seventh and final section is without parallel, and leaves Jonah and the reader with soul-searching questions regarding the mercy of God and the qualifications of the human recipients of that mercy.

Jonah’s Commission & Flight 1:1-3	Jonah’s Recommissioning & Compliance 3:1-3a
The word of Yahweh came unto Jonah v1	The word of Yahweh came unto Jonah v1
Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry (Heb <i>qara</i>) against it v2	Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach (s/w <i>qara</i>) unto it v2
But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh v3	[Contrast] Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh , according to the word of Yahweh v3
Jonah & the Gentile Sailors 1:4-16	Jonah & the Gentile Ninevites 3:3b-10
Yahweh threatens judgement against the pagan ship v4	Yahweh threatens judgment against the pagan city v4
Sailors cry out (Heb <i>qara</i>) to Yahweh v14	Ninevites cry (s/w <i>qara</i>) mightily to God v8
The captain expresses hope that God may show mercy v6	The king expresses hope that God may show mercy v6-9
Yahweh spares the contrite pagans of the ship v15-16	Yahweh spares the contrite pagans of the city v10
Jonah’s Prayer of Thanksgiving 1:17-2:10	Jonah’s Prayer of Resentment 4:1-4
Jonah prays unto Yahweh v1	Jonah prays unto Yahweh v2
Jonah boasts about Yahweh’s mercy (chesed) that pagans forfeit 2:8	[Contrast] Jonah complains about Yahweh’s great kindness (chesed) that pagans receive 4:2
Jonah is grateful that he has been spared, and his life (chay v6) and soul (nephesh v5, 7) preserved.	[Contrast] Jonah is resentful that pagans have been spared, and wishes that his life (nephesh v3) & soul (live = chay v3) would be taken away
Jonah’s Lesson about Compassion 4:5-11	

THEMES

There are a few key words and themes in the book of Jonah which are helpful to identify. This Bible marking exercise will help you to quickly spot the key themes in Jonah next time you turn to the book.

KEY WORDS

Some of the key words are easy to find and others will require a Strong's Concordance or eSword because not all the same Hebrew words have been translated into the same English words, (e.g., 'sent out' in 1:4 is the same Hebrew word 'cast forth' in 1:5).

Fill out the table and colour in these words in your Bible.

Key Words	Heb Word	Strong's #	Occurrences
Great	gadol	H1431	1 :2,4(x2),10,12,16,17; 3 :2,3,5,7; 4 :1,6,11
Cry			1 :2...
Sent out			1 :4...
Down			1 :3...
Afraid <i>Note the increase in fear!</i>			1 :5...
City			1 :2...
Perish			1 :6...
Life			1 :14...

THEMES

See if you can highlight these themes throughout Jonah:

- The Presence of Yahweh**
 Hint: It appears Jonah associated the presence of Yahweh with the temple at Jerusalem.
- Prayer**
 Almost 1/3 of the book (15 verses out of 48) are either prayer to Yahweh or refer to prayer to Yahweh. Contrast this with the prayers of the sailors to their pagan gods.
- Mercy/Pity**
 There are a few different words or ideas which relate to God's mercy/pity throughout the book. Take note of the way God shows mercy to both Jonah and the Ninevites.
- Wickedness/Evil**
 Nineveh was a city renowned for its evil ways and lack of mercy. Contrast this with the mercy of God when the city repents and seeks forgiveness and is spared!

JONAH'S COMMISSION & FLIGHT

CHAPTER 1:1-3

JONAH'S COMMISSION & FLIGHT (1:1-3)

1-2 *Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.*

Jonah the Son of Amittai

Jonah Heb *yonah* H3124 same as H3123 = 'a dove' (Str).

Amittai Heb *amittay* H573 = 'veracious' [i.e. representing truth] (Str), from H571 *emeth* = 'truth'

Very little is known of Jonah other than what we gather from this book. There is only one other mention of him in the OT, found in 2Kings 14:25, during the reign of Jeroboam II:

'He [Jeroboam] restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of Yahweh God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher.'

From this reference we can ascertain the following:

(1) Jonah was a Prophet of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. At this time, Israel was under the reign of king Jeroboam II, who was some way into his 41-year reign. 1Kings 14 records,

'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. And he did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.' (1Ki 14:23-24)

By the end of the reign of Jeroboam II, Israel had sunk to such a state of spiritual depravity that it was a short 31 years later that they were taken into Assyrian captivity, from which they never returned. As discussed in the introduction to these notes (p 8-9), Jonah's aim was to try and foster a spiritual reform in the nation of Israel before they were punished for their wickedness.

(2) His birthplace was *Gath-hepher*, termed *Gittah-hepher* in Joshua 19:13. This was a town not far from Nazareth in the tribe of Zebulun, which lies in the region of Galilee (Isa 9:1). This becomes most interesting when we note the words of the Pharisees in John 7:52, '*Search and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no Prophet.*' Jonah was not the only one who struggled with his mission; such was the Jewish contempt for the Gentiles, that the nation rejected Jonah as a prophet because of his mission to the Gentiles.

(3) He exercised the prophetic office either before or early in the reign of Jeroboam II (793 - 753 BC). This would place Jonah as a contemporary of Hosea and Amos, or slightly before them (Hos 1:1, Amos 1:1), and his book, one of the earliest of all the writings of the prophets we have in the Old Testament.

Jonah is introduced as '*the son of Amittai*'. Literally this means, *Jonah, the son of truth*. When we look at the way the book of Jonah tells his story, we see a stark, open account of Jonah's

actions and intentions. Much of the narrative is comprised of personal thoughts or events which record all his faults! He was very much 'the son of truth'.

Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city

Great Heb *gadol* H1419 = 'great', from H1434 *gadal* = 'to be large'

This is the first of 14 times in the book of Jonah that this word occurs. See themes on p 16.

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, the biggest empire in the world at this time. This was the very last place on earth that Jonah would want to preach to. After reading the background section on Nineveh (p 10), imagine what it would have been like for Jonah to walk through those city gates, striding between the colonnades with vivid scenes carved into the stone walls, depicting the fate of unwelcome foreigners. Imagine being instructed to walk into the Kremlin today and tell the Russian president he has 40 days to repent!

Cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me

Cry Heb *qara* H7121 = 'to call out to' (Str)

Wickedness Heb *ra'ah* H7451 = 'evil'

There are a number of other occasions in Scripture when the wickedness of the world is seen by God and He decides to act:

- The world at the time of Noah (Gen 6:5)
- Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:20-21)
- Great Babylon, the Roman Catholic Church (Rev 18:5)

On all these occasions, the wickedness is characterised by gross immorality, violence, false religion and the persecution of God's children. Although it is not recorded in Jonah, we are told in Nahum that Nineveh's sins included plotting evil against God, cruelty and plundering in war, prostitution, witchcraft and commercial exploitation (Nah 1:11; 3:1,4,16,19). As well as this, Nineveh was the capital of the empire of Nimrod, the arch enemy of the Truth!

Imagine the devastating blow Jonah would have felt at these words from God. Here was a man who had given his heart and soul to Israel, and it seemed God was ignoring this work and sending him to a nation renowned for its cruelty, immorality and evil. As well as this, there was the deeply ingrained belief in Jonah - and indeed amongst all Israelites - that they were exclusively God's people,¹⁸ and that all those outside were unclean pariahs. To entertain the thought of preaching to a Gentile nation went against every part of Jonah's upbringing.

How could God take Jonah away from his responsibilities to his own people and send him to a nation notorious for its barbaric and pagan ways, to offer a warning to repent? This was a completely unprecedented request. We gain an insight into the way Jonah felt about his commission from Ch 4:2; he knew the character of God and understood that to preach impending judgement was to offer the possibility of repentance, and that repentance would be followed by forgiveness from God.

Jonah also knew that his own people were guilty of some of the very same sins as the Ninevites (p 13) and would thus understandably fear that a repentant Assyria could be used by God as a rod for Israel. Jonah did not want to be liable for the death of his people.

¹⁸ Based on Scriptures such as Deut 7:6 - but they forgot Deut 7:7-11 and 9:4-6.

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.*

Tarshish

Why did Jonah choose Tarshish? Tarshish was an ancient mercantile city of the Phoenicians. To reach it, one must sail through the 'Pillars of Hercules' (today known as the Strait of Gibraltar), which, according to Greek legend was thought to be beyond the end of the world. It was the furthest west one could travel. In boarding a ship to Tarshish, Jonah was taking a journey as far in the opposite direction to Nineveh as was possible.

This was not the impulsive move of an egotistical or sullen man. This was the desperate and premeditated attempt of a man so passionate about his people that he was willing to deliberately defy a Divine command. He was so committed to the cause of Israel that in his mind, to turn and preach to an opposing nation was completely impossible.

From the presence of the LORD

To imply that Jonah thought he could run away from God is to give a childish intention to a mature and deeply spiritual man. Jonah knew that one could never truly leave the presence of God. We know that Jonah was incredibly familiar with the Psalms (see table in Ch 2, p 35). He therefore knew the words of Psalm 139:

'Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence...if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.' (Psa 139:7-10)

'The presence of God' is used in several different ways in Scripture. **(1)** The first relates to the temple, which was a symbol of God's presence among His people:

- In Lev 22:3, God said that any of Aaron's sons who touched the holy things whilst unclean would be '*cut off from my presence,*' i.e., removed from temple service.
- In 2Chr 20:9, Jehoshaphat prays for the people and pleads that if they '*stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy presence is in this house,) and cry unto thee, then wilt thou hear and help.*'

Thus, the Temple clearly represented God's presence amongst His people. **(2)** But there is another sense in which this idea applies. The first recorded words of the prophet Elijah are: '*As Yahweh Elohim of Israel liveth, before whom I stand...*' (1Ki 17:1). The Hebrew word 'before' (*paniyim* H6440) is the same word translated 'presence' in Jonah 1:3. The significance of this word is that a prophet's work was to stand *in the presence of God* awaiting His direction. (As with the Man of God in 1Ki 13:6).

In his decision to flee, therefore, Jonah was conveying two important things:

1. He resigned as a Prophet of God
2. He resigned any attachment to the temple

It is possible that Jonah was in Jerusalem, and maybe even in the Temple, at the time he received this commission from God. v3 says '*he went down to Joppa*'. If Jonah was at Gath-hepher he would not have gone to Joppa to catch a ship to Tarshish, for the nearest Phoenician coastal ports were Tyre or Dor, and it would have been far more efficient for him to have commenced his journey from either of them. If, however, he was at Jerusalem, then

Joppa would have been the nearest port. Perhaps in this manner he quite literally 'left the presence of God' in Jerusalem as he set out for the coast.

Went down to Joppa

Jonah was told by God to 'arise and go to Nineveh' (v2); yet here he is found to be going **down** to Joppa. We see in the first half of the book that Jonah is constantly in decline.

Jonah's Descent	
1:3	Went down to Joppa
1:3	Went down into the ship
1:5	Gone down into the sides of the ship
2:6	Went down to the bottoms of the mountains (bottom of the sea)

Jonah descended further and further until he was at the lowest point he could possibly be. It was only once he had reached the bottom of the ocean that he finally 'arose' to go to Nineveh (3:3).

So he paid the fare thereof

Fare Heb *sakar* H7939 = 'fare, fee, passage money'.

Why are we distinctly told that Jonah paid the fare? It would seem obvious that anyone boarding a ship would need to purchase a ticket. There may be more to this statement than simply a monetary transaction.

Jonah had counted the cost of his decision to disobey God. Twice in the short history of the Northern Kingdom, a prophet had been killed because they had deliberately disobeyed God's commands: 1Kings 13:11-24 and 20:35-36. Jonah was prepared to die for his deliberate disregard for God's commission. He was willing to give up his life for the sake of his nation. Despite his human, nationalistic motives, in this we have the beginning of a majestic type of the Lord Jesus Christ; a type that will be considered more fully in the section on *The Sign of the Prophet Jonah* (p 76).

COUNTING THE COST

Verse 3 says that Jonah 'paid the fare' (price). He had counted the cost and was willing to die, so passionate was he about the cause he was supporting. What are we willing to give for the cause of the Truth?

*And we know that
all things work together
for good to them that
love God, to them who are
the called according
to his purpose.*

ROMANS 8:28



**JONAH &
THE GENTILE
SAILORS**

CHAPTER 1:4-16

JONAH & THE GENTILE SAILORS (1:4-16)

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.*

This is the first time in the book of Jonah that God directly intervenes in Jonah's life. There are 7 other occurrences of clear direct involvement from God. Together they have been described as the 8 signs of Jonah.

The 8 signs of Jonah		
1	1:4	Yahweh sent out a great wind
2	1:7	The lot falls on Jonah
3	1:15	The sea ceased from her raging
4	1:17	Yahweh had prepared a great fish
5	2:10	Yahweh spake unto the fish
6	4:6	Yahweh prepared a gourd
7	4:7	Yahweh prepared a worm
8	4:8	Yahweh prepared a vehement east wind

But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea

Sent out Heb *tul* H2904 = 'to cast down or out'

Wind Heb *ruach* H7307 = 'wind' (Str)

Tempest Heb *sa ar* H5591 = 'a hurricane' (Str)

The same Hebrew word for 'sent out' is used in v12 and 15 where Jonah says, '**cast me forth into the sea**'. It is also used in 1 Sam 18:11 '**Saul cast the javelin**' at David. In this instance, God unleashed the wind and hurled it into the midst of the sea like a javelin, in order for this tempest to be created (cp Psa 135:6-7 and 148:8).

Psalm 107:25 speaks of God's ability to bring up such storms out of nowhere: '*He commandeth, and raiseth the **stormy** (H7307) **wind** (H5591), which lifteth the waves thereof.* (Notice the use of the same Hebrew words as Jonah 1:4).

Violent storms were not uncommon in this region. The Cambridge Commentary states:

'Josephus speaks of a violent wind called "the black North wind," which he says sometimes visited the sea off the coast of Joppa. And we read of 'a tempestuous wind called Euraquilo' [Euroclydon] in another part of the same sea, which rushing down the highlands of Crete suddenly caught the ship in which Paul was sailing, and brought on a tempest scarcely less severe than that to which Jonah was exposed (Acts 27:14).'

There is an interesting comparison with the storm found here in Jonah 1, and the storm that came upon Jesus and his disciples in Mark 4:

Jonah 1:4-16		Mark 4:36-41	
v4	Yahweh sent great wind/mighty tempest	v37	There arose a great storm of wind
v5	They seek to lighten the ship	v37	The ship is now full
v5	Jonah asleep in the side of the ship	v38	Jesus asleep in the hinder part of ship
v6	Shipmaster woke Jonah saying, 'call upon thy God... that we perish not'	v38	Disciples woke Jesus and said, 'Carest thou not that we perish?'
v15	Jonah was thrown overboard and the sea ceased from her raging	v39	Jesus rose and caused the wind to cease, and there was a great calm
v16	Sailors 'feared exceedingly'	v41	Disciples 'feared exceedingly'

The ship was like to be broken

Broken Heb *shabar* H7665 = 'to burst, literally or figuratively' (Str)

The storm was so powerful that the sailors were facing the threat of shipwreck. The wooden boards would have groaned sickeningly as the vessel fought to resist the strain of the fearsome breakers as they heaved it sky-wards and then dropped it into the seething depths below.

5-6 *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. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, what meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so, be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.*

Then the mariners were afraid

Afraid Heb *yare* H3372 = 'to fear' (Str)

The Hebrew word 'yare' is used in the following passages:

- Genesis 19:30 - After witnessing the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot was too afraid to dwell in Zoar.
- Exodus 14:10 - Israel were terrified when they saw the chariots of Pharaoh approaching before they crossed the Red Sea.
- 1Samuel 17:11,24 - The soldiers of Israel were sore afraid of Goliath.

This is a strong word. Although seasoned sailors, the mariners were petrified. They were accustomed to storms on the Mediterranean. But they saw in this storm something out of the ordinary, something supernatural.

Cried every man unto his god

Cried Heb *za'aq* H2199 = 'to shriek (from anguish or danger)'

The multiple gods may indicate that the mariners were of different nationalities, however the Phoenicians as a people did worship numerous gods.

And cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea to lighten it of them

Wares Heb *keliy* H3627 = 'something prepared, that is, any apparatus (as an implement, utensil, dress, vessel, or weapon)' (Str)

Any furniture or excess goods were thrown overboard to add buoyancy to the ship (cp Acts 27:18-19).

But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship, and he lay, and was fast asleep

Fast asleep Heb *radam* H7290 = 'to stun, that is, stupefy (with sleep or death)' (Str)

To gain an insight into how deep Jonah's sleep was, consider the following (s/w *radam*):

- Sisera was 'fast asleep' after fighting a battle (Jud 4:21).
- Daniel fell into such a 'deep sleep' that it was a symbol of death followed by resurrection (Dan 8:18).

As Jonah lay down to sleep, utterly exhausted from his hasty journey and mentally drained from suppressing his conscience, he must have felt terribly alone. There was another prophet, some 80 years or so earlier, who also set out on a very lonely journey, and was found asleep by God (1Ki 19:4-5). It is interesting to compare the flight of Jonah with that of Elijah in 1Kings 19.

So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him

Shipmaster Heb *rab* H7227 = 'abundant (in age, rank, quality)' (Str) and Heb *chobel* H2259 = 'to handle a rope'. Literally 'the chief of the rope'.

The shipmaster was known as the 'chief of the rope' because the sailors would climb up the rigging of the ship to guide it - this man was the captain. It is most unusual for a captain of a ship to be knocking on the door of the passengers during a terrible storm; this only proves how dire the situation was!

What meanest thou, O sleeper?

