

The Book Of Jonah

or

Jonah, the man with a whale of a problem

By

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OUTLINE

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This book is silent about its authorship but it is assumed that Jonah wrote it himself. There are several instances that could be written only by the man who experienced what was written. Jonah is referred to in the third person several times throughout the book. Since using the third person was a common practice of that day, there is no need to doubt Jonah was the author.

The events described in Jonah have led some to say the book is fictional. However, the God who can speak the universe into existence certainly would not have any difficulty making a fish that could swallow a man, or keeping a man alive for three days and three nights in the belly of that fish. Jesus did not think the events described in this book were fictional. He even used Jonah as an example of Himself (Mt. 12:39-41, 16:4).

THE PROPHET OF THIS BOOK

Jonah came from Gathhepher (2 Kg. 14:25). He was a prophet to the northern tribes of Israel just prior to Amos.

Jonah is mentioned one other time in Scripture (cf. 2 Kings 14:25). It appears as though he had been faithful to preach the Word of God before the events recorded in this book

Jonah is one of the twelve minor prophets. There are twelve minor prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). The term, "minor prophets", simply means they are shorter than the major prophets, not that they are of less importance. The average Christian knows little about the other minor prophets. Amazingly, we know the most about the worse of the prophets.

Jonah's mission was to go to the city of Nineveh and preach. But, he despised the people of Nineveh. He did not only hate the people of Nineveh, but he also loved his people Israel. He could not comprehend God blessing anyone other than the people of Israel. This certainly was a ridiculous way to look at it since God's grace has no limits. He certainly had enough grace to give to both, if they would only obey Him.

In spite of his rebellious nature, God used him to turn these wicked people to Himself. That should give us hope for ourselves and our country.

We must commend Jonah for how well he knew God. He knew God was a God who would judge those who are guilty, but also, a God who was compassionate and willing to forgive those who repent.

THE PEOPLE OF THIS BOOK

God sent Jonah to the city of Nineveh. Nineveh was built by Nimrod the great-grandson of Noah (Gen. 10:10-12). This was the Nimrod that built the tower of Babel. Nineveh was located on the banks of the Tigris River and was the capitol city of Assyria. God called it a "*great city*" (Jon.1:2; 3:2,3; 4:11). It had about 600,000 residents at that time. It was so large it took three days to walk around it (Jon.3:3).

Nineveh was a part of the Assyrian empire. The Assyrians had a history of violence, torture, and killing. Nahum described them as a lion that tore flesh like a lion (Nahum 2:11-12). They carried the body parts of their conquered foes back home as a souvenir. The king of Nineveh would place the severed head of his defeated foe on a pole in to display his victory during his feasts. Some of their victims were flayed alive,

others had their throats cut, their bodies cut apart and the parts distributed over the country as souvenirs. This nation would eventually destroy the northern kingdom of Israel (1 Chr. 5:26).

Eventually, Jonah's preaching brought about a mighty repentance among the people (3:5-10). Unfortunately, they fell back into sin and were judged by God 150 years later.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

This book is much more than a fish story. It is about God and His love. It deals with the mercy of God on the wicked sinners and the wayward servant. This book reveals the mercy of God in a way that is not found anywhere else in scripture.

God wanted to *save* Nineveh. The people of Nineveh were wicked, but God was willing to forgive them. The book of Jonah shows us how God is willing to forgive people who are different than us.

God wanted to *send* Jonah. God wanted to use all of Israel to evangelize the world, which would include the people of Nineveh. But, they had failed miserably. So, He sent one man to Nineveh to preach. Jonah refused at first. We will discover how Jonah was as much a mission field as Nineveh was. In many ways, he needed more of a work of God than the ungodly people he was sent to.

God wanted to *shame* Israel. Jonah lived during the days of King Jeroboam II (793-753 BC). At that time, Israel was experiencing a time of peace and prosperity. As is so often the case when God blesses His people, Israel had wandered away from God spiritually. God had spoken to them time after time but they had totally ignored him. Ironically, He would speak to Nineveh one time and they would repent. It was God's desire that His beloved Israel would see how Nineveh repented, how He forgave them, and do likewise.

This book demonstrates the fact that God can use a broken vessel. Jesus used Jonah as an example. He spoke of the "*sign of the prophet Jonas*" (Mt. 16:4). God is willing to forgive those who repent and use those who have been rebellious. That means, there is hope for us all.

1. JONAH WAS SENT 1:1-2

Jon 1:1 Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

The name "*Jonah*" means "dove". The name "*Amittai*" means, "truth-telling".

God spoke directly to Jonah. God does speak to His people. We should not take it lightly when He does. He never wastes words. When He speaks, He has something important to say.

Jon 1:2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

God sent Jonah to "*Nineveh*". God called it a "*great city*" (Jon.1:2; 3:2,3; 4:11).

It was great in *size*. Historians tell us it was the largest city in the world at that time, having about 600,000 residents. Nineveh was a city of "*three days journey*" (cf. Jon. 3:3). It is assumed the three days journey is referring to the distance around its outer boundaries. Historians tell us the circumference of the city was about 60 miles. Some believe the three days journey means it took three days to walk through the city.

It was great in *structure*. It was a wealthy and luxurious city. Much of its riches were from their plundering of other nations. The inner city was surrounded by eight miles of walls. The walls were one hundred feet high and wide enough for three chariots to ride abreast on top of them.

It was great in *sin*. The people of Nineveh were Gentiles and worshiped many false gods. It was the capital city of the Assyrian empire. The Assyrians were indeed ungodly people.

The city was simply an example of the wickedness of that ungodly nation. Nahum tells us they were like a lion tearing flesh apart (Nahum 2:11-12) and called them a "bloody city" (Nah. 3:1).

The word "*cry*" means to "call out". Jonah was to cry aloud and spare not (cf. Isa. 58:1). He wasn't to hold back. This word carries with it the idea of bidding or an invitation.

He not only was to preach against their sin, but he was to offer forgiveness if they would repent.

The word, "*wickedness*" means "evil". It carries with it the idea of being an adversary. Their actions had

made them the enemy of God.

God was sending Jonah because their wickedness had come to His attention. The fact that He was sending a preacher and giving them a chance to repent was an act of great mercy.

The wording of this verse makes me think of what God said about the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Just as He said about Nineveh, He said the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah had "*come unto me*" (Gen. 18:21). This may be an indication of just how wicked this city had become. Their sin had grown to the point to where something had to be done. God's mercy was about to run out. I can't help but wonder if the sin of America has "*come up before*" God.

God said their wickedness had come up before "*me*". He was saying their wickedness had grown to the place to where they actually deserved to be judged. It is one thing when people say someone deserves to be judged. It is quite another when God says it. Our estimation may be incorrect because we are limited in our ability to judge, but God is not. Our estimation might be tainted by our own prejudices, but His is not. When God says a people deserve judgment, He is right, and they had better listen to Him.