'How can you sleep?' (NIV) This is an exclamation of disbelief that a man could be so indifferent to their predicament that he was sleeping through it! Cp the disciples' cry to Jesus in Mark 4:38: 'Carest thou not that we perish?'

Arise call upon thy God

The shipmaster is conceding defeat. All the gods that the sailors had been calling upon had failed them. This places Jonah in an awkward position. How could he explain to this desperate man that he would rather not call upon his God, as he was in fact trying to run away from Him?

There is a further point to take from these words. 'Arise' and 'call' are the same Hebrew words translated 'arise and 'cry' in v1. How poetic for a pagan sea captain to be repeating the same instructions that God had given to Jonah which initiated his flight in the first place. This would not have gone unnoticed by the prophet.

Think upon us

RSV, ESV: 'give a thought' - they hoped God might spare a thought for them and show pity and care towards them in their desperate plight, yet they were not presumptuous.

7 *And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.*

The sailors were quite aware that this storm was a supernatural weather event and had taken it as a message of doom from the gods. After all prayer had utterly failed, they felt they needed to narrow down the cause of offence and deal with it in an attempt to appease the gods.

Jonah would also have been aware of another time in Israel's history when this method singled out a wrong-doer (Josh 7:16-18). He knew he was the culprit from the beginning, yet he allowed the lots to be cast instead of admitting he was the cause of the trouble.

8 *Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?*

The sailors proceed to interrogate Jonah to determine what he had done to cause such evil to come upon them. The fact that they were willing to hear his account before immediately condemning him is a remarkable testament to their integrity.

In this, as the Cambridge Commentary observes, Jonah was really being placed on trial: *'One might see in the scene a terrible tribunal: for the ship was the court of justice, the judges were the sailors, the executioners were the winds, the prisoner at the bar was the prophet, the house of correction and prison of safe keeping was the whale, and the accuser was the angry sea.'*¹⁹

9 *And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which made the sea and the dry land.*

I am an Hebrew; and I fear Yahweh

Hebrew From Heb *abar* H5674 = to cross over (Str)

Jonah opens his testimony with a remarkable affirmation, resembling that of Elijah on Mt Carmel (1Ki 18:20-39). In Elijah's speech to the frenzied prophets of Baal, he says: *'Yahweh God of Abraham, Isaac and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.'* (1Ki 18:36).

Jonah here also associated himself with the fathers (Gen 14:13) by identifying as a Hebrew. The Hebrew people were renowned by other nations for being different (Ex 1:19, 2:6; 1 Sam 4:9). 'Hebrew' is the name by which the Jews were known to foreigners. Had he been addressing his own countrymen, he would have spoken of himself as an Israelite.

As well as this, in calling his God 'Yahweh', Jonah is referencing the covenant name by which God was known to His own people - He was the God of the Hebrews (Ex 3:18).

Not for a moment could it be said that was Jonah running from God because he was embarrassed about his faith. His witness here is unashamed.

Made the sea and dry land

By stating that Yahweh is the God of the sea and the dry land (cp Psa 95:4-6), Jonah is (perhaps unwittingly) acknowledging that his God is not relevant to just one particular nation, but rather, He is the Creator of *all* life, and as such, may be worshipped by *any* nationality. Despite Jonah's disgust at the idea of being sent to preach to an evil Gentile

¹⁹ Cambridge Commentary, Obadiah and Jonah, p 64

nation, he is here conveying to these sailors the concept that Yahweh is the God of the whole earth!

To a group of terrified sailors in the midst of a paranormal storm, this would also carry weight. They were calling out to their heathen gods to no avail, but here was a man who stated that his God controlled the elements. In the religions of the ancient Near East, generally the highest Deity was master of the seas.²⁰

10-11 *Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.*

Exceedingly afraid

Exceedingly Heb *gadol* H1419 = great (Str)

Afraid Heb *yare* H3372 = to fear, morally to revere (Str)

The sailors who were already afraid (v5) are now *exceedingly afraid*. Initially, they were afraid of the storm; now after hearing Jonah's words they are exceedingly afraid of having offended the God of heaven, the sea and the dry land.

Why hast thou done this?

*'Better, 'What is this that thou hast done?' This is not a question of inquiry, for he had already told them that he had fled from the presence of the Lord; but rather an exclamation of horror and amazement at his folly and sin.'*²¹

What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?

Calm Heb *shathaq* H8367 = to subside (Str)

Other than in v11-12, this Hebrew word *shathaq* occurs only two other times in the Bible:

1. Psa 107:30 (the sea is made **quiet** after a storm)
2. Prov 26:20 (the strife **ceaseth**)

The sailors now knew that the tempest was sent by God because of Jonah, but they also understood that Jonah was God's prophet, and although he might have walked away from God, he was still in some way related to God. They were reluctant to commit to a course of action, and waited for Jonah to tell them in what way his God might be honoured so that the storm would abate. They understood that their salvation depended absolutely on him. Cp the response to the teaching of the apostles in Acts 2:37 and 16:30.

The sea wrought, and was tempestuous

- The sea was becoming increasingly stormy (NASB)
- The sea grew more and more tempestuous (ESV, RSV)

²⁰ NIV Study Bible, Zondervan, 2011, note on Jonah 1:9

²¹ Pulpit commentary

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 confesses his guilt to the sailors, takes full responsibility for the storm, and asks them to throw him overboard into the violent waters.

It is very insightful to note that Jonah did not just ask for them to turn the boat around and take him back to land so that he could follow God's commands and preach to Nineveh. No, he is still true to his own conviction that he would rather die than preach to that nation. His loyalty to his own people is still paramount and he is willing to sacrifice himself for their sake. In a sense he is a type of Christ at this moment, willing to sacrifice his life for the benefit of others, even if his motives were more nationalistic than God-focused at this point.

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.*

Rowed hard

Rowed Heb *chathar* H2864 = to force a passage, as by burglary, to dig (Str)

This word is used for digging or breaking through a wall (Job 24:16, Ezek 12:5,7).

Hard Heb *shub* H7725 = to turn back (Str)

Evidently, they were not too far out at sea, so that under normal conditions they would have been able to row to the land. The sailors put in every effort, but to no avail (cp Mk 6:48). The sea was too rough for them to conquer, and only increased in strength against them. These Gentile men were learning that their salvation could not be achieved by their own efforts. They were powerless to redeem themselves - their life depended on the offering of Jonah's life. Cp Rom 5:6.

14 *Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.*

Wherefore they cried unto the LORD...

What an incredible transformation! Earlier, the sailors were praying to their heathen gods with all their might, but now they have come to the realisation that their lives are in the sovereign control of the Almighty God. In humility they pray to Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, beseeching Him that He would save them, and that what they were about to do was in accordance with His Divine will.

The openness of these heathen men and the readiness with which they acknowledge Yahweh (previously to them an unknown God) and reverence His prophet is a strong contrast to the conduct of God's own people Israel in turning from Him to idols, and killing the prophets that were sent to them (cp Jer 3:6-8, Matt 23:37).

Lay not upon us innocent blood

Contrast this with Matthew 27:25 '*his blood be on us, and on our children*'. These sailors are very different to the Jews in Jesus' time; they do not wish to shed innocent blood, despite Jonah's disobedience to God's commands.

For thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.

Barnes' Commentary describes this phrase as a '*wonderful, concise confession of faith in these new converts.*' Cp Psa 135:6.

15 *So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.*

So they took up Jonah

With respect and reluctance, the sailors lifted up Jonah and flung him into the sea. There was no struggle on his part - this typical death was done with the full consent of the prophet. He gave himself as a willing sacrifice, just like Christ (Jn 10:18). As with His Son, God used the instrumentation of men to perform His will (Cp Acts 2:23 with Isa 53:10).

the sea ceased from her raging

Ceased Heb *amad* H5975 = 'to stand' (Str)

As soon as Jonah hit the water, the sea 'stood still'. Just as the storm had begun suddenly in v4, it now subsided just as abruptly, leaving a miraculous calm. For the sailors, this would have been every bit as uncanny as the storm itself. An excellent section in Scripture to note which is almost identical to this story is Psa 107:23-31.

16 *Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.*

Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly,

Feared Heb *yare* H3372 = 'to fear, morally to revere' (Str)

Exceedingly Heb *gadol* H1419 = 'great' (Str)

Notice these are the same two Hebrew words as in v10, with the difference being that the sailors now understand Jonah's God. This leads to a deep reverence and a decisive need for further action on their part. Contrast this with the attitude of the Pharisees who saw many signs and wonders performed by Christ, yet they did not fall down and worship God, but rather claimed that Jesus was working by the power of Beelzebub (Mt 12:24).

and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows

Made Heb *nadar* H5087 = 'to vow' (BDB) or 'promise' (Str) (verb)

Vows Heb *neder* H5088 = 'a vow' (BDB) or 'promise' (Str) (noun)

Literally, this is saying, '*to promise promises*' or '*to vow a vow*'.

The **sacrifice** was an act of present dedication; the **vow** was to commit themselves to service in the future - these pagan sailors were converted to the Truth! Jonah had unwittingly made his first Gentile converts. Compare this response with Naaman in 2Kings 5:15-17 and with Jonah himself in Jonah 2:9!

Although it is possible that they could have offered a sacrifice on board, it seems more likely that they would have returned to land. We know from v5 that they had thrown their wares into the sea, so to continue their journey to Tarshish must have seemed a little pointless.

It would be highly probable therefore, that the ship returned to port at Joppa, and the sailors went to the nearest place of worship (Jerusalem). If this was the case, the story of a storm, a prophet thrown overboard and an instant calm would likely have become headline news, especially considering Jonah was known in the region.

The Conversion of the Sailors	
Introduced as Gentiles praying to their pagan gods	1:5
But entertained the possibility that Jonah's God might save them	1:6
They carefully determined who was at fault rather than casting immediate blame	1:7
They judged the matter fairly	1:8
They came to understand that their salvation was dependent on Jonah	1:11
They were reluctant to kill the Prophet even to save themselves	1:13
They prayed to Yahweh for help - this was more than Jonah had done	1:14
They feared Yahweh exceedingly	1:16
They offered sacrifices and made vows to God	1:16

*The LORD on high is mightier
than the noise of many
waters, yea, than the
mighty waves of the sea.*

*Thy testimonies are
very sure: holiness becometh
thine house, O LORD, for ever.*

PSALM 93:4-5



JONAH'S
PRAYER OF
THANKSGIVING

CHAPTER 1:17-2:10

JONAH'S PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

(1:17 - 2:10)

Having been determined to show God was wrong in extending His mercy to anyone other than His people Israel, Jonah found himself sinking to the depths of the stormy Mediterranean Sea. We learn from this chapter in emotive detail the great distress he felt being cast into the deep, with the waters compassing him about and overwhelming his soul to complete exhaustion. In his last moments, uttering a cry for help to God, he was saved by the great fish prepared by God. Over the next three days and nights, as he lived inside this enormous sea creature, Jonah would come to realize that just as God is able to forgive him and extend His mercy towards himself, God can do the same for anyone who calls upon His name.

17 *Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

There is some debate about whether there is actually a fish living in the Mediterranean today that is capable of swallowing a man whole. More recent archaeological findings have determined that there were once much larger whales and sharks living in the Mediterranean, but that the Romans participated in the whaling industry between 400BC-500AD so these sea giants have largely died out of this area.²²

Whatever the case, God had prepared a great fish to be at the right place at the right time to swallow Jonah. This was a miracle, but it was also a literal event. There is no suggestion that this was a vision, a dream or parable. Jonah was **literally** inside this great fish for three days and three nights. This is important to emphasise because of the way in which this event is referenced by the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ believed this was a real event, which was a type of what would happen to him in his own death and resurrection (see p 76).

For us, we can take great comfort from the fact that God is absolutely in control of our lives. We often stumble from the path and at times may even deliberately take steps to circumvent God's plans for us, however He does have all power and control. The psalmist reminds us of this: *'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.'* (Psa 23:4).

²² Jason Daly, 2018, Smithsonian Magazine <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/romans-may-have-hunted-whales-extinction-their-home-waters-180969605/>

JONAH & THE PSALMS

In Ch 2 it is evident how much Jonah thought upon the Psalms in his daily life. This is the only way he could have been able to quote them so readily in his prayer, which is filled with allusions and citations from the Psalms. In addition to this, many - if not all - of the expressions used in Jonah's prayer are strongly linked to expressions used concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, as will be considered in the final section of these notes (p 76).

	Jonah	The Psalms	
v2	'I cried (<i>qara</i>) by reason of mine affliction (<i>tsarah</i>) unto Yahweh'	'In my distress (<i>tsar</i>) I called (<i>qara</i>) upon Yahweh'	18:6; 120:1
	'I cried by reason of mine affliction unto Yahweh, and he heard me...'	'I cried unto Yahweh with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill' 'He hath not despised the affliction of the afflicted... but when he cried unto him he heard '	3:4 22:24
	'Out of the belly of hell (<i>sheol</i>) cried I, and thou heardest my voice'	'The sorrows of hell compassed me about' 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell ' 'Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell '	18:5 16:10 86:13
v3	'Thou hadst cast me into the deep , in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about:'	'Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit... In darkness, in the deeps . Thy wrath lieth hard upon me... And thou hast afflicted me with all Thy waves.'	88:6-7
	'All thy billows and thy waves passed (Heb <i>abar</i>) over me. '	'All thy waves and thy billows are gone (Heb <i>abar</i>) over me. '	42:7
v4	'I am cast out of thy sight (Heb <i>ayin</i>)'	'I am cut off from before thine eyes (Heb <i>ayin</i>)'	31:22
	'Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple '	'But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple '	5:7
v5	'The waters compassed me about, even to the soul... '	'Save me O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul... I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me' 'Innumerable evils have compassed me about '	69:1-2 40:12
v6	'...Yet has thou brought up my life from corruption , O Yahweh my God'	'For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption ' 'Thou hast brought up my soul from the grave'	16:10 30:3
v7	'When my soul fainted within me , I remembered Yahweh '	'O my God, my soul is cast down within me : therefore will I remember thee ' 'Their soul fainted in them . Then they cried unto Yahweh in their trouble'	42:6 107:5-6
	'And my prayer came unto thee, into thine holy temple. '	'In thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple ' 'He heard my voice out of his temple '	5:7 18:6
v8	'They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. ' v8	'I have hated them that regard lying vanities : but I trust in Yahweh. I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy '	31:6-7
v9	'I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving , I will pay that that I have vowed '	' Sacrifice of thanksgiving... pay thy vows unto the Most High' ' I will pay my vows... '	116:17-18; 50:14. 22:25
	' Salvation is of Yahweh '	' Salvation belongeth unto Yahweh '	3:8

Throughout Jonah's prayer several themes emerge that are either directly quoted out of a Psalm, or that can be found in the immediate context of the Psalms he cited from:

- Desperation of facing certain death - Psa 42:7; 31:22; 88:6-7
- The desire to worship in the temple - Psa 3:4; 5:7; 18:6; 22:25; 42:4; 116:17-18
- The expansion of God's purpose to include the Gentiles - Psa 22:27
- The hope of the resurrection and salvation - Psa 3:8; 16:10; 30:3; 86:13

1 Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly,

Prayed Heb *pâlal* H6419 = 'to intercede, pray' (Str). Occurs twice in Jonah - ch 2:1, 4:2.

Belly Heb *me'eh* H4578 = 'to be soft; the abdomen, stomach, intestines, bowels' (Str). s/w 1:17. Different to 2:2.

It has been suggested that the prayer of v2-9 was offered by Jonah once he was back on dry land, particularly as it contains references to his cries from 'the belly of hell' v2 and his deliverance when God 'brought up my life from corruption' in v6. However, the text here reads very clearly:

- "Jonah prayed unto Yahweh his God **out of the fish's belly**" - v1
- And this is what he said - v2-9

The sense of the KJV is supported by many other translations, including the ESV, LEB, Roth, RSV and NASB. Even those translations that place a full stop at the end of v1, when read as a simple story clearly support the same picture. For example, the NIV reads:

¹From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. ²He said:

"In my distress I called to the Lord...

This is again supported by the ASV, ISV, NKJV and YLT. It would seem that Jonah actually offered this prayer, as v1 states, when he was inside the belly of this giant fish.

It is evident from the prayer of v2-9 that after Jonah was thrown overboard, he plummeted down towards the ocean floor (v3,5,6) to the point where he almost drowned as his life faded away (v7). At that point, Jonah made a short cry to God for help, the words of which are not recorded, but which he refers to in v2,7. In response, the great fish prepared by God (1:17) came and swallowed Jonah, saving his life from the death, or 'corruption' he had faced (v6).

A cursory reading of the prayer reveals that Jonah's greatest terror in being thrown off the ship was the fear of drowning in the merciless oceans beneath. So when God sends a great fish to swallow him up, he realises that this is the source of his salvation (v9), and offers this Psalm of thanksgiving in response, while still inside the fish.

Jonah prayed

This is the first time we read of Jonah praying. In what he must have thought were his final moments before death, he uttered a heartfelt cry for help to his God.

Jonah knew that Yahweh was a God of mercy, and although he believed that death was about to claim him, he directed his prayer to Yahweh's holy temple (v4,7) - cp. 1Ki 8:38-39, recalling Solomon's words at the dedication of the temple. David (Psa 138:2) and Daniel in exile (Dan 6:10) did likewise. A striking parallel is seen here between Jonah and the Lord

Jesus Christ: 'He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save him from death...' (Heb 5:7).

IMMEDIATE PRAYER

How often is prayer our first resort in difficult situations? How can we train our minds to turn to God first?

The way we react to stressful situations is so often governed by how we have trained ourselves to act throughout the rest of our lives. Our Lord is the prime example of this. When he faced the tempter in the wilderness (Mt 4; Lk 4), his answers were saturated with scriptural reasoning because *that is what his mind had been trained to do when temptation wasn't there* (cp Isa 50:4-5). When he hung on the cross in excruciating agony, his thoughts were of compassion and forgiveness for others, because *that is how he had trained his mind to think when he was not in pain* (Lk 23:28,34,43; Jn 19:26-27).

For Jonah to 'remember Yahweh' even at the point that 'his soul fainted within him' (Jon 2:7), and to turn to God in prayer even when 'very angry' (Jon 4:1-2), this must have already been a consistent habit of his everyday life. If we want prayer to be our first response to difficult situations, we must first train ourselves to pray when life is *not* difficult (Psa 55:17; Dan 6:10).

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.*

I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me

Cried Heb *qârâ'* H7121 = (first 'cried' in the verse - 'I *cried* by reason') 'to call out to' (Str). Cp Psa 3:4.

Affliction Heb *tsârâh* H6869 = 'tightness, fig. trouble', feminine of (H6862) *tsar* = 'narrow, a tight place' (Str), 'distress' (Roth).

Heard Heb *'ânâh* H6030 = 'to eye or heed, i.e. pay attention, by implication to respond' (Str).

NIV - '*In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me.*' Even though Jonah had voluntarily disobeyed the instruction of God and his present plight was in fact a result of his own actions, Jonah's great trust in the mercy and forgiveness of God (the very thing that had stopped him from preaching to Nineveh!) is here manifested. He believed that this prayer would reach God in His dwelling place.

Jonah's prayer describes the affliction that Christ had to endure. The Lord's mind was in tune with the Word of God and because of this, he knew that God's power was able to deliver him (Psa 22:24; 116; 118:4-5). Christ was **afflicted** like Jonah (Isa 53:4-5) but God also **heard** him and saved him from death (Heb 5:7).

'By reason of mine affliction' - cp Psa 18:6 - '*In my distress I called upon the LORD*', and Psa 118:5 - '*I called upon the LORD in distress: the LORD answered me...*'

Out of the belly of hell

Belly Heb *bēten* H990 = 'to be hollow; the belly, especially the womb' (Str). Note that this is different to the Heb word translated 'belly' in 1:17, 2:1.

Hell Heb *she'ôl* H7585 = 'the grave' (Str, AV margin).

Jonah's reference to '*the belly of hell*' is a vivid description of the depths of the cavernous ocean that he had been rescued from - it was his grave. From his vantage point in the belly of the fish, he now reflected on this concept. This word for belly has particular reference to the womb; he saw his deliverance from the deep like a birth to new life.

In this, Jonah's experience is once again comparable to that of the Lord:

'For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (H7585); neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption' (Psa 16:10)

'The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell (H7585) compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. In my distress (H6862) I called upon Yahweh, and cried (H7768) unto my God: He heard (H8085) my voice out of His temple, and my cry came before Him, even into His ears.' (Psa 18:4-6)

The Hebrew word for 'hell' in both citations is the same word used in Jonah 2:2, as is 'cried' and 'heard' from Psalm 18:6. Additionally, 'affliction' in Jonah 2:2 is the feminine equivalent of 'distress' in Psalm 18:6. When Jonah expressed his thankfulness in the latter part of this verse, he was quoting Psalm 18:5-6.

Cried I and thou heardest my voice

Cried Heb *sha'ava'* H7768 = 'to be free, i.e. (to cry out for) freedom from trouble' (Str).

Heardest Heb *sha'ama'* H8085 = 'to hear intelligently, give ear to, listen' (Str).

David spoke of Christ who likewise descended into **hell** (the grave - Psa 16:10; Acts 2:29-31) and who also was resurrected by God who **heard** his prayer with '*strong crying and tears*' (Heb 5:7).

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.*

For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas

Cast Heb *shâlak* H7993 = 'to throw out' (Str).

Deep Heb *metsûlâh* H4688 = 'a deep place (of water or mud)'; from Heb *tsûlâh* H6683 = 'an abyss' (Str).

Midst Heb *lêbâb* H3824 = 'the heart' (Str). Cp Mt 12:40.

Seas Heb *yâm* H3220 = 'to roar, a sea (as breaking in noisy surf) or large body of water' (Str).

It was the sailors who cast Jonah into the deep, but Jonah saw that God had brought about these circumstances (cp Psa 88:6-7, see also Psa 69:1-3, 13-15). The sailors were the agents of God's work. Realising that God is overshadowing our lives and that events that come upon us are in His control is a comforting perspective when we find ourselves in deeply troubling circumstances (cp Psa 93:4).

Interestingly, Jonah is also a type of natural Israel, who were cast from God's presence into the nations, but whom God will bring again '*from the depths of the sea*' (Psa 68:22; Zech

10:10-11). He will also *'have compassion on them, subdue their iniquity, and cast all their sins into the depths of the sea'* (Mic 7:18-20).

THE CHASTENING HAND OF GOD

This is a great lesson for us - to learn that God in His love, corrects and reproves His servants, though *'no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous'* (Heb 12:5-13). No doubt Jonah struggled with the pain inflicted by that chastening hand as he struggled on the ocean floor.

True sons and daughters of God will undergo trials and afflictions which bring forth a precious, tried faith (1Pet 1:6-7), for *'we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose'* (Rom 8:28). See also Php 4:19; Psa 55:22; Isa 41:10.

And the floods compassed me about

Floods Heb *nâhâr* H5104 = 'a stream or river' (BDB). See Psa 93:3-5.

Compassed Heb *sâbab* H5437 = 'surround' (Str), 'enveloped' (Roth).

The word *'nahar'* is most often translated as *'river'*, but this is describing a river in the midst of the sea! Jonah here is describing being drawn down by a strong current into the depths of the sea. Other translations emphasize this point: *'The currents swirled about me'* (NIV); *'the current engulfed me'* (NASB).

All thy billows and thy waves passed over me

Billows Heb *mishbâr* H4867 = 'a breaker, wave' from (H7665) *shâbar* = 'to burst, break, crush' (Str).

Waves Heb *gal* H1530 = 'waves, billow' from (H1556) *gâlal* = 'to roll, run down' (Str).

Passed Heb *'âbar* H5674 = a prim root 'to cross over' (Str).

Jonah's description is powerful. He reflects on the panic he felt as the mighty breakers towered over his head, only to descend upon him with a sickening crash, after which he would have tumbled around and around as the waves pummelled him. One brother comments:

*'The churning ocean, with its fierce breakers, and its powerful rolling billows, swallowed Jonah up, drawing him down to its depths. The language is similar to Psalm 42:7, where the expressions denote the waves of persecution and opposition that would destroy the Psalmist. They are also found in the language of Psalm 69:1-2, 14-15, a Messianic Psalm which is prophetic of the overwhelming opposition and persecution the Lord experienced, even from the members of his own family (v8). Therefore, Jonah's experience, in this moment of terror, foreshadowed that which the Lord endured, as the rolling tide of hate and anger in Jewry engulfed him, and ultimately submerged him in death.'*²³

4 Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.

Cast Heb *gârash* H1644 = 'to drive out from a possession; especially to expatriate or divorce' (Str), sig total rejection. Different to Heb word for 'cast' in v3.

²³ Bro HP Mansfield, *Jonah & Nahum Expositor*, Jon 1:3.

Sight Heb 'ayin H5869 = 'an eye' (Str), 'to flow out' as water, tears; the eye (Ges).

Look Heb *nabaṭ* H5027 = 'to scan, to look intently at; by implication to regard' (Str).

Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight

Perhaps it was in this moment that Jonah fully appreciated what it felt like to have been dismissed from God's presence. The NASB says, '*I have been expelled from Your sight*'; Rotherham says, '*I am driven out from before thine eyes.*' The same word translated 'cast out' is used in Genesis 3:24 to describe the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden - such is the intensity of estrangement that Jonah felt from God.

His words are also similar to the phrasing used in Psalm 31:22: '*For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee.*' Jonah knew that his actions were contrary to God's will, and he realised he was undeserving of Yahweh's Divine favour.

It is a strange conundrum when we realise that sometimes the very thing we have been fighting for is not actually what we want when it takes place.

CAST OUT

In considering Jonah as a type of natural Israel, we note the Heb word for 'cast' in this verse means *to drive out*, especially *to divorce*. The relationship that God intended to have with Israel was one of a husband (Jer 2:2, 3:14, 31:32, Isa 54:5), after they had entered into covenant relationship with Him in Exodus 19. But Israel went '*a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land*' causing them to break this covenant (Deut 31:16), and after numerous failed attempts to restore them to faithfulness through the words of the prophets, such as Hosea just a few years later (Hos 2:1-3), God **cast** them out from His presence to the nations (see Deut 29:25-28, 31:16-18; 32:16, Jer 3:1, 6-8). God did not initiate the divorce, it was the result of Israel's own faithlessness, most reluctantly on God's part²⁴ (Isa 50:1). But the bill of divorcement was not a finality of the marriage - for Israel's ultimate restoration to her longsuffering husband is assured (Jer 3:14-16).

Jonah thought he was beyond hope of help, but our God is a God of mercy - His character means that He is willing to forgive (Ex 34:6-7). According to the Law, one was not allowed to take his divorced wife back again if she had remarried (Deut 24:1-4), however God makes it clear that He *will* accept them back, if they '*return again to me*' (Jer 3:1, 14, 22; 4:1). This theme of *turning back* to Yahweh is contrasted with the wickedness of their hearts (Jer 3:10, 17; 4:14, 18, 22) - so even with the weight of their sins, if they *turn* to God, He is willing to forgive.

Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple

The holy temple was Yahweh's dwelling place on earth and was the place from which He extended His mercy and forgiveness (Psa 5:7; 65:4; 69:13). In Solomon's prayer at the dedication of this temple he pleaded with God to hear and forgive when someone turned and prayed towards the temple (1Ki 8:28-30).

As the breath was being pressed out of Jonah, he cast himself on God's mercy. He recognised that God was justified in allowing him to die, but in bringing to mind the holy temple, Jonah was pleading for God's forgiveness.

²⁴ See '*The Ministry of the Prophets: Isaiah*' by Robert Roberts and CC Walker, chapter 50.

5 *The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.*

In the next couple of verses, Jonah graphically describes how close he was to drowning. A study into the Hebrew words give us more detail as to the experiences of Jonah as he sunk to the bottom of the ocean in what he thought were his last moments. There are many references to the Psalms which can be found on the table on p 35.

The waters compassed me about, even to the soul

Compassed Heb *âphaph* H661 = 'to surround' (Str).

Soul Heb *nephesh* H5315 = 'a breathing creature, that is, vitality' from *nâphash* H5314 = 'to breathe' (Str).

The phrase 'even to the soul' is rendered 'to the peril of my life' (Roth).

The depth closed me round about

Depth Heb *tehôm* H8415 = 'an abyss (as a surging mass of water)' from *hûm* H1949 = 'to make an uproar, agitate: destroy' (Str).

Closed me round about - Heb *sâbab* H5437 = 'surround' (Str), 'enveloped' (Roth). S/w 'compassed'

Jonah felt the intense pressure of the deep water building up and its gradual crushing hold on him, as he spiralled down further and further towards the murky ocean floor.

The weeds were wrapped about my head

Weeds Heb *sûph* H5488 = 'a reed, rush, water plant' (BDB).

Wrapped Heb *châbash* H2280 = 'to wrap firmly (especially as a turban)' (Str).

With the weeds wrapped about his head, Jonah was imprisoned in the depths of the ocean. In type, it was as if Jonah was bound by grave clothes - cp Christ (Mt 27:57-60) and Lazarus (Jn 11:44). He was but a dead man.

God took Jonah from the very depths of the sea and redeemed his soul. In this, Jonah was again a type of Israel, when God *'led them through the depths, as through the wilderness... and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy (Egypt)'* (Psa 106:9-10).

6-7 *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. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.*

I went down to the bottoms of the mountains

Bottoms Heb *qetseb* H7095 = 'roots' of the mountains (Ges, Roth, RSV), 'base' (Str).

The Jews treated the mountains as the pillars of the earth, with roots going down into the uttermost abyss of the sea. Jonah had reached the very bottom of the ocean.

The earth with her bars was about me for ever

Bars Heb *beriyach* H1280 = 'to bolt' (Str, Ges).

For ever Heb 'ôlâm H5769 = 'concealed, generally time out of mind' (Str), 'hidden time' (Ges).

The RV renders this - '*its bars closed upon me forever*'. The bars are those of Sheol itself. Job 17:16 talks about the '*bars of the pit*'; Isa 38:10 '*the gates of the grave*'. To the Jewish mind, Sheol was like a dungeon, but once you entered there was no return, for the door was bolted and barred behind you. Jonah was as it were '*bound with affliction and iron because he rebelled against the words of God*' (Psa 107:10-11). However Yahweh in His mercy '*broke the gates of brass and cut the bars of iron in sunder*' (Psa 107:16).

Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God

Brought up Heb 'âlâh H5927 = 'to ascend' (Str).

Corruption Heb *shachath* H7845 = 'a pit (especially as a trap); figuratively destruction', from (H7843) 'to decay' (Str).

The word 'yet' is the turning point of this prayer. It was at this precise moment that Yahweh acted to ensure Jonah would not see corruption. Cp the Heb word for 'corruption' with Job 33:22-30 'grave' (v22), 'pit' (v24, 28, 30), and 'destruction' in Psa 103:4.

This phrase carries a very strong parallel to the type of the Lord Jesus Christ (Psa 16:10; Acts 2:27). In contrast to now having been 'brought up', Jonah had continually *gone down* (see ch 1:3 & note) until he figuratively *died* at the bottom of the mountains.

When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD

Fainted Heb 'âtaph H5848 = 'to be wrapped in darkness' (Ges), trans. 'overwhelmed' in Psa 61:2; 77:2-3; 142:3.

It is thought that it was at this instant that the fish swallowed Jonah. Lost in the suffocating depths of the ocean he had begun to sink into unconscious oblivion and at the very last moment, God intervened. It is an amazing witness to Jonah's relationship with God, that his final thought was to 'remember Yahweh'. The spiritual training of a lifetime asserted itself against the growing numbness of Jonah's mind. When he was all but lifeless, he thirsted after Yahweh (Psa 143:6-7), and barely able to speak he whispered his plea, leaning on the mercy of God, who inclined His ear towards him and heard him (Psa 40:1-3).

and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple

The fact that Jonah was alive in the fish was a confirmation that Yahweh had indeed heard his prayer (Psa 18:6; 34:17-19). See v4 notes on the holy temple.

8 They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.

'Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.' NIV (1984 ed.)

'They who take heed to the vanities of falsehood do their own lovingkindness forsake'. (Roth)

They that observe lying vanities

Observe Heb *shâmar* H8104 = 'to hedge about, guard, protect, attend to' (Str).

Vanities Heb *habel* H1892 = 'emptiness or vanity' (Str).

This phrase is taken directly from Psalm 31:6-7,

'I have hated them that regard lying vanities, but I trust in Yahweh. I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy; for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities.'

In this Psalm, which is highly Messianic, the opponents who trust in 'lying vanities' were evidently the Jewish rulers, who though wicked, did not worship idols. So what does it mean 'regard lying vanities'?

The word 'vanity' speaks of anything *empty* or *transitory*. Bro Geoff Henstock suggests the phrase would be better rendered: *'They that try vain, evil, temporary solutions forsake their own mercy'*.²⁵ Jonah may therefore be acknowledging that his attempt to circumvent Yahweh's will by fleeing to Tarshish was a 'vain, evil, temporary solution'. Like the Jews of Christ's day, he had placed his trust in something other than the living God.

The sailors also *observed* their own vain gods; but after realising their own attempts to save themselves from the storm were useless, they turned to Yahweh. They cast their idols *'to the moles and to the bats'* and learnt of Yahweh's extended salvation because they *'stopped trusting in mere humans, who have but a breath in their nostrils'* (Isa 2:20-22 NIV).

Forsake their own mercy

Forsake Heb 'āzab H5800 = 'to loosen' (Str), 'to leave off, cease' (Ges).

Mercy Heb *chêsêd* H2617 = 'kindness' (Str), trans 'lovingkindness' (Roth).

In the context of the Psalm from which he is quoting, 'their own mercy' is the mercy of God which we relinquish when we rely on futile manmade inventions, rather than God.

God will never forsake us unless we first forsake Him (Heb 13:5; cp Israel, Deut 31:16-18). Idols, whether tangible (such as materialism or physical possessions) or intangible (covetousness Col 3:5), are all around us constantly trying to pull our attention and trust away from God. Let us, like the sailors, reject idolatry and cast out whatever idols in our lives are causing us to forsake the mercy and lovingkindness of God, and the benefits He has designed for those who in faith submit to His will.

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.*

I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving

Thanksgiving Heb *tôdâh* H8426 = 'adoration, praise, thanks' (Str).

In this verse, Jonah is citing directly from Psalm 116:17-18. He wished to *'offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and... pay my vows unto Yahweh'*. But v19 of the Psalm tells us where he wanted to do this: *'In the courts of Yahweh's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem.'* Jonah wanted to get back to God's 'holy temple' (Jon 2:4,7)! Cp Psa 100:4-5.

In deep gratitude to God for His mercy and forgiveness, all Jonah wants to do now is to return to the temple in Jerusalem, to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, pay his vows to God and to stand in the presence of God as his Prophet once again.

²⁵ Mercy & Judgement - Jonah & Nahum, p 39.