God saw how they were living. The all-seeing eye of God misses nothing. None of our sin is hidden from Him. What happens in Vegas, does not stay in Vegas.

Jonah's assignment was to "*cry against*" the wickedness of the city. He was to publicly preach a message that judgment was coming unless they repented. He knew his message would not be pleasing to the people. Yet, it was the message of God and not of himself. We would do well to realize, the modern preacher's message is not of his own making, it is also a message from God.

No doubt Jonah had also seen the wickedness of his people Israel. Perhaps he wondered why God did not send him to Israel. Yet, instead of sending him to Israel, God sent him to the pagan people of Nineveh.

2. JONAH WAS STUBBORN 1:3

Jon 1:3 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.

The word "*rose*" is the same word translated as "*Arise*" in verse one. Jonah did rise, but that was all he did in obedience to God. This will be the only move upward for Jonah. From this point on, his path goes downward.

He rose up "*to flee*". He intended to get as far away from God as he could. Two times in this one verse it says, "*from the presence of the Lord*". Perhaps he thought if he could get far enough away, God would leave him alone and get someone else to go to Nineveh in his place. He would soon learn, you cannot run far enough to get away from the presence of God (Ps. 139:7-10).

Jonah went to the port city of Joppa and "*found a ship*". It is amazing how easy it is to find that which helps us do the wrong thing. The devil's timing is as precise as the Lord's. He never misses an opportunity to set a trap or place a temptation, in our path. Of course, there are times when we, like Jonah, we are looking for it. That is why God tells us to avoid anything that even appears to be sinful (1 Th. 5:22).

Jonah went "*down to Joppa*". Notice, his decision to run leads him downward. Anytime, we run from God's will, we head downward.

Jonah "*paid the fare thereof*". That certainly sounds easy. Jonah may have even thought to himself, "The Lord provided the money for my fare".

This should remind us of the fact that disobedience always has a fare. Sin will cost us more than we want to pay. Someone has rightly said, sin will take you farther than you want to stray, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay. Many a Christian has learned the hard way that sin is not worth the cost. The sword never departed from David's house (2 Sam. 12:10).

Jonah must have breathed a sigh of relief, to begin with. He went down into the ship, found a place to relax, the ship set sail, and the seas were calm. Surely, he must have thought his plan was working.

Notice how Jonah went "*with them*" who were in the ship. You could not tell him from any of the pagans on the boat. It is a sad estate indeed when one of God's children cannot be recognized among the world.

He intended to flee to "*Tarshish*". Tarshish was in the exact opposite direction and approximately 2,300

miles away from Joppa. Jonah probably headed towards Tarshish because it was considered as a city that was at the end of the world.

Nineveh was east, so Jonah headed west. He intended to get as far away from the calling of God as he could. He was about to learn, you cannot outrun God.

This map shows how Jonah was trying to get as far away from God as he could.



Why did Jonah refuse to obey God?

It undoubtedly was not because of the *danger* involved. Considering Nineveh's size and sin it certainly was an intimidating place to preach. Yet, there is no indication that Jonah was afraid to go. Many use this excuse in our day, but Jonah did not.

It undoubtedly was not because of the *distance* involved. It was approximately 550 miles from Joppa to Nineveh. However, we must remember, a donkey was the best transportation he could hope for. It would be a long and difficult trip. But, the journey to Tarshish would have been much more difficult. It was approximately 2,300 miles of unpredictable sea, where storms and thieves were common. He chose the longer and more difficult journey.

It undoubtedly was not because of the *dedication* involved. We have no indication that Jonah had a history of being unfaithful. The only other Scriptural reference to Jonah seems to suggest he had been a faithful prophet (2 Kgs. 12:45). I personally do not believe God would have selected Jonah for this task had he not been faithful beforehand. He refused this mission but I do not believe that was the norm for this man of God.

The real reason for Jonah's disobedience is revealed by something he said (cf. 4:2). Jonah knew God would forgive Nineveh if they repented, and that was the last thing he wanted.

As stated in the introduction, Nineveh was a part of the Assyrian empire. The Assyrians had a history of violence, torture, and killing. Nahum described them as a people who tore flesh like a lion (Nahum 2:11-12). They carried the body parts of their conquered foes back home as a souvenir. The king of Nineveh would place the severed head of a recently conquered foe on a pole in his banquet hall, then he would put it over the gate on Nineveh where it rotted away. They flayed some of their victims alive. Others, they slit their throats, cut their bodies into pieces, and distributed the parts over the country as souvenirs.

Jonah did not think the people of Nineveh deserved to be forgiven. And, he was right. But, neither did he, and neither does anyone else in this world. No one deserves forgiveness, that is why they call it grace.

It is easy to judge Jonah for his refusal to preach at Nineveh. But, we should ask ourselves what we would do if God told us to go to Iraq and preach to the terrorists. What if God told you to witness to the type of person you despise? For some, that would be those of another race, another religion, or another lifestyle. In essence, this is what Jonah was asked to do. By no means, did this excuse him from obeying God.

We know Jonah's excuse for not going to those God sent him to, but what is our excuse? God has sent us to the lost world around us (Mt. 28:19-20). So many times, just like Jonah, we refuse. And, like Jonah, we have no justifiable excuse to not go and tell.

Why didn't God just get rid of Jonah and find someone who was more willing to go? I believe it was because God was not only working on Nineveh, but He was also working on Jonah. When I think of this type of question I must take a good look at myself and ask why God has not done away with me a long time ago.

3. JONAH WAS SEEN 1:4

Jon 1:4 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.

The word “*But*” has never been more descriptive of any series of events than in this verse. Jonah thought he was safely on his way to Tarshish, BUT, God was about to upset his apple cart. He would not escape God or His will.

God saw Jonah. Imagine that, he was out in the sea, down inside a ship, but he was not hidden from God. And, neither are we. God sees all. The fact that God sees all can be very settling.

Knowing we have someone as powerful and loving as God watching over us should give us peace. However, the fact that God sees all can be very scary. Knowing we have someone as holy as God watching over us should cause us to be cautious.

The words, “*sent out*” actually means, “to hurl”. God hurled the storm at Jonah.

The word, “*great*” means, “exceeding great”. God never does anything halfway.

The word, “*tempest*” means, “a hurricane” or “a whirlwind”. Jonah was about to find out that Nahum was right when he said: “*God hath his way in the whirlwind*” (Nah. 1:3). A hurricane or tornado seem so out of control to us. But, God is so in control that, every leaf, every twig, every grain of sand is doing exactly what He tells them to do. What seems like chaos to us, is God’s orchestra in total harmony.

God sent a “*wind*”. This word has the idea of “breath”. God breathed out the wind. This is not the only time God-breathed. He breathed into Adam the breath of life (Gen. 2:7). He breathed out and all of creation became a reality (Ps. 33:6). He breathed out the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16).

God sent the wind “*into the sea*”. A casual reading of those words would make us think the wind went aimlessly out into the vastness of the sea. But, the opposite is true. God hurled the wind straight at Jonah like Saul hurled his javelin at David. But, God was a much better shot than Saul. God never misses His target. He did not miss Jonah, and He will not miss us either.

The wind caused a great storm. Storms were common in the Mediterranean Sea but this was not a common storm. We think about our God calming the storms (Mat. 8:26), but we seldom think of His causing storms.

Things are changing for Jonah, and not for the good.

The storm was so severe the ship was about to “*be broken*”. In other words, if something did not happen, it was going to get worse, and the ship would not survive. Dear wayward Christian, Jonah’s God is your God. He still sends storms. If you think it is bad now, just hang on, it will get worse.

We must not miss the “*who*” of this storm. God sent the storm. We are quick to blame our storms on the devil, but they often come from God.

We must not miss the “*why*” of this storm. Why did God send it? This storm was God’s arm of mercy reaching out to His rebellious servant. God was not trying to hurt, He was trying to help. He had Jonah’s best interest in mind. Jonah’s path was going to take him to more misery and heartbreak. The same is true of our storms. God’s storms are meant to help us, never to harm us.

4. JONAH WAS SLEEPING 1:5

Jon 1:5 Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.

The sailors on the ship were frightened. This speaks to the severity of the storm. These rough and tough fishermen had seen many severe storms and faced them without an ounce of fear. But, this storm was not your average storm.

One of the saddest elements of this story is the fact of the innocent bystanders who suffered because of Jonah’s rebellion. Our resistance to God’s will causes harm to those who are close to us. Achan’s sin caused much havoc to those who were innocent (Josh. 7:5, 12-15, 20-26).

Everyone on board was so frightened they began to cry out to their god for help. That is, everyone, except for Jonah. The one person who knew the one true God was sleeping instead of praying.

We dare not miss the fact that none of their gods were able to assist them in even the slightest manner. A dead god has no ears to hear nor hands to help.

The frightened sailors did not just cry, they cast. They did not just stand back and let the ship go down.

They, unlike Jonah, went into action in an effort to save the ship and themselves. In an effort to lighten the ship, they began throwing the cargo overboard. Little did they realize, the greatest weight in the ship was Jonah, not the cargo.

Meanwhile, during all this chaos, Jonah in the interior part of the ship fast asleep. He had laid down and drifted off like a little baby. Through the tossing of the ship, the sounds of the driving rain, the beating waves, and the loud cries of the sailors, Jonah slept on.

Most of the time sleep is an indication of a clear conscience. But, not in this case. Jonah was able to sleep because he had a calloused conscience.

The word "*asleep*" means, "to stun" or "stupefy". He was asleep literally but he was asleep spiritually also. Jonah did not recognize how far he had wandered from the Lord's will.

Jonah did not realize the *distance*. He had gone down in the ship to get away from everyone on board. A wandering Christian wants to avoid others.

Jonah did not realize the *danger*. The person who is sleeping is unaware of their surroundings. Jonah was in a place where death was not only possible but probable. Yet, he did not realize it. The wandering Christian does not see the danger of walking away from the will of God.

Jonah did not realize the *damage*. The person who is sleeping is unaware of their own condition. Jonah's spiritual condition was causing a great deal of damage to the name of his God. No wonder Paul tells us "*it is high time to awake out of sleep*" (Rom. 13:11).

Jonah did not realize the *desperation*. The ungodly sailors were desperate. This was a great opportunity to introduce these men to the one true God, but Jonah was in no condition to do so. The wandering Christian misses opportunities to share Christ.

The most dangerous place on earth is to be out of God's will and undisturbed about it. I say often, "Lord, please do not leave me alone when I wander from your will". I am so thankful for the convicting hand of God. Though it hurts, I rejoice in His chastening stripes. I do not want to be at the place where He lets me do as I desire.

The contrast in this verse is unbelievable. The storm caused the entire crew to fall on their faces and call out to their gods. Yet, the one true child of God was asleep.

However, Jonah would not stay asleep. God was about to wake him up quite abruptly.

5. JONAH WAS SUMMONED 1:6-14

Jonah was summoned before the ship captain and the sailors to explain himself.

Jon 1:6 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.

The "*shipmaster*" was the captain of the ship. It is a sad affair when one of God's children is rebuked by an ungodly sailor. How sad that it took an ungodly man to call Jonah to prayer. Sadly, the last thing Jonah wanted to do was call on his God.

The captain told Jonah to call upon his God. Since their gods had done nothing to calm the storm, maybe Jonah's God would.

The word, "*think*" means to study intently in order to comprehend fully. The captain was hoping Jonah's God would see their predicament and realize how much they needed His help. I am so glad that God remembers those who are His (Gen. 8:1; Ex. 2:25; 3:7,9; Ps. 40:17).

Jon 1:7 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 men on the ship determined to find out why the storm had come. Perhaps the severity of the storm made them realize there had to be a reason for it. They knew someone on board was guilty of something.

They "*cast lots*" to determine the guilty party. There are times when God revealed His will through the casting of lots (Lev. 16:8; Josh. 18:6; 1 Sam. 14:42; Neh. 10:34; Es. 3:7; Pro. 16:33). The casting of lots was used to help in making decisions. This practice is mentioned seventy times in the Old Testament and seven times in the New Testament. The exact details are not known. They may have been different length sticks,

different colored stones, or a type of dice.

In the New Testament era, we do not need this type of assistance in making decisions because we have the Word of God and the Spirit of God to direct us.

The "*lot fell upon Jonah*". In this case, God used the casting of lots. God was making sure Jonah was not going to get away.

Jon 1:8 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?

Once they discovered Jonah was the reason for the storm, they wanted to find out as much about him as they could. They were unwilling to condemn him without an investigation.

Jonah was likely being confronted by more than one of the sailors. One would ask a question and before he could answer someone else would ask another.

From their questions, it is obvious that Jonah had had little communication with these men. He had not told them he was a preacher and he had mentioned nothing about his God. The wayward Christian fails to share Christ with the lost world. How could they? When our lives contradict our words, no one will listen.

Jon 1:9 And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.

The word "*Hebrew*" was the word outsiders used when referring to the Israelites.

Jonah said a lot when he said he feared the "*God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land*".

First, he was saying his God was the one who made, and controlled, all that was in heaven. Since rain comes from above, that meant Jonah's God had sent the rain they were encountering, and therefore, the only one who could cause it to cease.

Second, he was saying his God was the one who made, and controlled, the sea. That meant Jonah's God had caused the storm and the only one who could stop it.

Thirdly, he was saying his God was the one who made, and controlled, the dry land. He was the only one who could get them back to dry land safely.

Jonah's profession and practice did not agree. He claimed to "*fear*" God but his actions contradicted that claim.

Jon 1:10 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.