This verse draws us back to many other Psalms as well. Consider the following:

- Psa 56:11-13 – Jonah desired to render ‘praises’ (same Heb word as *thanksgiving*) to Yahweh because He delivered him from death.
- Psa 50:14-15 – Jonah sought to offer the sacrifice God desires more than the offering of bulls and goats – that of gratitude and *thanksgiving*.
- Psa 50:23 – Those who offer praise (same Heb word as *thanksgiving*) glorify Yahweh’s name, and to them will He ‘*shew the salvation of God.*’

I will pay that that I have vowed

We are not explicitly told what the vow is that Jonah made, but given this is in response to the blessing of receiving Yahweh’s mercy, we can infer that it most likely relates to Jonah’s intention to complete the mission God gave him in preaching to the Gentiles.

Consider the words of Psalm 22:24-25,27 in the context of Jonah’s experiences:

‘For He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath He hid His face from him; but when he cried into Him, He heard. My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him...all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto Yahweh; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.’

Jonah had accepted that it was wrong for him to run from God, and that he must complete his mission, but as we will see, that doesn’t mean he is ‘fully converted’. Like Peter, Jonah would find this a very difficult lesson. In Acts 10-11, Peter may have learnt that he didn’t personally have the authority to determine who God would or would not save (Acts 10:28), but that is a far cry from saying that God could save Jew and Gentile equally and Peter still struggled with that fact (Gal 2:11-14).

Salvation is of the LORD

Salvation Heb *yeshu`a*h H3444 = ‘saved, deliverance, victory, salvation’ (Str).

In this statement Jonah acknowledges that Yahweh is not only the ‘*God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land*’ (1:9), but that it is His prerogative, and His alone, to extend salvation. The logical extension of this is that He can extend it to anyone He chooses, but whether Jonah has accepted that yet is another question.

‘*Salvation of Yah*’ is the meaning of the name ‘*Jesus*’, or in the Hebrew, ‘*Yehoshua*’. What better way to end this prayer than with the name of the greater Prophet, who Jonah’s experiences shadowed in type!

10 And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

Whenever God speaks, His will is performed (Psa 33:6-9; Job 37:5). An immediate example that comes to mind would be in Genesis 1, where God simply spoke, and the world was created.

Jonah may have been all but brought from the dead, but his account is not yet done. And so we proceed to the next phase of his journey. In Ch 3 we will find Jonah taken literally thousands of kilometres outside his comfort zone to a place where God will work wonders beyond Jonah’s imagination and teach him a lesson beyond his current comprehension.



JONAH'S
RECOMMISSIONING
& COMPLIANCE

CHAPTER 3 : 1 - 3a

JONAH'S RECOMMISSIONING & COMPLIANCE (3:1-3a)

Having been miraculously delivered, Jonah was now prepared to preach to Nineveh as God had originally commanded. Nineveh was the largest city in the world at the time and well known for its violence and wickedness, yet Jonah fearlessly marched in and delivered his message of condemnation. Doubtless expecting – even hoping – for ridicule, he instead looked on as the people began to repent and mourn in dust and ashes.

1-2 *And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.*

And the word of the Lord came... the second time

This phrase commences the second half of the book, written in parallel to the first (p 15). It is almost as though the story is starting afresh, yet this time Jonah's response to the call is radically different. We don't know how much time there was between 2:10 and 3:1. Jonah may have returned to Jerusalem (see notes 2:9), but if his vow involved a commitment to preach to Nineveh, then presumably the delay was not long.

The phrase '*the second time*' is used many times in Scripture, and often with great significance. If in his 'first time' Jonah's experiences typified a mission of self-sacrifice, with one man dying for the salvation of many, then in his 'second' is depicted a mission of judgement by one man upon all, if they do not repent.

Preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee

Preach Heb *qârâ'* H7121 = 'to call, call out' - s/w translated 'cry' 1:2.

This was a reminder to Jonah of God's sovereign prerogative. He had been given a commandment from God, not a job offer that Jonah was free to turn down. It is interesting that despite his good resolutions, Jonah did not take up his commission again until explicitly commanded – perhaps in the hope that God might yet change His mind.

3a *So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.*

Arose Heb *qum* H6965 = 'to arise, stand' (Str).

Went Heb *yalakh* H3212 = 'to walk' (Str).

These are the same two Hebrew words as 'arise' and 'go' in v2, showing that this time Jonah did *exactly* as God asked. He had made a vow of obedience and he didn't hesitate to fulfil it, even though he didn't want to.

The distance to Nineveh from Jerusalem or Joppa is about 1130 km. It is said that in ancient times a man could travel 20 miles, or 32 km, per day²⁶. If Jonah were to walk 6 days each week, then rest on the Sabbath, he would arrive at Nineveh after about 40 days journey. Jonah could hardly miss the similarity of his own journey to that of Elijah's, who was also called 'the second time' and journeyed 40 days and nights (1Ki 19:7-8). No doubt Jonah hoped to see somewhat of the earthquake, wind, and particularly the fire, on Nineveh.

²⁶ See Cambridge Commentary, *Jonah*, Appendix Note B



JONAH &
THE GENTILE
NINEVITES

CHAPTER 3: 3b - 10

JONAH & THE GENTILE NINEVITES (3:3b-10)

3b Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

An exceeding great city

Exceeding Heb *elohim* H430 = 'mighty ones'

This word is usually used to refer to God, so the literal Hebrew describes the city as "great unto God" (Cambridge Commentary, Jon 3:3). This is a Hebraism implying that the city was much larger than other cities at the time to the point of being incomparable.²⁷



Figure 4: Walking from Jerusalem to Nineveh

Three days' journey

On an initial reading, this measurement poses a significant issue: Three days' journey is about 95 km - how can a city be so large?! Archaeological excavations have shown that the circumference of the actual city of Nineveh was only about 12 km, and even that was only after a major extension completed by Sennacherib some 50 years after the time of Jonah.²⁸

The problem is resolved, however, when we consider the layout of ancient Nineveh a little more closely. As discussed in the background (p 12), the city of Nineveh was one of a complex of cities which made up a larger metropolis. Nineveh was the chief city, so that this group of four cities were called '*the Great City Nineveh*', or to archaeologists today, *The Assyrian Triangle*.

When we go back to the Biblical record of Assyria's foundation, we find these cities listed:

²⁷ Bro Geoff Henstock, *Mercy & Judgement*, p 42.

²⁸ Garner, GG 1981. *Royal Cities of Assyria*, The Australian Institute of Archaeology, p 102.

“From that land he [Nimrod] went into Assyria and built **Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen** between Nineveh and Calah; **that is the great city.**” (Gen 10:11-12 ESV, cp KJV mg).

Together, these cities comprised ‘the great city’ (s/w Gen 10:12 as Jon 3:3). History and archaeology affirm the existence and size of this city group, with the historians Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus giving the circumference as 60 miles²⁹ (about 95 km) and thus about ‘three days’ journey’.

The scholars Keil and Delitzsch affirm this view in the following comments (vol 10 p.263):

*“[Nineveh] was the largest city in the world at that time. According to Strabo (16:1,3), it was much larger than Babylon, and was situated in a plain, Ἀρουπία, of Assyria i.e., on the left bank of the Tigris. According to Ctesias (in Diod. ii. 3), its circumference was as much as 480 stadia, i.e., twelve geographical miles;³⁰ whereas, according to Strabo, the circumference of the wall of Babylon was not more than 365 stadia. These statements have been confirmed by modern excavations upon the spot. **The conclusion to which recent discoveries lead is, that the name Nineveh was used in two senses: first, for one particular city; and secondly, for a complex of four large primeval cities (including Nineveh proper), the circumvallation of which is still traceable, and a number of small dwelling-places, castles, etc., the mounds (Tell) of which cover the land.**”*

Several incidental details from the Biblical record also agree to this explanation. Nineveh was home to ‘much cattle’ (Jon 4:11) – a strange feature, unless it is in reference to the fields enclosed by these cities. God also notes the incredible size of the city as part of the reason why He sent Jonah to preach to it (4:11).

4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

Began to enter into the city a day’s journey

Jonah would likely have entered the great city at Nineveh proper. However, the King’s citadel at that time was most likely located at Calah, one of the four cities within Greater Nineveh (see map p12).³¹ So it seems plausible that Jonah would have walked in that direction. Given that the straight-line distance between Nineveh and Calah is ~30km,³² it seems reasonable that Jonah would have completed almost a full day’s journey before the king heard his message.

And said

Jonah does not exactly spare words. He strides into the city, and says five Hebrew words:

‘YET - FORTY - DAYS - NINEVEH - OVERTHROWN!’

²⁹ See Cambridge Commentary, appendix note B. Also *Exposition of Jonah*, Bro H.P. Mansfield, p 39.

³⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, being German, used the German geographical mile, which is approximately 7420 metres, giving 12 geographical miles ≈ 90 km ≈ 3 days’ journey. The length of a stadion varies from around 150-200m depending on the source. Assuming 480 stadia ≈ 90 km gives 1 stadion ≈ 185m which is squarely within this range. Herodotus also notes that 1 day’s journey was 150 stadia (Keil & Delitzsch vol 10 p.274), thus 3 days ≈ 450 stadia which is also quite close to the other values given.

³¹ Garner, GG 1981. *Royal Cities of Assyria*, The Australian Institute of Archaeology, p 33.

³² Keil & Delitzsch, vol 10 p.274-5

It was a harsh, uncompromising cry, reminiscent of Elijah's, who delivered a similar message to Ahab in Samaria in 1Kings 17:1. Both cities were notorious for their violence and robbery (Jon 3:8, Nah 3:1, cp Amos 3:9-10), yet both Jonah and Elijah fearlessly delivered their messages without compromise.

Yet forty days

This is a period usually associated with some kind of probation:

- Gen 7:12 - It rained 40 days/nights during the flood, and Noah waited 40 days after seeing the tops of the mountains before sending out the raven (Gen 8:6-7).
- Lev 12:4-5 - 40 days of purification followed birth of boy, additional 40 days for girl.
- Num 13:25, 14:34 - The spies searched the land of Canaan for 40 days.
- Deut 9:9,18 - Moses fasted 40 days/nights twice before approaching God at Horeb.
- 1Sam 17:16 - Goliath mocked for 40 days before David delivered Israel
- 1Ki 19:8 - Elijah fasted for 40 days/nights before coming before God at Horeb.
- Mt 4:2 - Christ fasted 40 days/nights at the time of his temptation.
- Acts 1:3 - 40 days between Christ's resurrection and ascension.

In some cases the period is 40 years, rather than days:

- Num 14:33-34 - Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years before entering the land, on the day-for-a-year principle for each day the spies were in the land.
- Israel was overthrown in AD 70 following 40 years of preaching by Christ and the Apostles.

This was one way in which the men of Nineveh would be a sign to Christ's generation. As Christ pointed out in Luke 11:32, these were given only 40 days and yet they repented, whereas the men of "this generation" were given 40 years and still met with destruction.

Nineveh shall be overthrown

Overthrown Heb *hafakh* H2015 = 'to turn about or over' (Str).

'Overthrown' is the same Hebrew word used of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:21, 25, 29). There can be little doubt that Jonah would have delivered this message with all the emphasis it deserved. As he traversed the great Assyrian capital, he would have envisaged fire and brimstone falling upon its grand promenades and palaces.

The forthrightness of Jonah's message brings to mind Paul's words to the Athenians in Acts 17:30-31. While God was once content to 'wink' at their ignorance, He was now commanding them to repent. God has always had supreme authority over all nations, and this was a landmark declaration that His work of salvation would apply equally to Jew and Gentile, although this was not widely recognised until after Christ's ascension and was strenuously resisted by both Jonah and the first-century Jews.

A LESSON IN PREACHING

Do we have the same attitude to preaching the Truth? We would do well to remember the words of Hebrews 13:6 *'So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.'* Too often we shrink from preaching our beliefs where a little bit of courage might have made all the difference.

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.*

Believed God

The Hebrew is the same as Gen 15:6, Ex 14:31 etc. and should read 'believed in God', as YLT, NASB, and HCSB translate the phrase. They didn't just believe the message, they believed in the God who sent it.

It may be a little difficult to see why this city should repent so readily at Jonah's message, but a few points make it much more plausible:

- **Jonah preached during a time of relative weakness for Assyria.** Prof Rawlinson, in *Ancient Monarchies*, states that about this time Nineveh was in serious trouble, so that Assyrian history is *'shrouded in darkness for forty years'* (Vol 2, p 379-800). As Bro Boulton points out (in *Assyria*, p 48), it would be difficult to imagine a king like Shalmaneser III or Tiglath-Pileser III, both of whom were fierce conquerors, acting in the manner described in Jonah.
- **It is likely that Jonah's fame had gone before him.** Not every day does a man turn up alive whom all his sailing companions reported as dead at sea for three days! Doubtless the story of the terrifying storm, the instant calm and the runaway prophet spread far and wide.
- **Jonah would likely have born scars of his ordeal.** It is said that the gastric juices in the stomach of a fish bleach the skin and pull it tightly on the skull, giving him the white face of a dead man who was now alive.
- **The mythology of Nineveh involved a fish.** As mentioned in Appendix 2 (p84-85), the word *Nineveh*, and her chief goddess Ishtar, or *Nina*, is linked to the idea of a fish. Superstitious as they were, the Ninevites may have found these connections all the more compelling.
- **Jonah's very manner of entrance and delivery would have been convincing in itself:** *"The appearance of a foreigner, who, without any conceivable personal interest, and with the most fearless boldness, disclosed to the great royal city its godless ways, and announced its destruction within a very short period with the confidence so characteristic of the God-sent prophets, could not fail to make a powerful impression on the minds of the people, which would be all the stronger if the report of the miraculous working of the prophets of Israel had penetrated to Nineveh"* (Keil & Delitzsch, vol 10 p.276).
- **Jonah's God had a reputation.** This would not be the first time that the fame of Yahweh had gone before His messengers (Josh 2:9-11; 2Ki 5:6).

The repentance of the Ninevites further strengthens the type of Jonah. Here the Gentiles were repenting at the witness of one who rose from the dead - as they would in Christ's day.

In stark contrast, his own brethren ignored his signs, and famously did not repent *'though one rose from the dead'* (Lk 16:31).

From the greatest of them even to the least of them

Greatest Heb *gadol* H1419 = 'great (in any sense)' (Str).

Least Heb *qatan* H6996 = 'diminutive, literally (in quantity, size or number) or figuratively (in importance)

These two Hebrew words are commonly used in similar phrases to refer to the entirety of a group of people regardless of rank (e.g. Gen 19:11, Deut 1:17, 1 Sam 5:9, 1 Sam 30:2,19, 1Ki 22:31, 2Ki 23:2, Jer 6:13, 8:10, 16:6, etc.). This repentance included everyone from the king to the commoner, illustrating the principle outlined by Peter, *'that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.'* (Acts 10:34-35).

Perhaps the most significant usage of these two words is in Jeremiah 31:34 (later quoted in Heb 8:11), speaking of a future wholesale repentance of Israel. What would Jonah say if he knew that Israel would one day be called to follow Nineveh's example?

It is noteworthy that the reform began at the top – with the greatest of society – including both the king v6, and his government v7. This is an extremely rare occurrence in history, as it is more often the poor and oppressed who are drawn to the hope of the Gospel.

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.*

The king of Nineveh

It has been suggested that the events of the book of Jonah took place during the reign of Adad-Nirari III (810-783 BC), making it earlier, rather than later, in Jeroboam II's reign. If that is the case, then *'unlike most Assyrian rulers, he was monotheistic, a worshipper initially of Nebo only. No other Assyrian ruler was more likely to respond to the truth about Yahweh than this particular king.'*³³

Arose from his throne

Such a move in response to a message from God is of the greatest significance. The throne was the symbol of his royal authority (cp Gen 41:40). It is almost as though the king abdicates his authority in deference to the God this man spoke for.

Laid his robe from him

Robe Heb *addereth* H155 = 'Garment, mantle, robe' (Str).

This is the same word used for Elijah's mantle (1Ki 19:13 etc.) which was passed to Elisha as a sign that he had become prophet in his stead (2Ki 2:14-15). The word is also used of the rough garments worn by false prophets to illustrate their status (Zech 13:4). Garments were often a sign of a person's position and function in society (cp 2Ki 10:22, Mk 1:6, Mt 11:8, James 2:2-3), thus for the king to put off his robe and wear sackcloth was a further sign of his symbolic abdication – an act of great humility.

³³ Bro Geoff Henstock, *Mercy & Judgement*, p 45

Covered him with sackcloth and sat in ashes

Sackcloth Heb *saq* H8242 = 'mesh, coarse loose cloth' (Str). It is interesting to note that this is the root of the English word 'sack.'

Sackcloth and ashes are common elements of mourning throughout scripture. Sackcloth may be used without ashes (Gen 37:34, 2 Sam 3:31, 1Ki 21:27), and the reverse is also sometimes true (2Sam 13:19, 1Ki 20:38, Job 2:8). There are fewer occasions where both are mentioned, and this seems to be limited to instances of national mourning and/or repentance (Est 4:1,3, Jer 6:26, Dan 9:3, Mt 11:21, Lk 10:13).

As with the king putting off his robe, dressing in sackcloth and ashes was a sign of great humility. The repentance of the men of Nineveh is very much in the spirit of James 4:8-10.

The book of Jonah is in many ways an indictment upon Judaism. There was a tendency among the Jews to believe that they were superior as the chosen people of God, and nowhere was this more pronounced than in the Scribes and Pharisees of Christ's generation and their self-righteous keeping of the Law. These were the very people who would be condemned by the sign of the prophet Jonah (Lk 11:29-32). In that context, it is interesting to compare the repentance of the Ninevites to that of the praying publican in Luke 18:13-14.

TRUE REPENTANCE

What other examples of humble repentance can you find throughout the Bible?

What is our attitude when we come before God? Do we humble ourselves in the sight of God or are there elements of self-glorification in our worship?

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:*

Decree of the king and his nobles

The word *ta'am*, translated 'decree', occurs in both the Hebrew and Syriac (also known as Aramaic) languages, the latter being the language of Assyria in those days. In Syriac it refers to 'a royal edict', indicating that whoever wrote the book of Jonah was familiar with the Assyrians and their language. The same word is also used in Ezra and Daniel of the royal decrees in Babylon and Persia.³⁴

Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing

Everyone, including the animals, were to be included in mourning and repentance. Animals in Bible times were regarded as a part of the household (e.g. Gen 33:13; Num 32:26) - **everyone** is included in this lamentation.

The inclusion of animals is another testament to the validity of the record since several ancient historians ascribe similar customs to the peoples of this area. In describing a war between the Greeks and Persians in the fifth century BC, Herodotus writes:

³⁴ Cambridge Commentary, Jon 3:7

"All the Persian army made great lamentation... They shaved off all the hair from their own heads, and cut the manes from their war-horses and their sumpter-beasts, while they vented their grief in such loud cries that all Boeotia resounded with the clamour."³⁵

Even in more recent times, when horses were a primary mode of transport, it was not uncommon for funerals to be attended by horses draped in black velvet to express the depth of sorrow.

We know from Jonah 4:11 that the cattle of Nineveh would have been destroyed along with their masters. This is a quite a common theme in scripture, and there are many examples where man and beast:

- Are punished together, for example: In the flood (Gen 6:17), the plagues (Ex 9:3-6,9,19-21,25; 11:5, 12:13,29), the Red Sea (Ex 15:1), at the destruction of Jericho (Josh 6:21) and with the famine sent on the kingdom of Ahab (1Ki 18:5).
- Are saved together, such as in the flood (Gen 7:14-16), the plagues (Ex 9:3-4) and in Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Ex 10:9, 24-26, 12:32,38).

In addition to illustrating how all-encompassing was the mourning in Nineveh, this reflects the principle that the curse pronounced by God because of sin in the Garden of Eden affected not just Adam and Eve, but the whole of Creation. Thus, *"the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now"* (Rom 8:22), but when God grants peace to mankind in the future, He will also bring peace to the animal kingdom (Isa 11:6-9).

Let them not feed, nor drink water

Fasting was the voluntary abstention from pleasurable things (food) to express the importance of a situation, and a genuine sorrow at what had been done. This was like the Ninevites' Day of Atonement - a fast which God had instituted for Israel so that they could express their sorrow for their sins, and appeal to God for mercy (Lev 16).

Thus, fasting was an expression of sorrow and repentance (cp Ezra 10:6), and a way of ascribing supreme importance to a task or dire situation:

- Ex 34:28 - Moses neither ate nor drank during both 40-day visits to Mt Horeb.
- 1Ki 13:8-10 - The man of God was not to eat/drink until he had fulfilled his mission.
- 1Ki 19:6-8 - Elijah apparently neither ate nor drank during his own visit to Horeb.
- Acts 23:12 - Certain Jews swore they would not eat/drink until they had killed Paul.

Is this the gravity with which we view sin and rebellion against God in our life?

8 *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.*

Let man and beast... cry mightily to God

What a lamentation this must have been! Imagine the sound as the weeping of a few grew into the cry of many, which merged with the bleating of the hungry and thirsty cattle (v7) and the sobs of the upset children, to form an almighty wail that bellowed out across the

³⁵ Herodotus, Book 9.24

countryside and echoed up into the heights of heaven. Was there ever a lamentation like Nineveh's?!

From the violence that is in their hands

Violence Heb chamas H2555 = 'violence, by implication wrong' (Str).

This word refers to violence, or more generally wrongdoing of one person against another. Among many other uses, it was cited as a reason for the flood (Gen 6:11,13), the destruction of Jerusalem (Ezek 12:19) and the desolation of Edom and Egypt (Joel 3:19, Obad 10). As previously noted, Nineveh was known as a particularly violent city, and is later described in Nahum as *'the city of blood'* (Nah 3:1). Consequently, this would have been a major factor in God's condemnation of them, and a topic that Jonah evidently spoke out against.

9-10 *Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? 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.*

Who can tell if God will turn and repent

The principle governing this style of repentance is outlined in Jeremiah 18:7-8:

"At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them."

God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way

God has not set a 40-day deadline for our destruction as he did for the Ninevites, but we are all under the curse of sin and death, and all in need of repentance and salvation. The sorrowful repentance of the Ninevites is an instructive pattern for us of the type of repentance God is seeking from us. God is looking for a sorrowful humility towards past failures, coupled with an enthusiastic, genuine desire to do better in the future (2Cor 7:9-11). While we might find it relatively easy to make good resolutions for the future, how often do we react to our past sins with an attitude of pride or defensiveness?

HOW GENUINE WAS THE NINEVITES' REPENTANCE?

It is sometimes suggested that the Ninevites' repentance was superficial or short-lived, because in the end Assyria was destroyed in accordance with God's warning. It is true that Nahum condemned Assyria's return to their wicked works and foretold their consequent doom (p 86), but we must remember that was some 100 years later - well beyond a generation or two.

We are not told of any further preaching to, or education of, the Ninevites at this time, other than Jonah's five-word warning of 3:4, but it is interesting to ponder how much the Ninevites may have been told, and their level of responsibility. The Lord Jesus Christ makes a most fascinating affirmation in this regard. He says that they, along with the Queen of Sheba, *'will rise up in the judgement'* to witness against the Lord's generation (Lk 11:31-32)! How many of the inhabitants of Nineveh this may include, and what may be their ultimate position before God, we will have to await the return of Christ to know.

*Oh that men would
praise the LORD for
his goodness, and for his
wonderful works
to the children of men!*

PSALM 107:31

JONAH'S PRAYER OF RESENTMENT



CHAPTER 4:1-4

JONAH'S PRAYER OF RESENTMENT (4:1-4)

Jonah 4 opens with an insight into the passion of this prophet. Jonah's fiery commitment to his people meant that he would rather die than see their enemies saved. However, this section also serves as a warning against misplaced zeal as we see Jonah struggle with his priorities of loyalty. Does loyalty to his people trump loyalty to God's character? Who does he value more?

THE SPIRIT OF ELIJAH

Particularly in Ch 4, but also throughout the whole book, Jonah follows in the footsteps of the prophet Elijah. Both were prophets to the northern Kingdom of Israel, and both had a strong passion for their ministry. This section will highlight how similar these prophets were in both thought and action.

Discussion Point:

- How many parallels can you find between Jonah and Elijah?
- What significant differences are there?
- Why did Jonah model his ministry on Elijah?

1 *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.*

Very angry Heb *charah* H2734 = 'burn, be kindled' (BDB).

Jonah's burning anger was not a response to the repentance of Nineveh, but to the relenting of Yahweh. As far as he was concerned, Israel was the only nation from whom Yahweh's anger should be turned away. After all, *they* are the covenant people of God, and it is *through them* that all other nations are to be blessed.³⁶ For God to show mercy on Assyria, one of the greatest threats to Israel's existence, was unthinkable!

But perhaps there was an even more significant reason for Jonah's heartfelt distress. He was bitterly aware of the sins of his people, and would have known just how true were the words of Deut 32:20: '...they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith.'

Indeed, the book of Deuteronomy repeatedly warned Israel against their inevitable descent into sinfulness, and no doubt Jonah also knew the chilling words of judgement that followed:

*'They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them **with a foolish nation**. For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall **burn...**' (Deut 32:21-22).*

³⁶ See Gen 12:3; 22:18, but cp Gal 3:16,26-29. It is through Christ, the singular seed of Abraham that all nations will be blessed.

Yahweh's anger surely was burning against Israel at this time (see intro, p13), and Jonah must have feared that God really would implement the judgements of this verse. Perhaps Assyria was the 'foolish nation' whose repentance would be used by God to provoke Israel to jealousy!

Could God really reject Israel and turn to another nation? This question had certainly been asked before, and the answer becomes immensely relevant in the next verse of Jonah 4.

But the very thought of it moved Jonah to jealous anger. He represented Israel's cause, and on their behalf, he was provoked by this Gentile conversion. It was a sentiment with which the Apostle Paul was very familiar. Like Jonah, he *'wished that [he] were accursed from Christ for [his] brethren' the Jews.*³⁷ Unlike Jonah, however, he recognised that *'through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy'* (Rom 11:11).

Far from this being a rejection of Israel, God's response to Nineveh's repentance was a plea to them to repent themselves (cp Mt 12:41)! It was possible for *both* Israel and Assyria to be blessed by God, as Isaiah would later show (Isa 19:23-25).

It displeased Jonah exceedingly

Exceedingly Heb *gadol* H1419 *ra'ah* H7451 = great (*gadol*) evil, bad (*ra'ah*).

Notice that 'exceedingly' is the same Heb word translated 'wickedness' in Ch 1:2, together with the word for 'great'. Yahweh had viewed the violence and corruption of the Ninevites as a wicked, evil thing. But here, Jonah viewed *their repentance* as 'a great evil' (YLT).

2 *And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O the 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.*

And he prayed unto the LORD

For the second time in this book, we see that Jonah's resort in times of great distress was to prayer (cp 2:1). For all his faults, we would do well to follow his example in this regard.

Was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish

Jonah's statement is somewhat akin to the modern expression: 'See? I told you so!' He knew all along that in the very act of pronouncing judgement in Nineveh's ears, he was giving them an opportunity to repent, and a chance for God's mercy to be manifested. Such was the character of the God he worshipped!

Jonah followed the same stern spirit of unrelenting judgement that, for the most part, characterised Elijah's ministry.³⁸ He believed that Nineveh, a city renowned for its ability to concoct new ways to be evil, should have been well beyond the scope of Divine mercy.

But as has previously been suggested, there was more to Jonah's concerns: Assyria was immensely powerful, and all he could see in that nation was the most prominent political

³⁷ Rom 9:3. Jonah chose death over disloyalty to his people multiple times (Jon 1:12; 4:3).

³⁸ See 1Ki 17:1; 18:40; 19:10; 21:19; 2Ki 1:9-17; 2Chr 21:12-15.

threat to Israel's safety and independence.³⁹ His opposition to God's mercy was just as much concern for his own people as it was spite for a sinful nation. As far as he was concerned, to bless Assyria was to curse Israel! What he could not see was a nation full of individuals, each of whom were a potential vessel for God's character and glory.

'WRITTEN OFF'

- Are we blind to the way God may be working with others for his glory?
- How often do we 'write off' others as possible objects of God's mercy?
- Do we ever stop praying for others because we see them as beyond the reach of God's grace?

For I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil

Jonah's words are a direct reference to God's character that He revealed to Moses in Exodus 34. This revelation was made by God at a time most relevant to the circumstances Jonah was facing. Jonah's fear was that God could reject Israel and turn to another nation (see p14), and this was precisely the situation that Moses had faced in Ex 32:10:

'Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.'

The wickedness of Israel at this time was so great that Moses had to intercede on their behalf for Yahweh to relent of the judgement He had pronounced (Ex 32:11-14,30-32; 33:12-17). It is upon this backdrop that Yahweh famously revealed his character to Moses, and it is this very revelation that Jonah cites (Ex 34:6-7):

*'And Yahweh passed by before him, and proclaimed, Yahweh, Yahweh El, **merciful and gracious, longsuffering**, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, **forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin**, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.'*

Since Jonah quotes this chapter, it is probable that at this time his mind was fixed on the events of Exodus 34, and the terrifying prospect of God rejecting Israel that marked its context in chapter 32.

In fact, there is more Biblical evidence to support this. As discussed in the Background (p8-9), in 2Kings 14:23-27, we have the only other mention of Jonah outside of his book. These verses relate to the reign of Jeroboam II, during which Israel experienced great political success in accordance with Jonah's earlier unrecorded prophecies.

However, there is an intriguing statement at the beginning of v27:

*'And Yahweh said **not** that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven...'*

As previously observed, the fact that God needed to clarify that He would **not** blot out the name of Israel implies that someone had suggested He would! Before Jonah's time, Israel

³⁹ For example, see 2Ki 15:19-20,29. Just decades later, under the rule of Menahem and Pekah, Israel would suffer economic and military losses at the hand of Assyria. This would not have been possible had God overthrown Nineveh as he had threatened.

had suffered for decades at the hand of the Syrians, and someone had evidently accused God of intending to 'blot out' the nation, even using the terminology of Exodus 32:33.⁴⁰

Israel was predominantly the object of God's goodness in Old Testament times (Deut 7:6,8,14), and so the possibility of showing mercy to other nations was quite foreign to them. Jonah could thus understand and appreciate the merciful aspect of God's character, so long as it benefited *His* people. He struggled to apply the same mercy to Israel's enemies. Intellectually, he 'knew' that God's mercy could extend to everyone (v2). But emotionally, he couldn't bear the implications of that fact (v1,3). He rested on the covenant of Ex 34; he rightly believed that Israel was eternally God's people, and that their rejection was impossible.⁴¹ His error lay in supposing that this excluded other nations from being accepted as well. For all his familiarity with Exodus 33-34, Jonah had not appreciated the full import of God's affirmation in Exodus 33:19: '*I will... be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.*'

- Are there any other examples of Gentile nations or tribes turning to God in the Old Testament?⁴² What could Jonah have learned from these examples?

3 *Therefore now, O Yahweh, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.*

Therefore now

This phrase links v3 to v2. Jonah wants to die *because* of the mercy shown to Nineveh, and the apparent rejection of Israel that he thought this implied.

Take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live

This is the request of a man in absolute despair. Every part of Jonah revolted against the favour shown to Assyria. If, as it seemed, Israel had been rejected by God in deference to their enemies, then his ministry to that nation was pointless; and if his ministry was pointless, then so was his life!

Jonah's request echoes that of Elijah in 1Kings 19:4:

'But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Yahweh, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.'

Both Jonah and Elijah were so invested in their ministries, that to fail in them was to take away all reason for living. The Truth was what gave their lives meaning, and to see its light being snuffed out in God's people hurt them so much that they would rather die. Though it may have been misguided, the passion of these prophets for the spiritual welfare of God's people is an admirable quality. How much passion do we have for the spiritual welfare of God's people?

⁴⁰ Perhaps it was even Jonah, a man so palpably concerned for the future of his people, who challenged God in this way, leading to the prophecy of restoration in 2Kings 14:25.

⁴¹ See Rom 11:1-2,26.

⁴² Consider Gen 34; Josh 9.

At the same time, these events serve as a warning against becoming self-absorbed in the Truth. Although sincere, Elijah's zeal had consumed him to the point that he could think of no one else but '*I, I only*'. Jonah's situation was little different. His desperate concern for his people and his fury at God's pity on their enemies had cascaded into a controversy focused on *himself*. It was *his* 'anger' (v1), *his* 'saying' (v2) and *his* 'life' (v3) that mattered; God's purpose had been pushed into the shadows.

The remainder of the chapter, therefore, will see God's patient endeavour to educate and refocus Jonah, just as he had done for Elijah decades before.⁴³

4 *Then said Yahweh, Doest thou well to be angry?*

Angry Heb *charah* H2734 = 'burn, be kindled' (BDB).

The word '*angry*' connects this verse to v1, in which Jonah was angry at God's mercy being shown to sinful Gentiles; it was the anger of jealousy. As much as Jonah '*knew*' about the character of God (v2), he couldn't bring himself to accept its outworking in this event in his life. God's question is therefore very pertinent: is Jonah's jealousy more valid than Yahweh's righteous character? Does he have '*good reason to be angry*' (NASB)?

God could very well have asked, *Jonah, 'is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?'* (Mt 20:15).

The question, '*doest thou well to be angry?*' is eerily similar to one that had been asked more than 3000 years before, just outside the garden of Eden. In Genesis 4, Cain had witnessed the acceptance of his brother's offering, and the rejection of his own. He responded in jealous anger (Gen 4:5). Perhaps Jonah, who witnessed the acceptance of Nineveh, could have sympathised. It was in response to this anger that God questioned Cain:

*'And Yahweh said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?
If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?'* (Gen 4:6-7)

Jonah may not have realised it, but his attitude in this chapter mirrored that of Cain himself. No doubt it grieved Yahweh greatly to have to repeat the same rebuke to Jonah, a faithful prophet, as he had given to Cain, a vicious murderer.

But this parallel with Genesis 4 is more than simply an interesting fact. In the account of Genesis, Cain was offered acceptance if only he would '*do well*.' Given Jonah stands representative of Israel, the same invitation must have been open to them - if *they* did well, *they* would be accepted also!

⁴³ See 1Ki 19:9-18.

A wide-angle photograph of a desert landscape. The foreground is dominated by rolling sand dunes with fine, rhythmic ripples. The dunes extend into the distance, where a few small, dark green trees are scattered. The sky is a clear, pale blue, and the overall scene is bright and open.

JONAH'S LESSON ABOUT COMPASSION

CHAPTER 4:5-11

JONAH'S LESSON ABOUT COMPASSION (4:5-11)

A PERPLEXING CONCLUSION

The book of Jonah concludes in Ch 4:5-11 with a most peculiar story. We could be excused for thinking of it as abrupt and perplexing. It is the story of the gourd. There are many questions to ask, and they are not easy to answer:

- Why did Jonah stay to watch the city, rather than going home (v5)?
- What was the purpose of the gourd (v6)?
- What lesson did God want to teach with the worm (v7)?
- What was the significance of the east wind (v8)?
- Why does God appear to care so much for Nineveh's cattle (v11)?
- Why does the book end so abruptly?