Not all of their conversation is recorded in this book. Jonah told them he was running from God but did not record that part of the conversation.

The sailors were already afraid, but now they were "*exceedingly afraid*". They were exceedingly fearful because Jonah told them he was running from God. They had been afraid of the storm, now they were afraid of the God who sent the storm. Even they knew enough to fear a God who can control the wind, rain, and sea.

They asked, "*Why hast thou done this*". They wanted to know why Jonah would try to run from the God of the sea and use a ship as his escape plan. They were smart enough to know that was not smart.

It is sad indeed when an unsaved person asks a saved person why they are living as they are.

Jon 1:11 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.

The words, "*wrought, and was tempestuous*" actually mean "grew more and more tempestuous". The storm was getting worse. It was obvious, the problem was not going away on its own. Something had to be done. Dear disobedient child of God, if you think the storm is bad now, just hang on, it will get worse. God is not going to forget where you are. He will continue to pursue you.

The sailors asked, "*What shall we do unto thee*". The reason for their concern for Jonah is uncertain. It may have been that these rough and tough men genuinely wanted the best for Jonah. Or, it may have simply been their fear of Jonah's God and what He might do to them if they mistreated him (cf. v. 14).

Either way, they knew enough to know they needed to do something. And, they knew since Jonah was the cause of the problem he would be the solution to the problem.

Jon 1:12 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 told them to throw him overboard. It is bad enough to be in a ship but to be in the sea would be worse. Humanly speaking, being cast overboard would mean certain death.

This is the first of three times Jonah asks that he die (cf. 3:3, 8). Jonah would rather be dead than to obey God. He was not the last to have this attitude. There are many in his tribe.

Some believe Jonah asked the sailors to throw him overboard because he had repented and was willing to do the Lord's will. If this is the case, why did God put him in a fish for three days and three nights? I believe, at this point, Jonah is as rebellious as ever.

Jonah said, "*I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you*". At least he admitted that he was the cause of the problem. But, he still refused to do the one thing that would really settle the issue.

I have often wondered why Jonah did not simply jump overboard himself. It certainly would have made it a lot easier for everyone involved. I think this reveals the selfish attitude of the one who has wandered from the will of God. I have known people who refused to repent even though their actions were causing great distress for themselves and those who cared about them. The human nature is stubborn indeed.

And yet, though he refused to jump himself, he willingly submitted to them tossing him overboard. The true heart of Jonah is seen here. Though a believer may cause harm, they still have a heart to help.

Jon 1:13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

The sailors did their best to get themselves, and Jonah, through the storm safely. The ungodly sailors had more compassion for one man than Jonah had for the thousands in Nineveh.

The words, "*rowed hard*" are words that speak of breaking through a wall. They were doing their best but it was like beating against a wall too strong to break. God was saying to Jonah, "I will not let you win".

The sea was fought "*against*" them. They were fighting a losing battle. Many have tried fighting against God, but none have won. How can you row out of a storm when the reason for the storm is on board your ship? One of the most interesting things about this verse is the fact that these sailors did their best to "*bring it to the land*". My question is, which land? It is unlikely that it is referring to Tarshish since they were as much as 2,300 miles away. Our answer comes by looking at the word "*bring*". It actually means, "to turn back" or "to return". The sailors had turned the ship around and were trying to get to the closest land available. In this case, it would have been the coastal city of Joppa. But, why would God stop them from rowing back to the city of Joppa since it was at least heading in the direction of Nineveh? I believe God would not allow Jonah to make it back to shore because he was not yet willing to obey. Jonah had to be broken so that he might go willingly to Nineveh. God had plans for Jonah in that sea and nothing, or no one would stop Him.

Jonah is a perfect example of how God deals with those who do not want to do His will. He does not force us. He allows us to make our own decision about whether we will obey Him. However, He will work on us to bring us to the point to where we are willing to obey Him. God will not *make* us, but He will *break* us.

Jon 1:14 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.

The sailors asked God for mercy. They acknowledged the fact that it was Jonah's God who had been in control of the situation.

This certainly is another one of the miracles of the book of Jonah. Just minutes earlier these men were calling out to their false gods. Now, they cry to the one true God.

6. JONAH WAS SWIMMING 1:15-16

Jon 1:15 So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

The sailors "*took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea*". To say the least, Jonah's adventure was not over. He was thrown overboard and he found himself swimming in the midst of the Mediterranean Sea. Sadly, he was just as rebellious as ever.

The instant Jonah was off the ship, "*the sea ceased from her raging*". This proves God was totally in control

of the storm. It also proves Jonah was the reason for the storm.

Notice, the sailor's gods could not calm the storm. Their vigorous rowing did not get them out of the storm. Until Jonah, the reason for the storm was cast out, the storm continued. The only way we can get real help is to discover the source of our problems and deal with them at their root. If our storm is because of our sin, it will not cease until we deal with our sin.

The storm had ceased, but that did not mean Jonah was safe. Remember, he was not off the hook with God. Unless God does something to rescue him, he will perish. Thankfully, God would save him from certain death, and He would do it in a most unexpected manner.

Jon 1:16 Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.

The sailors who had worshiped all types of false gods turned to the one true God. They had seen the power of God in the storm. They had seen the holiness of God in His dealing with Jonah. They had seen the mercy of God in the ceasing of the storm.

This caused the sailors to make a promise to serve the true God. There are times when it takes a storm to get people to where they will listen to God.

We do not know if they followed up on their promise, but I believe they did. I think they did because they gave the sacrifice and made their vows after the storm had ceased. If they had done so while the storm was still raging we might have a reason to think they were just trying to find a way to survive. But, doing this when they were safe certainly suggests they are sincere.

This shows how wonderful God is. In spite of a backslidden preacher, He was able to reach the hearts of the men on the ship. God can do His work any way He wants to.

The sailors were rejoicing but Jonah was still resisting. They were glad and he was sad. The most miserable person on earth is the believer who is not right with God.

7. JONAH WAS SAVED 1:17

Jon 1:17 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.

God prepared a great fish for the task He had in mind. This fish was God's way of saving His servant from certain death. God was not ready to give up on His servant. He could have chosen any of a number of ways to corral His reluctant servant. Who would have guessed He would use a fish?

The word, "*prepared*" means "to assign". This word carries with it the idea of "appointing". God gave this fish an assignment. Might I say, he carried out his assignment quite well. Man is only part of all of God's creation that disobeys Him.

There is a great deal of discussion about what kind of fish this was. Jonah simply says it was a "*great fish*". Jesus called it a "*whale*" (Mt. 12:40). That is good enough for me. Some have said it could not have been a whale because the mouth of a whale is not big for a man to pass through. This argument does not hold water because this verse clearly says God prepared this fish. It may have been one of a kind just for this occasion.

Some have given examples of people who have supposedly lived after being swallowed by a fish. There is no reason to do so. Since God prepared the fish that swallowed Jonah we do not need an example before we believe what God said. He said it, that should be enough.