There are two foundational keys that are essential to unlocking the meaning behind God's parable of the gourd that he gave Jonah on this occasion.

THE FIRST KEY - JONAH REPRESENTS ISRAEL

It is quite clear that this section is largely intended to be an enacted parable - that is, a collection of symbols that are types of real people, and real events. The gourd, the worm, and the wind were not ends in themselves. They all represented something *more* real and *more* important that was going to happen. This is nothing new in the book: for example, Matthew tells us that Jonah's entombment inside the fish was a type of Christ's burial many centuries later (Mt 12:40).

The prophets are filled with such enacted parables. In each one, the prophet will either enact the part of God, or the part of his people.⁴⁴

As we saw in v1-3, Jonah has chosen to represent Israel's cause before God, pleading on their behalf to destroy their enemies. Now he will find himself enacting their future national plight. As can be seen on the next page, Jonah stands as a representative for his people:

⁴⁴ Ezek 4 is a particularly good example: In v1-8, the prophet enacted *Yahweh's* role as punisher of his people, laying siege against Jerusalem. In v9-17, he enacted the starvation of *his people* during that same siege.

Jonah		Israel	
1:1-2	Given Divine commission	Given Divine commission	Rom 3:2; Isa 43:10
1:3	Rose to flee	Fled God's mission	Hos 7:13
1:9	'An Hebrew'	Israel were 'the Hebrews'	Gen 40:15
2:3,6	Saved from the waters	Preserved through waters	Isa 43:2
1:17; 2:10	Typically resurrected after 3 days	Raised up after 3 days (millennia)	Hos 6:2
2:3	Jonah's 'casting away' saved Gentile sailors	'If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world...'	Rom 11:15
4:1-2	Resented mercy on Gentiles	Resented grace to Gentiles (attitude of older brother)	Lk 15:28; Gal 2:15

THE SECOND KEY - HOSEA

Like Jonah, Hosea prophesied 'in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel' (Hos 1:1 cp 2Ki 14:23-25) and was largely concerned with the growing power of Assyria. There is an array of connections between the two prophecies, and many symbols in Jonah are explained in Hosea, as seen in the table below. As such, the book of Hosea is one of the best tools we have for unlocking the parable of the gourd in Jonah 4.

Similarity	Jonah	Hosea
Concern for animals	'Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth' 3:8, cp 4:11.	'Every one... shall languish, with the beasts of the field' 4:3, cp 5:6.
Raised up the third day	'Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days... ' 1:17; 2:10.	'After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up' 6:2.
A dove that goes to Assyria	Jonah's name means ' dove ' (Str).	'Ephraim also is like a silly dove... they go to Assyria' 7:11, cp 11:11.
Fleeing from God	'Jonah rose up to flee... from the presence of Yahweh' 1:3.	'They have fled from me: destruction unto them!' 7:13.
Swallowed up	'Great fish to swallow up Jonah' 1:17.	'Israel is swallowed up ' 8:8.
Smitten and dried up	'A worm... smote the gourd that it withered ' 4:7.	'Ephraim is smitten , their root is dried up ' 9:16 (same Heb words).
Yahweh relents of judgement	'God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not ' 3:10.	' I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim' 11:9, cp 14:4.
Dwelling in booths	'So Jonah... made him a booth , and sat under it in the shadow' 4:5.	'I... will make thee to dwell in tabernacles ' 12:9.
An east wind of judgement	'God prepared a vehement east wind ' 4:8.	'An east wind shall come... Samaria shall become desolate' 13:15-16, cp 4:19; 12:1.

5 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.

Booth Heb *sukkah* H5521 = 'a hut or lair' (Str).

So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city

If Jonah had wanted to return home, he would have gone southwest. Instead, he went in essentially the opposite direction. In so doing, he is stating that the case is not closed. He is

fully invested in this controversy and will not leave until the 40 days of probation are well and truly complete.

And there made him a booth,

From a practical perspective, no doubt Jonah made this booth because he needed shade from the sun. His skin would have been greatly damaged from stomach acid of the fish, and a booth (a small hut made from branches) was an excellent way to quickly find respite.

WHY DID JONAH BUILD A BOOTH?

Apart from his practical need, there may have been another reason behind Jonah's choice to build a booth. The word 'booth' (*sukkah*) is also used to describe the feast of 'tabernacles' in Leviticus. During this feast, the Israelites would '*dwell in booths seven days*' (Lev 23:42) as a reminder of God's care for Israel, and their miraculous deliverance from their Gentile Egyptian oppressors (Lev 23:43).

Jonah's decision to construct a booth may give us an insight into his frame of mind at this stage. In defiance of God's favour towards Assyria, he wanted to memorialise who God's historic people *really* were, and the booth was an apt symbol for Yahweh's care and protection of Israel.

And sat under it in the shadow

Shadow Heb *tse/* H6738 = 'shadow, shade', hence 'protection' (BDB)

Jonah, representing his people, wanted to find shelter '*under the shadow (s/w) of the Almighty*' (Psa 91:1). He felt that, given Israel's status as the apple of God's eye (Deut 32:10), God should '*keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow (s/w) of Thy wings*' (Psa 17:8).

Till he might see what would become of the city

This begs the question of what Jonah expected to happen to the city. If he was looking for its salvation, then there would be nothing to see! Clearly, therefore, he was looking for Nineveh's destruction - he wanted God to change His mind and judge Nineveh after all!

It seems almost certain that Jonah had in mind another righteous man who '*went out*' of a sinful city in order that it might be overthrown in Genesis 19:16,24:

'They brought [Lot] forth, and set him without the city... Then Yahweh rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Yahweh out of heaven'.

Like Nineveh, Sodom's wickedness had reached unto God (Gen 18:20-21; cp Jon 1:2). If God had found even ten righteous people in Sodom, he would have spared the entire city for their sakes (Gen 18:23-32). So, Jonah left Nineveh and watched eagerly for the fire and brimstone to fall now that he was absent from it.

To add to the drama of the scene, both of Jonah's contemporaries refer to the fiery judgements of God upon Sodom (Amos 4:11; Hos 11:8), but as a warning to *Israel*, rather than *Assyria*. The prophet stood with his people, and he knew they were in a perilous plight.

6 *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.*

Prepared Heb *manah* H4487 = 'count, number, reckon, assign' (BDB).

Gourd Heb *qiqayon* H7021 = 'the gourd (as nauseous)' (Str).

Having presented his case before Yahweh, Jonah will now be shown three signs - the gourd (v6), the worm (v7), and the wind (v8) - followed by the gentle, educating word of God (v9-11). This follows a similar pattern to Elijah in 1Ki 19: having presented his case before Yahweh (v10), he was shown three signs (v11-12), followed by 'a still small voice' (v12-13).

And the LORD God prepared

Each of the three signs in this chapter were '*prepared*' by Yahweh. He is taking Jonah on a journey of education through this chapter. Since Jonah represents Israel, Jonah is being taught that God is in control of Israel's destiny - both for good (through the provision of the gourd), and for evil (in the worm and wind).

A gourd

The exact identity of this plant is unknown: the KJV margin suggests that it was a palmcrist, and many commentators believe it was a castor-oil plant.⁴⁵ Keil & Delitzsch describe it as,

*'A very common shrub in Palestine, which grows in sandy places, having broad leaves that throw a pleasant shadow, and which shoots up to a considerable height in a very few days.'*⁴⁶

In each of these suggestions, the proposed plant would have provided a broad, leafy canopy over Jonah to shade him from the sun, more than anything his booth could have done. God had provided shelter and protection greater than anything Jonah could make for himself. This is an important detail in uncovering the parable of the gourd.

THE MEANING OF THE GOURD

Jonah, representing Israel, had constructed a booth, which we suggested was intended to illustrate that God's care and protection was owed to *His people*, rather than the city which stood before Jonah. God then '*prepared a gourd*', which provided even greater shelter from the oppressive sun. In looking for the symbolic meaning of this provision, we need to identify a way in which God protected Israel from the oppression they were facing.

Jonah was a prophet in the days of Jeroboam II, the fourth king in the dynasty of Jehu, which had long been afflicted with Syrian oppression (p 7). Here are some facts about the rise of this dynasty:

- It was prepared, or appointed, by God (2Ki 9:1-7; 1Ki 21:20-23; 2Ki 10:30).
- It rose to power very quickly - one might say 'overnight' (2Ki 9-10).

⁴⁵ For example, see *Mercy & Judgement - An exposition of Jonah and Nahum*, p. 51.

⁴⁶ *Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament - Minor Prophets*, p. 280.

- It provided Israel with prosperity and protection from the nations (2Ki 13:4-5; 14:8-15,25-26).

Thus, the dynasty of Jehu provided protection from the oppression that Israel was facing, in the same way that the gourd provided shelter from the sun.

However the dynasty of Jehu was by no means a righteous dynasty⁴⁷; in fact, the more it grew in power, the more depraved it became, just like the nation itself (Hos 4:7).

Just as Jonah had sat unappreciatively under the shade of the gourd, oblivious to the fact that God had provided it, so the people of Israel had enjoyed peace and prosperity under the Jehu dynasty, yet failed to acknowledge the God who had allowed them to rise. Because of this, continues Hosea, *'I will change their glory into shame'* (Hos 4:7), as will be represented in the next phase of Jonah's experience.

7 But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

Smote Heb *nakhah* H5221 = 'to strike' (Str).

Withered Heb *yavesh* H3001 = 'be dry, dried up, withered' (BDB).

As quickly as the gourd had grown up, so it had been destroyed. Its glorious canopy had been reduced to a shrivelled carcase, which flopped lifelessly on the roof of Jonah's booth.

In line with the parable, we would expect this to correspond to a speedy demise of Jehu's dynasty. We would expect the kingship of Israel to be smitten and quickly 'dried up' by a worm-like, withering force. This is exactly what Amos and Hosea prophesied would happen:

*'The high places of Isaac shall be **desolate**, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be **laid waste**;⁴⁸ and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword'* (Amos 7:9).

*'Ephraim is **smitten**, their root is **dried up**, they shall bear no fruit: yea, though they bring forth, yet will I slay even the beloved fruit of their womb'* (Hos 9:16).

A worm

A worm is not a particularly glorious, or impressive animal. It was not a lion or a bear that killed this dynasty; it was an insignificant worm. Remember that Herod was *'eaten of worms'* - a most humiliating death - because *'he gave not God the glory'* (Acts 12:23). In a similar way, the kingship of Israel had forgotten Yahweh, so it would be eaten out by worms until it was completely withered, and its glory was lost.

This may not have been a single worm, but a swarm of worms. The Cambridge Commentary indicates that *'it is better to take the word in its collective sense, worms, as in Deuteronomy 28:39; Isaiah 14:11, and other passages.'*⁴⁹ If this is true, it certainly fits the parable, as demonstrated below.

⁴⁷ (1) 2Kings 10:30-31; (2) 13:1-2; (3) 13:10-11; (4) 14:23-24; (5) 15:8-9.

⁴⁸ The Hebrew word for 'laid waste' (*yecheravu*) means 'be dry, dried up' (BDB).

⁴⁹ Cambridge Commentary, *Jonah*, p. 88. See also *Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*, p. 493.

THE WORMS: SHALLUM, MENAHEM, PEKAHIAH, PEKAH, HOSHEA

Jehu's dynasty lasted for five generations (2Ki 10:30), after which Israel had only five more kings: Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah and Hoshea. These final kings rapidly reduced the kingdom from a position of success and strength to weakness and disarray. As suddenly as Jehu's dynasty had arisen, so it would be overthrown. Of the last king in Jehu's line, Zachariah, it is recorded that,

'Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and smote him before the people, and slew him, and reigned in his stead... This was the word of Yahweh which he spake unto Jehu, saying, Thy sons shall sit on the throne of Israel unto the fourth generation. And so it came to pass.' (2Ki 15:10,12).

As Jonah 4:10 states, the dynasty 'came up in a night, and perished in a night.'

Shallum was the worm who 'smote' the dynasty of Jehu (s/w Jonah 4:7), causing the hitherto successful monarchy of Israel to 'dry up and wither' so that it no longer offered effective protection to the nation. Interestingly, Shallum is called '*the son of Jabesh (yavesh)*,' meaning 'to dry up or wither' (Str)! In fact, Jabesh (2Ki 15:10) is the noun of the verb 'withered' (Jon 4:7).

From this time onwards, this worm-like, destructive behaviour became characteristic of Israel's monarchy. The pattern is quite striking, as four of the last five kings 'smote' their predecessor to take the throne (2Ki 15:10,14,25,30). In each case, the word 'smote' (*nakhah*) is the same Hebrew word used in Jonah 4:7 - 'and it **smote** the gourd.'

Thus, under the hand of these worms, the kingship of Israel was reduced to a withered mess, full of inner turmoil, and providing very little protection for its people. Gone were the days of peace and shelter under Jeroboam III! Yet how many Israelites would have recognised that this was all 'prepared' by God?

8 *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.*

Vehement Heb *charishi* H2759 = 'harsh, hot, sultry, silent' (BDB)

Beat upon Heb *nakhah* H5221 = 'to strike' (Str).

With the gourd's protection gone, Jonah was left open to the sun, and the 'scorching wind of heat' (LXX). He represented the state of his people Israel, just decades into the future. With their kingship eaten out by worms, they would be exposed to every Gentile force around them, completely unprotected. In fact, the record of 2 Kings states the following about the end of Hoshea's reign (the last king of Israel):

'Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and gave him presents. And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea... therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison' (2Ki 17:3-4).

With their final king imprisoned, the people of Israel were without leadership; they were in an incredibly vulnerable position. Had they turned to Yahweh at this point, his mercy may have been extended to them, just as it had been given to Nineveh; but we can only assume

that their response was like Jonah's defiant attitude: he *'wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.'* So, God would bring upon them the very nation he had saved in the book of Jonah – Assyria!

THE WIND: ASSYRIA

The east wind blew in from the sandy deserts and was a formidable wind of judgement (Psa 48:7; Jer 18:17). On several occasions, the book of Hosea uses the symbol of wind to identify Assyria, to the north-east of Israel.

Israel thought that Assyria would ensure their national security (Hos 5:13; 7:11; 8:9), and in Ch 12:1, Hosea rebukes them for making *'a covenant with the Assyrians'*, describing their actions as *'following after the east wind'*. This was a very foolish move – It would be akin to Israel asking Russia for military aid nowadays, in spite of the Bible's predictions that Russia will invade Israel! In fact, just a little later, Hosea makes the following prophecy concerning Israel (Hos 13:15-16):

*'Though he be fruitful among his brethren, **an east wind shall come**, the wind of Yahweh shall come up from the wilderness... **Samaria shall become desolate**; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword...'*

From these quotations, it is clear that Assyria is the east wind of judgement that would be brought against Israel.

When a strong wind arises, it rarely reaches its full force immediately. It usually begins as a small breeze, then builds to a stiff gale, before finally becoming an overpowering storm. Assyria's oppression of Israel was no different. It began as a small breeze:

'And Pul the king of Assyria came against the land: and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver' (2Ki 15:19).

It progressed to a stiff gale:

'In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abelbethmaachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria' (2Ki 15:29).

And before long, it became an overpowering storm:

'Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria...' (2Ki 17:5-6).

In this way, the wind of God's judgement was brought upon Israel for all the sins that are comprehensively catalogued in 2Kings 17:7-23.

God prepared

It is interesting to consider the fact that if Nineveh had *not* repented, God would have destroyed them and the Assyrian empire would have collapsed. Therefore, in the very act of sparing Nineveh, God was 'preparing' his 'east wind,' ensuring that Assyria remained a strong force ready to bring against Israel.

It is no wonder that Jonah's wish to die in this verse is so much like his earlier wish to die (v3). In this verse, the east wind had been prepared. But in chapter 3, the Assyrians, which the wind was but a symbol of, had been prepared. In a way, Jonah's entire book is about the preparation of Assyria so that they could bring God's judgements upon His people! In this light, perhaps we can more readily sympathise with Jonah's emotions throughout this chapter, wrong though they might be.

9 *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.*

Having examined the parable of the gourd, we now need to take a step back and consider why this enacted parable is there at all, and what God was teaching Jonah. This controversy was all about the character of God (v2) and His prerogative to show compassion to whomsoever He will (v11). So how exactly did the parable of the gourd demonstrate this? In the following verses, God Himself will explain.

Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?

This question is almost identical to the one God asked in v4 - '*do you have good reason to be angry?*' (NASB). So why does God ask it again?

To understand, we must enter the thoughts of Jonah. In his mind, this controversy was not about God's character; it was about Israel versus Assyria - the Jews versus the Gentiles. Would God be faithful to His covenant people, or would He forsake them and save Assyria?

Although Israel was God's covenant people, they had repeatedly rejected that covenant. Therefore, in judging them, God was being faithful to his own character. This is borne out in the very chapter in which Israel was taken captive by Assyria (2Ki 17), where we read:

*'Yahweh testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, **Turn ye from your evil ways**, and keep my commandments ... And they rejected His statutes, and His covenant' (2Ki 17:13-15).*

Notice the contrast between Israel's response and that of Nineveh:

*'And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed God... let them **turn every one from his evil way**...'* (Jon 3:4-8).

Israel had been repeatedly warned of impending judgement, yet they had not repented. Assyria was warned *once* - and they repented immediately! Was God not righteous in judging Israel (by destroying the protective gourd), and saving Assyria?

Hence the two questions God put to Jonah:

- v4 - Did Jonah have good reason to be angry about the salvation of Nineveh?
- v9 - Did Jonah have good reason to be angry about the judgement of Israel?

Jonah wanted a repentant nation destroyed, and a stubborn nation preserved! Thus, although he may not have understood the parable of the gourd yet, his 'anger for the gourd' highlights to us his inconsistency and God's righteousness. That is the reason we have the parable.

PREPARED BY GOD

What gourds and worms has God prepared for us or for our ecclesias, and how do we respond?

- Do we thank God for the care and protection He grants us (gourds)? Or do we become '*exceeding glad*,' but forget who provided it?
- Do we patiently trust God when trial is brought upon us (worms)? Or do we give up in desperation and anger?

Jonah saw his trials as being of God (Jon 2:3), even if at the hands of men (1:15). He now needed to learn to accept God's decisions in his life. God is in control of our lives - he 'prepares' both the good and the trial.

10-11 *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: 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?*

Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow

Pity Heb *chus* H2347 = 'pity, look upon with compassion' (BDB).

Grow Heb *gadal* H1431 = 'to grow up, become great' (BDB).

Jonah's compassion for the gourd represents Israel's concern for their own success as a kingdom. The preservation of their national identity was so dear to them, yet they had failed to recognise that everything they had was given to them from Yahweh. He had 'prepared' it all (v6), and 'made it to grow.'

And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city,

Great Heb *gadol* H1419 = 'from 1431; great' (Str).

If Jonah could feel compassion for an inanimate gourd, *how much more could God have compassion on Nineveh, a city full of individuals in God's image?* Yahweh is highlighting Jonah's inconsistency here by showing him that, due to his prejudice against Assyria, he has more compassion for a plant than for over 120,000 people, plus cattle! God is nothing like this (Mt 6:30; Lk 12:28).

That great city

In Hebrew, the word 'great' in v11 is derived from the word 'grow' in v10. God is therefore drawing a parallel between the 'great city Nineveh,' and the gourd which 'grew up' and 'became great.' In both cases, God was the one who allowed them to become great. Therefore, since God oversaw the rise of both Nineveh and Israel, it was *His* prerogative to spare and destroy, not Jonah's. As Job had said so long before, '*Yahweh gave, and Yahweh hath taken away; blessed be the name of Yahweh*' (Job 1:21).

More than sixscore thousand persons

A “score” is an old English description of the number 20. Consequently, sixscore thousand = 120,000. The Hebrew more literally speaks of ‘two-and-ten ten-thousands,’ or twelve ten-thousands. Consequently, YLT translates the phrase, ‘in which there are more than twelve myriads of human beings’.

God does not tell us exactly how many people were in Nineveh. Across the complex of four cities there could have been hundreds of thousands of inhabitants⁵⁰. But why did He choose not to mention the exact figure? The reason is because the number of people itself was not important. God has never been swayed by the quantities of people, as Israel was told in Deuteronomy 7:7-8.

God chose to say, ‘more than 120,000’, because the number 12 would instantly remind Jonah of his own people, Israel. It was almost as if God was saying, *Jonah, I know you come from the 12 tribes, all descended from Abraham ‘the Hebrew’, but think not to say within your heart, ‘We have Abraham to our father:’ for God is able of these Ninevites to raise up 12 myriads of children unto Abraham.* (Cp Mt 3:9).

Persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand

This statement is like another common Biblical phrase: ‘knowing good and evil’ (see Gen 3:22). The ability to be able to distinguish between good and evil, or metaphorically between one’s right and left hand, comes with age. Hence, this phrase is used without the metaphor to describe children (Isa 7:15-16; Deut 1:39).

In terms of its use here, expositors are divided as to exactly who the statement refers to:

1. All the inhabitants of Nineveh⁵¹ as being morally immature like children. This would make the population of Nineveh >120,000, as discussed above.
2. Merely to the number of actual children.⁵² This would make the total population some 500,000-600,000.

Either way, population estimates of Greater Nineveh with all four cities range from 400,000-600,000, but that is not really the point God is making here.

God is stating that there are *at least* twelve ten-thousands of people who don’t know any better. And so He asks Jonah, ‘*Should not I have compassion upon them, Jonah?*’

and much cattle

Given the layout of Greater Nineveh, with four smaller cities enclosing much pastureland, the cattle are again included (see notes on 3:7 & Background, p 12).

It is almost as though God closes off the book by saying, ‘*And if you don’t have it in you to feel even the slightest pity for helpless, innocent children, then what about the cows and sheep, Jonah? What have they done to deserve destruction? Shouldn’t I have compassion upon them?*’

⁵⁰ In terms of the actual population estimate, records from Calah (or Nimrud), one of the four cities making up Greater Nineveh, indicate Calah had a population of 60,000-100,000. The population of Greater Nineveh could, therefore, conceivably be in the hundreds of thousands. See Garner, GG 1981. *Royal Cities of Assyria*, p 50.

⁵¹ ESV Study Bible; IVP Commentary; Garner 1981. *Royal Cities of Assyria*, Australian Institute of Archaeology, p 52.

⁵² As proposed in TSK; Barnes; Keil & Delitzsch, Cambridge Comm; Mercy & Judgement (Bro Geoff Henstock) p 52.

CONCLUSION

The book of Jonah ends abruptly, leaving us to muse on a number of questions:

Why does the book end with an unanswered question?

Throughout the Bible, when God educated faithful men and women, His teaching was rarely straightforward. Rather, He taught them in parables, and with rhetorical, probing questions. For example: God responded to Job with hundreds of questions (Job 38-41); He challenged Abraham with questions and symbols (Gen 15:5, 9-12, 17; 18:14); and He rebuked David using a parable (2Sam 12:1-14). These same methods were used to teach Jonah in this chapter: he was given the parable of the gourd (v6-8), as well as difficult questions to ponder (v4, 9, 11). If we want to learn from the Bible, therefore, we must learn to love and appreciate this way that God teaches us.

Why doesn't the book record Jonah's response to v10-11?

Even though Jonah saw the whole Nineveh-controversy as being about his people and his ministry to them (v1-3), this book was actually about the revelation of God's character (1:14-15; 3:9-10; 4:2,11).

If we knew Jonah's answer to this question, perhaps we would close our Bible and walk away, satisfied with the conclusion to the book. But it may just be that Jonah's response is not recorded so that we may place our own there.

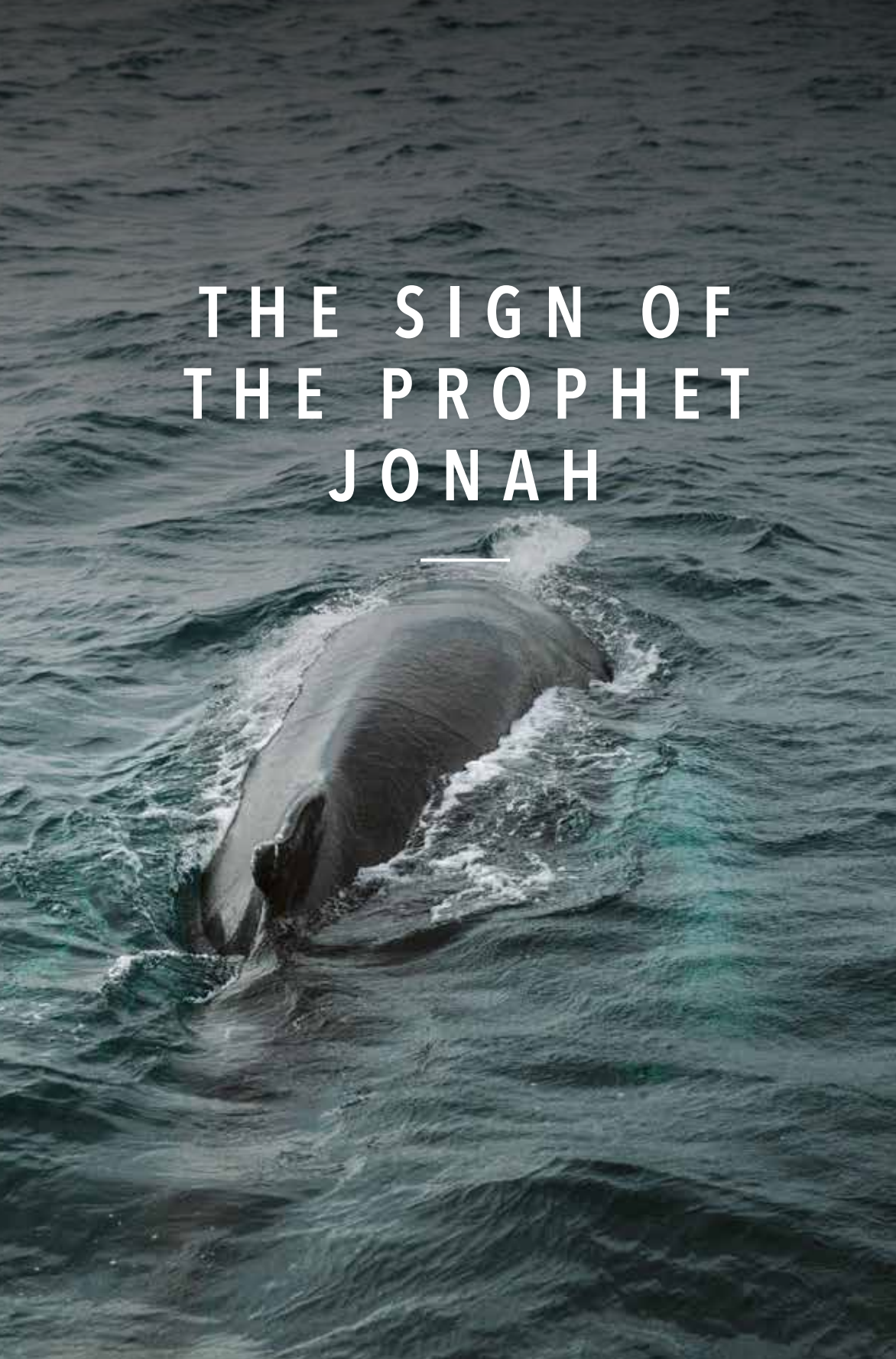
Did Jonah ever learn the lesson that God was teaching him?

We will never know for sure in this life. But perhaps we have a couple of hints at the answer:

- Jonah, it would seem, wrote this book all about his experiences; or at the very least, he relayed all the details to someone else who penned it. There is no saving of face; no painting Jonah in a good light. The book is expertly written in such a way that we can learn from his mistakes.
- Jonah was taken by the Lord as a sign to the people of his own day.

Would God have asked Jonah to write a book for others, if he had not first learned its lesson himself? And would the Lord have taken Jonah to be a sign if he never learned the lesson of his experiences?

THE SIGN OF
THE PROPHET
JONAH



THE SIGN OF THE PROPHET JONAH

Although the book of Jonah comes to an abrupt end, his story doesn't end there. Of all the great men and women in Scripture, it was to this man that the Lord Jesus Christ directed the attention of the nation 800 years later as the sign they would be given.

The NT word for a 'sign' describes something given as evidence - a reason to believe. It is the Greek word 'sēmeion', and a survey of its 77 NT occurrences verifies that a sign is something which is often miraculous or supernatural, but which is calculated to help its observers believe in something or someone. It is this word that is used of 'the sign' of the prophet Jonah.

The sign of the prophet Jonah is mentioned by Christ three times in the gospels. Notice that on two occasions the Lord is answering a request from the religious leaders for him to 'show a sign', and in the third it is implied:

1. *'But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a **sign**; and there shall no **sign** be given to it, but the **sign** of the prophet Jonas...'* (Mt 12:39-42).
2. *'He answered and said unto them... A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a **sign**; and there shall no **sign** be given unto it, but the **sign** of the prophet Jonas...'* (Mt 16:1-4).
3. *'This is an evil generation: they seek a **sign**; and there shall no **sign** be given it, but the **sign** of the Jonas the prophet.'* (Lk 11:29-32).

Now the Jews had seen plenty of signs to prove that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. In Matthew alone there are 15 references to miracles of healing prior to this event, some of which were mass healings!⁵³ As Nicodemus, the third highest in the Ruling Council, the Sanhedrin, said:

'Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles (s/w signs) that thou doest, except God be with him' (Jn 3:2).

The Jews were requesting a sign not so that they could believe, but so that they could excuse their unbelief. They would, however, receive far more than they anticipated from the Lord!

SUMMARY OF THE SIGN

When we combine the words of Christ that appear in these three NT references, we begin to build a picture of all that the Sign of the Prophet Jonah incorporates:

⁵³ See Mt 4:23-24; 8:2-3,6-7,13,14-15,16-17,28; 9:2-6,20-22,24-26,29,32-33,35; 10:1; 12:13,22.

Aspects of the Sign	Reference	Key Point
Addressed to a wicked, evil and adulterous generation.	Mt 12:39 Mt 16:4 Lk 11:29-30	The Jews were no more worthy of a sign than the Ninevites - God is no respecter of persons.
As Jonah was 3 days & 3 nights in the fish's belly, so Christ would be 3 days & 3 nights in the heart of the earth.	Mt 12:40	Jonah's figurative death and resurrection was a sign to Nineveh. Christ would die and be raised as a sign to Jew and Gentile of his Gospel teaching.
The men of Nineveh would rise in judgement against this generation.	Mt 12:41 Lk 11:32	The Gentile men of Nineveh, with no prior of knowledge of God, believed the sign and preaching of Jonah.
The Queen of the South shall rise in judgement against this generation.	Mt 12:42 Lk 11:31	The Gentile Queen of Sheba, who also had no prior of knowledge of God, believed at the wisdom of Solomon.
A greater than Jonah is here.	Mt 12:41 Lk 11:32	Christ is greater than prophets.
A greater than Solomon is here.	Mt 12:42 Lk 11:31	Christ is greater than kings.

The Jews had demanded a sign of Jesus Christ so that they could publicly disprove it and thus discredit him. There was no better sign to which the Lord could turn, than to the story of a man who struggled with *exactly* what these Jews were feeling: an obstinate, deep-seated refusal to accept both God's method of salvation, and His sovereign right to extend it to whoever He pleased in His mercy.

THE SIGN IN THE LIFE OF JONAH

The sign of the Prophet Jonah involves a few major phases. They can neatly be divided into the chapters of the book of Jonah:

1. The typical death of Jonah (*Chapter 1*)
2. The typical burial and resurrection of Jonah (*Chapter 2*)
3. Preaching to the Gentiles (*Chapter 3*)

We will now look at how these three phases were played out in the life of Jonah, which made him such an appropriate sign for the nation of Israel in Christ's time.

THE DEATH OF JONAH (CH 1)

The experiences of Jonah in Ch 1, right from his place of birth through the terrifying storm he encountered and his 'death' for the salvation of many on the ship, all reflect in vivid detail scenes from the life and death of our Lord. It is important, however, to remember that the life of Jonah, while demonstrating many parallels with that of our Lord, was but a shadow (cp Heb 10:1), and therefore not every detail will match with the life of Christ. After all, Jonah was not the Messiah himself, and therefore did not exhibit the perfect motivation and actions that Christ did.

The following table contains a list of parallels between the account in Jonah 1 and the work of Christ.

Story of Jonah	Work of Christ
'As Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites...' Lk 11:30	'...so shall also the Son of man be to this generation.' Lk 11:30
Jonah's name means dove 1:1	'The Spirit of God descended like a dove' Mt 3:16
'Son of Amittai' = Son of truth 1:1	Son of God, who is truth Deut 32:4; Psa 31:5
Jonah was from Gath-hepher in Galilee 2Ki 14:25, and rejected as a prophet Jn 7:52	Jesus was from Nazareth in Galilee Mt 21:11, and rejected as a prophet Jn 7:52
Jonah was sent to preach to Nineveh, a nation renowned for its wickedness & immorality 1:2	Christ preached to a wicked and adulterous generation Mt 12:39, 16:4, Lk 11:29
Jonah's commission - to warn of impending judgement 1:2; 3:4, and to provide opportunity for repentance & salvation 3:8-9; 4:2,11	Christ's commission - to warn of impending judgment, and provide opportunity for repentance & salvation Mt 12:41; Jn 3:14-17
Jonah was a willing sacrifice (for the sailors) 1:12	'No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself.' Jn 10:18
Jonah thought it was better that he died so that the whole nation of Israel did not perish at the hand of the Assyrians 1:3.	Caiaphas said, 'It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.' Jn11:50.
'The men rowed hard...' but could not save themselves by their own strength 1:13	'When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.' Rom 5:6.
'Lay not upon us innocent blood' 1:14	'I am innocent of the blood of this just person' Mt 27:24
Jonah was 'lifted up' to die 1:12,15.	'If I be lifted up will draw all men unto me' Jn 12:32; 3:14
It was <i>only</i> through Jonah's 'death' that the sailors could be saved 1:15	'There is none other name under heaven... whereby we must be saved.' Acts 4:12
The sailors ' <i>feared Yahweh exceedingly</i> ' when the storm stopped 1:16	The centurion said, ' <i>Truly this man was the Son of God</i> ' at the crucifixion Mk 15:39

THE BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF JONAH (CH 2)

As Jonah was cast into the deep, it was almost as though the sailors had hurled him into the sea of nations, there to flounder and die. As the Lord looked down from the cross, he saw below him a foaming sea of humanity, and his mind was drawn to many of the same Psalms quoted by Jonah (p 35). Once again, the experiences of Jonah in Ch 2 are rich in typical detail, testifying to the Jews of Christ's day that the man who was about to spend three days and nights in the heart of the earth, was indeed sent of God.