Jonah was in the fish for "*three days and three nights*". Since the Jews consider any portion of a day as a complete day, some try to say these were not complete days and nights. Those who hold to this theory say the same for the length of time Jesus was dead (Mt. 12:40). I believe it was three twenty-four-hour days in both Jonah and Jesus.

Some believe Jonah actually died while in the fish and God raised him from the dead.

First, they believe this because he said he prayed from the "*belly of hell*" during these three days (2:2). The word "*hell*" is the word "*Sheol*" that means, "the grave".

Second, they believe this because Jesus compared his three days and nights to Jonah's experience (Mt. 12:40). They assume that since Jesus died and rose, so must have Jonah.

Neither of these requires that Jonah was actually dead. There are three reasons why I do not believe Jonah died while in the fish.

One, the bible does not say he died. There is no biblical evidence that he did. Jonah's reference to the grave was symbolic. He was simply saying his deliverance out of the fish was like being delivered from the grave.

Two, Jesus comparing Jonah's experience to His own does not require that Jonah literally die and rise again. He was simply referring to the timeline of each. In fact, the point that Jesus was making was that one greater than Jonah had come (Mt. 12:41). Which means, Jesus did something Jonah did not do.

Three, the second chapter is a prayer Jonah prayed while in the fish. It is difficult to pray if you are dead.

Either way, alive or dead, the event connected to Jonah was a miracle that could only be attributed to God. Everyone aware of Jonah's situation thought he was a goner, including him. But, God had different plans.

Though Jonah living through this ordeal was indeed a miracle, it was not the greatest miracle. The greatest miracle is the fact that God would save hundreds of thousands of ungodly people by speaking through a halfhearted preacher.

The critics of the bible simply refuse to accept the story of Jonah and this fish. Some of them say when Jonah was cast overboard he landed on a whale and just held on for three days and nights. Someone has said he fell on a corpse of a dead whale and hung on. Someone has even said there was a ship nearby that was named "The Fish" and Jonah was picked up by the men on this ship. It is amazing how far people will go to keep from accepting God's Word as it is.

8. JONAH WAS SHAKEN 2:1-10

The fact there is a second chapter to this book is a display of God's mercy. The book could have easily been a one chapter book that told us that you do not play around with God. God could have simply killed Jonah when he first refused to obey. But, the story did not end in chapter one. It continued because God is gracious.

The fish was God's way of saving Jonah, but it was also God's way of shaking Jonah. He would have to shake Jonah in order to convince him to obey.

This chapter is a prayer Jonah prayed from the belly of the fish. It includes several phrases found in the Psalms (Ps. 3:8 in Jon. 2:7; Ps. 18:6 in Jon. 2:1; Ps. 31:6 in Jon. 2:8; Ps. 31:22 in Jon. 2:4; Ps. 42:7 in Jon. 2:3; Ps. 120:1 in Jon. 2:2; Ps. 142:4-5 in Jon. 2:7). This tells us he knew the Old Testament for he certainly had no bible to read while in the belly of the fish. Someone has rightly said, "Jonah made it while inside the fish because he had the bible inside of him". We will survive our battles a lot better if we have the Word of God in our hearts.

There is no argument in Jonah's prayer. He was no longer arguing with God about His will.

There is no accusation in Jonah's prayer. He did not accuse God of doing wrong. He knew God always does right and He was right in how He was treating him.

There is no appeal in Jonah's prayer. Not one time did Jonah ask for anything.

It is a prayer of confidence, contrition, contemplation, confession, commitment, and cheer. God let him live when He had every right to put him to death. For Jonah, just being alive was enough, how could he ask for anything more?

God had gotten Jonah's attention. He was shaken to his core. Unfortunately, like so many who are shaken by their circumstances, Jonah still had issues he had not yet settled. These issues will surface in the last chapter of the book.

JONAH'S PRAYER INVOLVED CONFIDENCE

Jonah's faith is displayed several times throughout this prayer. He will explain the severity of his situation and then rejoice in the fact that God was going to deliver him anyway (v. 2, 4, 6, 7).

JONAH'S PRAYER INVOLVED CONTRITION 2:1-2

Jon 2:1 Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly,

Jonah did the first thing he had done right since God first spoke to him, he prayed.

Jonah cried to God from a contrite heart. God had finally broken him. He had attended Whale College and graduated with honors. However, this brokenness had not come quick and it had not come easily.

The word, "*Then*" seems to suggest Jonah spent the three days and three nights in fish before he prayed. As far as we know, this is the first time Jonah had actually talked to God since he left Joppa. God had talked to him (1:1-2), but Jonah had been stubbornly silent.

The path to this place has not been an easy one. The stubborn spirit of a rebellious believer is not easily conquered. It is astounding how much suffering some are willing to endure before they surrender to God and His will. I think I have met some who were having a "belly of the fish" experience.

What the storm and the sea did not accomplish, the fish did. The fish's belly would become Jonah's altar. Many times a jail cell, lawyer's office, or hospital bed, has become an altar for the person running from God.

Though Jonah delayed his prayer, he did pray. So it is with the true believer. The heart of the true believer will eventually be drawn back to God. Though he may wander, the call of home will be heard and heeded. God does not forget His own, and those who are His will not forget their Lord forever (Jer. 3:14, 22; Hos. 6:1; 14:4; Lk. 15:22-23).

The fact that Jonah could breathe, let alone pray, out of the belly of the fish was a miracle. The entire adventure was a miracle. It was a miracle that Jonah was still alive. It was a miracle that Jonah had any of his reasoning left. He would have gone mad by this time had God not intervened. It was a miracle that his heart was turning towards God. And, it was a miracle that God was going to hear his cry.

We dare not miss the word, "*his*". In spite of his absolute rebellion, God was still his God.

Jonah prayed to the same God he had been trying to avoid. He had not been too interested in listening to God, but he certainly wanted God to listen to him. He wasn't concerned about God having mercy on the Ninevites, but he surely was concerned about God having mercy on him.

But now, Jonah was ready to listen.

JONAH'S PRAYER INVOLVED CONTEMPLATION 2:2-6

As Jonah prayed, he thought through his situation. He thought about what had happened to bring him to this place. He thought about his own heart and his need to change.

Jon 2:2 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.

Verse one gives a general summary of Jonah's prayer. Starting with this verse, he gave a more detailed account.

Jonah recognized his dilemma and began to talk to God about it. God's affliction was doing its work.

The word, "*cried*" signifies the urgency of Jonah's prayer. He had reached a desperate state.

He finally recognized God's authority over his life. Like the prodigal son, he finally realized the Father's way was best. But, just like the prodigal son, Jonah cried unto the Lord because of his "*affliction*". The pig pen caused the prodigal to turn back to his father, and the fish caused Jonah to turn towards his God. He prayed because it hurt too much not to. We will discover later that Jonah still had issues with the people of Nineveh and was still fighting the will of God. He would do what God said, but he would do so because it hurt too much not to.