Story of Jonah	Work of Christ
Jonah was entombed in a great fish 1:17	Christ was placed in a tomb Mt 27:60, Lk 23:53
'Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights' 1:17, Mt 12:40	'So shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth' Mt 12:40
'I cried by reason of mine affliction unto Yahweh' 2:2	'He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears' Heb 5:7
'And He heard me' 2:2	'And was heard in that he feared' Heb 5:7
'Out of the belly of hell cried I' 2:2	'Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell' Acts 2:27
'The floods compassed me about; all thy billows and thy waves passed over me' 2:3	'All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me' Psa 42:7

The weeds wrapped around Jonah's head, as though he were bound in graveclothes 2:5	Christ was bound in graveclothes Mt 27:57-60
Jonah was not left to see corruption 2:6	'Thou wilt not... suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.' Psa 16:10; Acts 2:27
Jonah ends his prayer, 'Salvation is of Yahweh' 2:9	This is the meaning of the name 'Jesus' Mt 1:21
'Yahweh spake unto the fish...' v10	'The angel of the Lord descended from heaven...' Mt 28:2
'...and it vomited out Jonah...' v10	'There was a great earthquake' Mt 28:2
'...upon the dry land.' v10	'He drew me out of many waters' Psa 18:16
The fish released Jonah because he was a foreign object and had no place inside it.	'Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it' Acts 2:24, cp 1Cor 15:55-57

PREACHING TO THE GENTILES (CH 3)

Finally, the risen Jonah stood ready to preach to the world. Having 'learned obedience by the things he suffered' (cp Heb 5:8), he was at least now ready to proclaim repentance and salvation to Nineveh (although in Jonah's case his 'learning' and 'obedience' were still a work in progress!). As the lone prophet enters the greatest metropolis in the world, a picture of our Lord is again presented to us, as we see the word of one man will determine the fate of a city, and change the course of world empires!

Story of Jonah	Work of Christ
'The second time' 3:1	'He shall appear the second time' Heb 9:28
Jonah himself was a sign unto the Ninevites as a man raised from the dead Lk 11:30	Christ's resurrection was a sign to all that he was the Son of God Rom 1:4; 1Cor 15:1-4
Jonah would have borne the marks of a 'death and burial' from the fish's stomach acids.	Christ bears the marks of a crucified man Lk 24:39; Zech 13:6.
At one prophet's teaching, the people of a 'great' city were repentant 3:6-10	As a result of the work and sacrifice of one man, many nations will be redeemed Isa 52:15
His preaching offered deliverance to both Jew 2Ki 14:25 and Gentile 1:12,15-16; 3:4	Christ came to deliver both Jew and Gentile Gal 3:26-29; Rom 15:8-9

CONCLUSION

The story of Jonah held for the Jewish people a vivid portrayal of the mission of their Messiah. But the Lord did not simply tell them that they would be given 'the type of Jonah'; no, they were to be given a *sign*. A sign, as we considered earlier, is designed to help one believe.

The Sign of the Prophet Jonah involved:

- A man who would die for his companions.
- A man who would be resurrected by the power of God.
- And a man who would command all men everywhere to repent.

And that man - *THE Sign of the Prophet Jonah* - was Jesus Christ himself. The generation to whom Christ spoke, evil and adulterous though they were, would be given the sign of Jesus Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension.

But the sign of the prophet Jonah did not end there - Jonah went on to deliver a message of impending destruction unless they repented. The Jews had asked for a sign that they could merely accept or reject at whim; they were given an ultimatum in response.

To reject the Sign of the Prophet Jonah was to suffer the fate of his message:

YET - FORTY - DAYS - NINEVEH - OVERTHROWN.

Or, we might say,

YET - FORTY - YEARS - JERUSALEM - DESTROYED!

The Ninevites had been given 40 days to respond to the message of Jonah. They needed but one day, and they repented in sackcloth and ashes, and Nineveh was preserved - at least for a time.

The Jews were to be given 40 years to respond to the message of Jesus Christ. But to no avail; the Romans came, and Jerusalem fell in AD 70.

* * *

Whilst we know what happened to Nineveh, and we know how the Jews responded to the Sign of the Prophet Jonah in Christ's day, the book of Jonah itself remains a book unfinished.

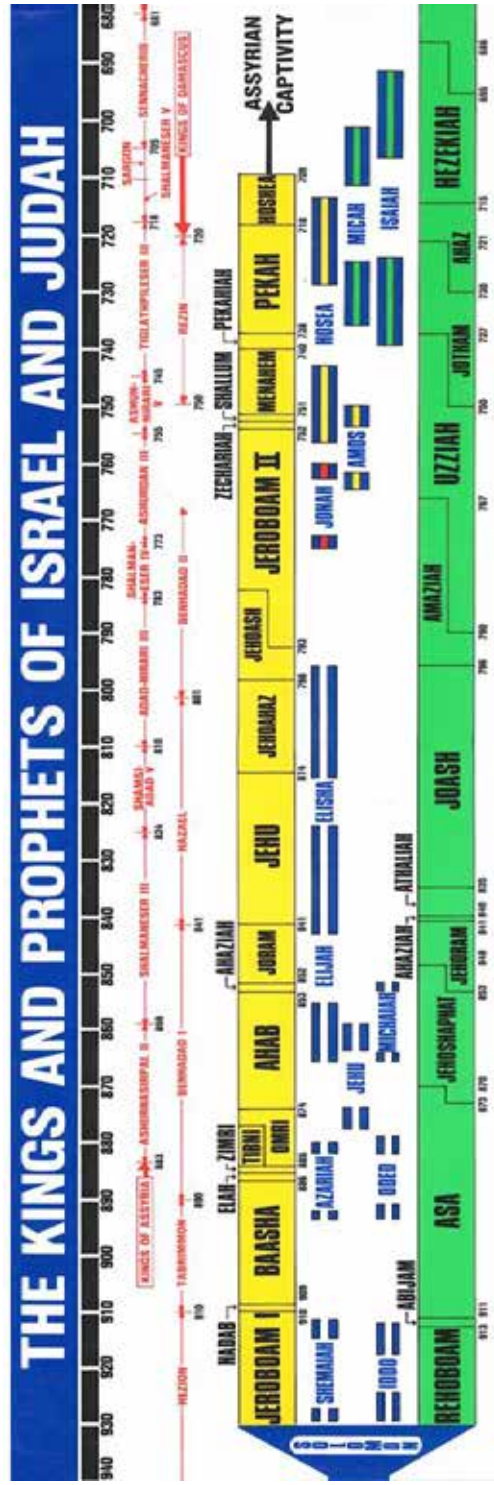
Jonah knew the end of his story, but he never wrote it down. Instead, he left his account unfinished; his story in limbo. What was Jonah's final position? Did he repent? Did he accept God's will? Or did he die in bitter resentment?

Whilst we may surmise, based on his inclusion in God's plan as a powerful type of His Son, that Jonah ultimately yielded to God's teaching hand, in reality we will never know how his story ended - until we see him again.

But Jonah's story is not the only story unfinished. And how our story will end may depend upon our response to the lessons of this book, and the preaching of the man who proclaimed, '*Behold, a greater than Jonah is here!*'

A P P E N D I C E S

APPENDIX 1: TIMELINE OF THE KINGS OF ISRAEL



APPENDIX 2: THE HISTORY OF ASSYRIA

1. Assyria: The First World Power

The empire of Assyria, over which the King of Nineveh ruled, has its own fascinating story. Initially Babylon held sway over Assyria and the city of Nineveh, but gradually the Assyrian people arose in power until Tiglath-Pileser I launched the Assyrian empire in about 1100 BC. After his death, the nation struggled against the powers of the Hittites, Babylonians, and others.

It was not until 200 years later that a great king, Ashurnasipal II, came to the throne in 883 BC and re-established Assyria militarily, with Babylon, Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine and Egypt falling under his control. The next king, Shalmaneser III, conquered further south along the Mediterranean coast, defeating Ahab and his Syrian coalition at the battle of Qarqar (853 BC)⁵⁴, and subsequently taxed the Israelite king Jehu.

The following table provides a summary of the Assyrian monarchs before and after the time of Jonah, with a selection of significant events that occurred during their reign:⁵⁵

	King	Ruled	Comment
Strong	Tiglath-Pileser I	~1100 BC	Founded the Assyrian Empire
~			
Strong	Ashurnasipal II	883-859 BC	Re-established Empire
	Shalmaneser III	858-854 BC	Took tribute from Jehu (Black Obelisk)
Weak	Shamshi-Adad V	823-811 BC	Only just gained kingship because of civil war
	Adad-nirari III	810-783 BC	Father died young, mother helped rule
Very weak	Shalmaneser IV	783-773 BC	Lost control of Syria
	Ashur-dan III	772-755 BC	Shadowed by rebellions & plagues
	Ashur-nirari V	754-746 BC	Little is known; deposed by coup
Strong	Tiglath-pileser III	745-727 BC	Founded Neo- / New Assyrian Empire & took it to greatest expanse
	Shalmaneser V	726-722 BC	Sieged Samaria but assassinated
	Sargon II	721-705 BC	Conquered & deported Israel
	Sennacherib	704-681 BC	Fought Judah, lost against Hezekiah
~			
	Sin-shar-ishkun	629-612 BC	Assyria falls to Babylonians/Medes

Following Shalmaneser III, the empire began to weaken, and with the rise of Shalmaneser IV in 823 BC, a time of civil unrest began in Assyria. Internal revolt began to weaken the nation and catastrophes such as famine and epidemics of plague caused great unrest among the people. The empire remained in its weakened state until the rise of an army general, Tiglath-Pileser III, who took power by military coup, and revitalised the empire.

It was within this era of Assyrian decline that Jonah prophesied, during the reign of Jeroboam II, in 793-752 BC. There can be little coincidence in this, for at this time more than any other, the king and people of Nineveh were ready to receive the word of God. Weakened by internal politics, famine and disease, they were receptive to the prophet's warning.

⁵⁴ The Carta Bible Atlas, 5th Ed, p 100.

⁵⁵ Compiled from www.britannica.com/place/Mesopotamia-historical-region-Asia - See sections on *The Neo Assyrian Empire 746-609*, and *Assyria and Babylonia from c 1000 to c 750 bce*

Following this time, the next few kings refrained from foreign conquest and Assyria was quiet and non-aggressive as a result of God's warning. But a usurper seized the throne in 745 BC declaring himself Tiglath-Pileser III and Assyria forgot the words of Yahweh, resuming once more its policy of conquest and bloodshed. The mighty king Sargon arose and lifted Assyria to the zenith of its power. It was he who overthrew Samaria. Following Sargon came Sennacherib in about 700 BC. He developed Nineveh architecturally to its greatest heights, but his power was curtailed when he attempted to take Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time. His army was destroyed - 185,000 men killed by one angel (Isa 37:36-37). From that time on the power of Assyria declined until its abrupt end in 612 B.C.



Figure 5: The Assyrian Empire

2. The Assyrian People

To the nations around, the Assyrians were cruel, vengeful warriors, *'whose arrows were sharp and their bows bent, the horses' hooves were like flint and wheels like a whirlwind'* (Isa 5:28). They built their state on the loot of other nations and their cruelty was unimaginable. One source describes the Assyrians dealing with rebels by flaying, impaling, decapitating, or burning them alive. Another says they ripped out tongues of blasphemers, smashed people under statues, and carved up corpses and fed them to the animals. Yet this was the empire to whom Jonah was sent to preach!

The Assyrians had mastered the art of war and of the administration of empires and provided an example for successive world empires - Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. Their network of roads, well-equipped infantry combined with chariots, system of governors, provinces and exacting of tribute was imitated everywhere.

Assyria's status was reflected in the lifestyle of its people and the art adorning the city walls. Their citizens enjoyed a wealthy existence, dressed in beautiful robes and living in extravagant houses. The city walls were decorated with carved pictures that recorded deeds of war or hunting. They were not only a bloodthirsty nation, but a learned one as well. Nineveh later boasted the Library of Ashurbanipal, the oldest known systematically organised library in the world, with over 30,000 texts surviving to this day, describing war exploits, the history of kings, science, astronomy, trading documents and religious works.

3. The Religion of Assyria

The writings of Assyria reveal that they worshipped many of the same gods as the Babylonians. Nineveh was associated at an early time with the god Ashur and the goddess Ishtar to whom he was married. Ashur was the god of war; Ishtar the goddess of love and war. It appears that this more than anything drove the Assyrians in their lust for blood and conquest. The worship in the temples involved gross immorality; theirs was truly the religion of Babel, designed to appeal to the flesh.

Fascinatingly, the goddess Ishtar had another name, Nina. In cuneiform, a writing style used in Assyria at the time, this was written with the character representing a 'water enclosure' with that for a 'fish' inside (ISBE, *Nineveh*). In commenting on Ishtar, one author writes,

'This interest in Ishtar is not surprising when it is realised that the name Nineveh in Assyrian is Ninua, which is a rendering of the earlier Sumerian term Nina, a name of the goddess. The ideogram or sign used for this is a fish within a womb.'

In addition to this, the *Theological Dictionary of the OT* observes that *'the dove is often taken as an attribute of Ishtar'* and lists a number of artifacts from Assyrian cities where the dove represented the goddess (TDOT, vol 6, p 35).

While we cannot say that either link is Divinely intended, the connections between Jonah and his story with the Ninevites mythology must only have added to the agitation felt by the people at this messenger of doom. Imagine their consternation when they heard a rumour that a man was on the way whose name was *'The Dove'* (for the word *'Jonah'* was almost identical to the Aramaic word for dove, *'yona'*) and he'd come from inside a fish! They must have felt that a messenger from the gods was on the way!

APPENDIX 3: THE SEQUEL – THE PROPHECY OF NAHUM

The book of Jonah ends with a number of open questions. One of those unfinished questions relates to the fate of the city to whom he preached. The book ends with Jonah seated under his booth, 'angry unto death' as he listens to God's final probing question, all the while watching the city whose doom he sought.

But Assyria's story does not end with Jonah's. Almost a century later, the prophet Nahum would deliver the sequel to the story of Jonah. The message of both prophets was directed to Nineveh. Jonah proclaimed a message of mercy and repentance, Nahum one of indictment and doom.

As we've seen, Jonah's preaching had a profound effect on Nineveh. The Ninevites repented and God spared them. God then commissioned Assyria to punish Israel for their wickedness as outlined in Isaiah 10. For example, v5-6 say:

'O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.'

Assyria's invasion of the land commenced with the campaigns of Pul (Tiglath-Pileser III) in 738-732 BC. We read of this in 2 Kings 15:19-20. The subsequent invasions of the land are outlined in 2 Kings 15-18.

Although Assyria was raised up by God to punish Israel, their motive was not one of submission to the plan of the God of Israel. Instead, they schemed in their heart to destroy Israel completely and in their pride exalted themselves against God (Isa 10:5-19). It was for this cause that God later pronounced judgement on Assyria. This message was sent by the hand of the prophet Nahum.

Overview of Nahum

Ch 1 - An introduction to God as Nineveh's destroyer or judge.

- v1-8 The character of Nineveh's Judge
- v9-11 The declaration of Nineveh's doom
- v13-15 The proclamation of comfort to Judah

Ch 2 - The overthrow of Nineveh in vivid detail by the hands of the Medes & Babylonians.

- v1-5 The city besieged
- v6-10 The city overthrown
- v11-13 The city made desolate

Ch 3 - The finality of Nineveh's overthrow & the lesson for subsequent generations.

- v1-5 The reason of their overthrow
- v6-19 Nineveh made an example to the nations

Dating Nahum's Prophecy

There is very little evidence to pinpoint the exact time when Nahum prophesied but there are two dates to work with.

- Nahum uses the destruction of the city of Thebes in Egypt as a warning to Nineveh (Nah 3:8-10 "No" = Thebes). Thebes had been devastated in 665 BC by the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal. Nahum must therefore have prophesied after 665 BC.
- Nineveh still existed at the time of Nahum's prophecy (1:1, 2:8, 3:1,7). Given it was destroyed in 612 BC, Nahum must have prophesied before 612 BC.

Nahum therefore prophesied between 665-612 BC, about 100 years after Jonah.

The Man Nahum

There is little known about Nahum himself. We are told in Ch 1:1 that he was from Elkosh which is located to the southwest of Jerusalem. Nahum is therefore from Judah, the kingdom to whom his message is directed. Nahum means 'comfort', and although he prophesied of the destruction of Nineveh, his message was one of comfort to Judah because the destruction of Nineveh and overthrow of Assyria would bring them reprieve.

Nahum's Message

Whilst Jonah emphasised the goodness of God and provided opportunity for Nineveh to repent (Jon 4:2), Nahum spoke of His severity (Nah 1:2). By this means, the full breadth of the character of God was exhibited to Nineveh (cp Rom 11:22). God is slow to anger and gracious, but He will not acquit the wicked. The pride and arrogance of Nineveh in defiance of God would be judged.

Jonah and Nahum also foreshadow the work of Christ at his first and second advents.

Jonah is a type of Christ at his 1st advent (p 75). In his first advent, Christ came as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Men were given opportunity to repent and turn to God.

At his second coming he will be the royal Lion of the tribe of Judah who will come to bring judgement on a guilty world. In his role as King, he will overthrow the latter-day Assyrian and 'that great city' Babylon. The prophet Micah likens the Gogian confederacy of Ezekiel 38 to the Assyrian invasion of Israel and describes how Christ will overthrow it (cp Mic 5:5-6).

These two aspects of the work of Christ, foreshadowed in Jonah and Nahum, are nicely summarised in Acts 17:30-31:

*'The times of this ignorance God winked at; but **now commandeth all men every where to repent**: because he hath appointed a day, in the which **he will judge the world** in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.'*