No grander words could ever be uttered than, "*and he heard me*". The man who resisted, rebelled, and ran, cried out to God, and He heard him. Jonah cried out in his distress like Peter called to Jesus even while he was sinking (Mt. 14:30). Our Father meant what He said when He said, "*I will therefore that men pray everywhere*" (1 Tim. 2:8 emphasis added). When we have Jesus in our hearts, our altar goes with us.

The fact that God hears us at all is wonderful, but to realize He hears us when we least deserve it is remarkable. Knowing this, why would we ever be hesitant to pray?

In the middle of this sentence, Jonah goes from talking to man, to talking to God. He said, "*he heard me*", but then he said, "*thou heardest my voice*" (emphasis added).

Jonah said he cried out of the belly of "*hell*". This is a word that speaks of the place of the dead. This is one

of the reasons some believe Jonah actually died while in the fish (please note our earlier comments on this thought). In this context, Jonah used the word to refer to the conditions he was enduring. The conditions inside the fish must have been horrible. The heat, the stench, the burning from the stomach acids, and the confined space, must have been unbearable.

His physical afflictions were bad, but I believe his worse affliction was on his mind. He knew what he was enduring was his own fault. He knew the only way to escape would be to do what God had told him. The mental battle between obedience or disobedience can be horrible. No doubt, Jonah's mind was tormented.

Jon 2:3 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.

Once again, we see Jonah's path is a downward one. He had gone down to Joppa, down into the ship, and now, down into the sea in the fish.

Jonah did not blame the sailors. He said, "*thou hadst cast me into the deep*" (emphasis added). Jonah knew there was more involved with his situation than the sailors on the ship.

He knew he had never been outside of God's reach. He said to God, "thy billows and thy waves passed over me" (emphasis added). He knew God had put him in the sea, but he also knew it was his fault. So many try to blame God when troubles come. The truth is, we make our decisions and we should be willing to accept the consequences. God will allow us to make foolish decisions even though He knows they will lead us to disaster.

Jonah described the circumstances while he was in the belly of the fish. God was using natural means to accomplish a spiritual work in Jonah.

The word, "*floods*" has the idea of a stream of water. The word, "*billows*" has the idea of a breaker or wave. Every wave was like the hand of God attempting to move Jonah towards His will.

The word, "*compassed*" means, "to surround". There was no way out. The only way out of his dilemma was for him to surrender. We do not escape the work of God in us. To be honest, I am glad we don't. I do not want Him to give up on me.

Jon 2:4 Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.

The two phrases in this verse are a good indication of how Jonah struggled between despair and delight while in the fish. So it is with anyone who is struggling about the will of God.

The word, "*Then*" marks a change in Jonah's attitude.

Jonah felt as though he had been "cast out" of the sight of God. He knew he had turned his back on God, but now he feared God had turned His back on him. I wonder if this means God had been silent during those days while Jonah was in the fish. There is no doubt He had been speaking before this, but now Jonah said he felt like God had cast him out.

There is nothing worse than God not speaking. We cannot be certain if God had been silent but something happened that touched Jonah's heart. His greatest concern had been for his own comfort (Jon 1:5). But, now it was the fact that there was a separation in his fellowship with God.

Jonah endured the severity of the storm, the terror of being thrown overboard, and even the discomfort of the fish's belly, and seemed relatively unaffected by them all. But what he could not endure was the thought of being put away from God's presence. Even God's conviction is better than Him leaving us alone (cf. Ps.13:1; 6:3-4; 10:1; 22:1-2; 74:1, 11; 89:46).

Jonah said he would "*look again toward thy holy temple*". The temple was the place where God's people could always find God (1 Kgs. 8:38).

Jonah realized his only hope was to look toward God. The man who had resisted, rebelled, and ran, was now repenting.

It seemed hopeless, "*yet*" Jonah called on the Lord. God would hear his call.

Jon 2:5 The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.

As is common among the Old Testament writers, Jonah goes back and forth in the timeline in describing his circumstances inside the fish.

The "*waters*" surrounded Jonah. It came to the point to where he felt like he could die at any moment.

The "*depth*" refers to him being taken toward the bottom of the sea inside the fish.

The "*weeds*" were the seaweed in the belly of the fish. It is possible that the fish, as such creatures often do when they have stomach problems, went to the bottom of the sea and ate some weeds. It seems as though the fish is no more pleased to have Jonah in him than Jonah is pleased to be there.

Being in the fish was bad enough, but to have these long strips of seaweed wrapped about him must have been terrible.

Jon 2:6 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.

The fish swam to the "*bottoms of the mountains*". As is the tendency of such creatures, when the fish detected a foreign object inside itself, he headed to the bottom of the sea taking Jonah going along for the ride.

Of course, this refers to the mountains in the sea. It is interesting to note that man used to believe the ocean was like a big bowl that simply went down on one shore and came up on the next. The Bible told us about the mountains under the sea long before man discovered it. We can trust our bible.

Jonah's reference to "*bars*" seems to suggest he saw himself as a man locked in prison with no way to escape. He thought his flight away from God would set him free but he found out it only confined him more than ever. The life of self-will always imprisons us.

Jonah continued by saying, "*yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption*" (emphasis added). Jonah spoke as though he had already been delivered. Even while still in the belly of the fish and in the depth of the sea, he began to see hope. Faith speaks as though the impossible has already been accomplished.

God would hear Jonah's prayer. God will not disregard the cry from the contrite heart (Ps. 51:17).

JONAH'S PRAYER INVOLVED CONFESSION 2:7-8

Jon 2:7 When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.

The word "*remembered*" means more than to simply think about. It has the idea of an action being taken. God remembered Noah and rescued those who on the ark (Gen.8:1). He remembered Abraham and removed Lot from Sodom (Gen. 19:25). He remembered Rachel and gave her a baby (Gen. 30:22). He remembered His covenant with Abraham and brought the people of Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 2:22). In each of these accounts, the word "remember" means God not only thought about His people, but He moved on their behalf.

And so, when it says Jonah "*remembered*" the LORD, it is saying more than he had thoughts about God. It means he did something about it. Jonah remembered "*the LORD*". These are some of the most delightful words found in the bible.

Jonah said, "*my prayer came in unto thee*". Jonah's prayer reached the heart of God.

His prayer went into God's "*holy temple*". As previously stated, the temple was the place where God's people could always find God (1 Kgs. 8:38; 2 Chr. 6:36-39). Jonah realized his only hope was to look toward God. It was as though Jonah moved from inside the fish and went into the temple, through the veil, and into the very Holy of Holies.

Jon 2:8 They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.

The word, "*lying*" means exactly what we think it does. It means not telling the truth. It carries with it the idea of something that leads a person in the wrong direction.

The word, "*vanities*" is referring to something that is empty or unsatisfactory. The person who thinks they will live their lives the way they desire is forsaking the one way to true happiness.

Jonah had turned his back on the God of mercy and gone to a place where lying vanities (idols) were worshiped. He had discovered, by doing so, he had forsaken his one true source of mercy. Even in his rebellious state, God had been merciful to him.

Therefore, the words, "*lying vanities*" can refer to anything other than the one true God.

The word, "*forsake*" means, "to relinquish" or "to leave". It has the idea of turning away from and leaving. This tells us we will either walk with God or we will walk with the world. We cannot do both at the same time.

We cannot serve God and the world (Mt. 6:24).

Looking to anything other than God is forsaking our one source of "mercy". Only God can do what God does. He is only One who can pardon, protect, and provide. Only He can give hope to the hopeless and help to the helpless. Those who seek the Lord will find Him to be a God who is "full of mercy" (Jam. 3:17). He alone is the fountain of living waters (Jer. 2:13).

Jonah was commenting about his own foolishness but was also giving a word of warning to those who might be thinking of running from God. When we look to anything, or anyone, other than God, we are forsaking our only means of help. If we live in rebellion we can expect God's wrath. Jonah learned this the hard way. From the voice of experience, we are told to not try what Jonah tried. No one has ever found happiness by running from God and you will not be the first.

Jonah's comments remind us how so many people want a God who loves. They reject the thought that God is also a God of wrath. However, we must recognize the fact that God hates sin and is too holy to not deal with it (Isa. 61:8; Ezk. 6:1-7; 7:8-9). God is angry with the wicked (Ps. 7:11). God's wrath is not like ours. His wrath is always just (Pro. 24:12b; Nahum 1:2; Rom. 1:18; Rev. 19:15). His wrath is always under His control. He never blows His top. God finds no pleasure in dealing with sin (Ezk. 33:11). He is slow to anger (2 Pet. 3:9) and quick to forgive (Ps. 103:13; 147:11; Zeph. 3:17; Lk. 15:10; 19:10).

Jonah is telling us if we forsake the God who is angry at sin we will, at the same time, be forsaking the God of mercy who is willing to forgive.

JONAH'S PRAYER INVOLVED COMMITMENT 2:9

Jon 2:9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.

Jonah anticipated by faith his deliverance from the fish and committed himself to the will of God. He also began to enjoy the fact that his deliverance was coming.

Jonah said, "I". He was not concerned about what others were doing, he had decided to follow the Lord. I can do little about what others do, I can only determine, by God's grace, to do what I should do. We need to determine to do right even if we are the only ones doing right.

The words "*unto thee*" tell us Jonah was speaking directly to God again.

The "*sacrifice*" Jonah was offering, was not a sheep or goat, it was himself.

Jonah not only determined to sacrifice, but he determined to sacrifice with the "voice of thanksgiving". He made his commitment from a grateful heart. He realized God could have put him to death and been right in doing so. He was truly thankful for God's mercy. God certainly has a way of turning the heart of those who are rebellious toward Him. He does not force us to do His will, but He can break us to where we become willing.

Jonah said, "*I will pay*". When a person made a vow it was like a debt they owed. The payment was to be paid.

Jonah said, "*that that I have vowed*". He made a promise to God and he fully intended to keep it. We are not told exactly what all Jonah promised. Since he was swallowed by the fish for refusing to go to Nineveh, it would seem that at least part of his vow was that he would go and preach as God had instructed him.

Notice how Jonah made this promise before he was able to keep it. Some believe he made this promise when he was writing this book after he had been released from the fish. I believe he made it while he was still in the belly of the fish.

Jonah said, "*Salvation is of the LORD*".

I believe Jonah's comment can be applied in three ways.

One, since salvation is of the LORD, He can save anyone He wants to. I believe Jonah was thinking about the people of Nineveh when he spoke these words. He still did not want them to repent and escape God's judgment (cf. 4:2). But, now he was saying, God is the One who has the authority to save whom He wants to. If He wants to save the people of Nineveh, that is His business. I believe Jonah struggled with these words.

Two, since salvation is of the LORD, He is the only one who can save His servants from troubles like Jonah's. Even before he escaped the fish, he was giving God the credit for his rescue. He knew he had

nothing to do with his living through the experience, or for his escape out of the fish.

Three, since salvation is of the LORD, He is the only one who can save the sinner from his sin. Jonah was giving God the credit for the salvation of his sin.

There is no salvation apart from God.

God is the source of salvation (Ps. 3:8; 118:14; 118:21). God designed the way of salvation. He is the one who determined what it would take to provide forgiveness for the sinner. Even from the Garden of Eden, He determined the way of salvation would be the innocent dying for the guilty.

God is the supplier of salvation. He provides what it take to satisfy His holiness and pay for sin. Jesus, who is God, provided the way to forgiveness when He died on the cross.

God is the sponsor of salvation. A sponsor is a person who represents another. The Holy Spirit, who is God, brings the offer of salvation to the sinner. He convinces the sinner about their need, He convicts the sinner of their condition, and He converts the sinner who believes and repents.

Did Jonah keep his vow and do as he promised? The answer is yes and no. He did preach, but he did not do it gladly. As we will see, Jonah did go and preach, but he was still hoping the Ninevites would reject the message and refuse to repent.

It is a good thing for Jonah, that even though he was not totally committed to God, God was still totally committed to him. God knew Jonah's attitude was not completely pure, yet He still had mercy on Jonah.

JONAH'S PRAYER INVOLVED CHEER

Jonah said he would sacrifice with the voice of "*thanksgiving*". In spite of all he had endured, he was thankful for God's care of him. There is always a reason for us to be thankful.

Jon 2:10 And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

God "*spake*" to the fish. And, as always with God's creatures, except man, he obeyed.

The fish spit Jonah on "*dry land*". This is certainly another one of God's miracles. God delivered Jonah from the fish and the sea at the same time.

That which had been Jonah's prison had now become his means of deliverance. So it with God's grace. The same Spirit that convicted us about our sin is the Spirit that brought us to Christ for forgiveness.

We are not told exactly where the fish deposited Jonah, but I believe it was exactly where he had boarded the ship. I believe God took him back to where he had begun his flight away from His call.

Since Nineveh was over 300 miles from the Mediterranean Sea, it is unlikely Jonah was deposited straight to Nineveh. Also, the next chapter tells us Jonah "*rose up and went to Nineveh*" (3:3 emphasis added). So, we know the fish did not deposit him directly in Nineveh.

God was giving Jonah an opportunity to do what he had promised (cf. v. 9).

That which had been his prison was now his means of deliverance. So it is with God's grace. It is His grace that convicts us about our sin, and His grace that saves us when we repent and believe. John Newton got it right when he wrote, "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved".

I believe the happiest one at this point of the story was the fish. I have the feeling, the fish was more glad to get rid of Jonah than Jonah was glad to be rid of the fish.

9. JONAH WAS SPEAKING 3:1-10

GOD'S MAN IS RECALLED 3:1-4

Jon 3:1 And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

God was persistent. He did not give up on Jonah. He came to him the second time. It sounds like a re-run. God was truly giving Jonah a fresh start. I am so glad for the times when God has spoken the "*second time*". We do not get a second chance very often. Usually, if we mess up we do not get a chance try it again.

God was under no obligation to Jonah. He could have set him aside and called someone else. There have been many times when He should have set me aside and chosen someone else to preach His Word, but He was merciful to me also, and I give Him praise.

Jon 3:2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

God still wanted to reach the ungodly people of Nineveh and He still wanted to use Jonah to do it. He was willing to speak to, and through, His servant who had refused to listen. This is another indication that God was not just wanting to do a work through Jonah, He was wanting to do a work in Jonah. God's work is as much on His servants as on sinners.

God said to Jonah, "Arise". Jonah's mission was the same as the first time God spoke to him (cf. 1:1-2a).

The destination had not changed. God told Jonah to go to "Nineveh". Jonah was to go to the same place, and the same people, as he was the first time God spoke to him (1:2).

The directions had not changed. The word "preach" found here is the same word translated "cry" in chapter one (1:2). There was a slight difference in God's directions to Jonah. This time, He told Jonah to preach what He "bid" him to preach. God did not tell Jonah exactly what to say until he got there.

The distance had not changed. God told him to go to "Nineveh". Nineveh was just as far now as it was when God first spoke to Jonah.

The disobedience had not changed. God still called Nineveh, a "great city". That tells us the people were just as wicked as they were when God first spoke to Jonah.

The difficulty had not changed. Jonah's task was just as difficult as the first time God spoke to him.

So, delaying his obedience had done nothing to make Jonah's task any easier. The will of God will be no less difficult tomorrow than it is today. We would do well to obey quickly when God speaks to us.

The word "preach" is a word that has the idea of a forerunner. A forerunner was an official messenger who went before to announce the arrival of a monarch. John the baptist was the forerunner of Jesus (Mk. 1:2-3). Jonah was to go and cry out to the city about God's coming judgment. God was coming, but He was coming to judge them if they did not repent.

He was to preach "unto" the people in Nineveh. His message was a message meant just for them. God knows what we need and He will tell us what we need to hear. The true preacher has no choice when it comes to the message he preaches. He must preach what God says.

The word, "bid" means, "to speak" or "to rehearse". It means God was going to speak to Jonah, and Jonah was to tell them what He said. Jonah's mission was simple. Our mission is the same. Whether we are a preacher, a teacher, or a Christian witness, we are to tell others what God said.

Jon 3:3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

Just like the first time, Jonah "arose" (cf. 1:3). But, this time, he arose to obey God's instructions. The message was the same but the messenger was different. The trip in the fish had taught him the consequences of disobeying God. He remembered his promise (cf. 2:9). Though he was safe and sound, and no longer in the fish in the sea, he kept his promise.

However, as we will discover in the next chapter, Jonah obeyed but he was anything but excited about it. His actions in this chapter are different than before, but his attitude had not changed.

Once again, God called Nineveh a "great city". It was great in size, structure, and sin (note the opening comments about this city).

Nineveh was a large city. It is assumed the "three days journey" is referring to the distance around its outer boundaries. Historians tell us the circumference of the city was about 60 miles. Some believe the three days journey means it took three days to walk through the city. As I have mentioned, the population was around 600,000 at that time. Indeed, Jonah was heading into a giant cesspool of sin.

Jon 3:4 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.

Jonah went into the city a "day's journey". We are not told exactly how Jonah preached. He may have walked through the streets crying aloud as he went. He may have walked awhile, stopped to preach, and walked on to do it again. However he did it, the message of this strange preacher spread like wildfire.

God's message was a message about coming judgment. In "forty days" the city would be judged. The word,

"*overthrown*" means "to overturn". It has the idea of being turned upside down. It was a word that was used to describe the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:25; Lam. 4:6; Amos 4:11). God's judgment would be severe.

Implied in Jonah's message about coming judgment was the fact that the judgment could be avoided if they would repent. God gave them forty days to repent. God is a God of mercy, but His mercy can run out.

Jonah's message was one of bad news. Most people do not want to hear the bad news. They want the preacher to preach in a way that makes them feel good. But, it is the bad news that leads us to accept the good news.

We need to hear about our sin before we know we need forgiveness. God's grace is usually received because of God's wrath and not because of His love.

This reminds us of the fact that God is willing to forgive the worse of sinners. Remember, the reason Jonah did not want them forgiven was because of how horrible their sin was. But, the cross is sufficient to provide forgiveness for the worse of the worse. Jesus died for all sin and for every sinner (1 Jn. 2:2).

I wonder if Jonah did not think of himself when he preached to these wicked people. After all, he had rebelled against the will of God himself. The fact that he had to repent himself did not disqualify him from preaching. In fact, it probably made his preaching even more effective.

GOD'S MESSAGE IS REVEALED 3:5-9

Jon 3:5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

This verse seems to give a summary of the events after Jonah preached. The verses following give a more detailed description of those events.

The people of Nineveh "*believed*". They believed Jonah was telling the truth.

Notice how this is worded. The people of Nineveh believed "God". This means more than they believed the message Jonah had spoken. It means they believed the God Jonah was speaking about. They not only believed the preacher of God, they believed the God of the preacher. A message means nothing if the person speaking is unable to do what they say. They believed God could, and would, do what He said.

We do not find the word "*repentance*" in these verses, but we certainly do see the act of repentance. The people of Nineveh believed God. Repentance begins with believing what God says about our condition. They did not just believe the message, they acted on it. They did something about what they had heard. True faith and repentance will bring about action. When real repentance comes, something is going to change. Things will not go on as they have.

Believing what God said brought shame. They were ashamed of their way of living. They offered no denial, nor excuse, about the fact that they had sinned. When we see how sinful we are, pride goes out the window.

Believing what God said brought fear. They were afraid of what God would do if they did not repent. The fear of God is something that is just about lost in our day. Fear can be a legitimate reason for repentance. A big part of the reason I got saved was because I was afraid that I was going to go to hell. Conviction brings fear. John the baptist preached "repent" (Mt. 4:17). He asked the Pharisees and Sadducees, "*who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come*" (Mt. 3:7). It is either repentance or wrath.

Notice, they believed when they heard God's Word. Jonah did no miracle nor spectacular feat, he simply preached God's Word. Any real move of God will be closely connected to the preaching of God's Word.

A "*fast*" was called for. Biblical fasting is abstaining from physical needs for spiritual reasons (1 Sam. 7:6; 2 Sam. 1:12; Neh. 1:4; Zech. 7:5). The Old Testament Jews were to fast one day a year on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:27, 29, 32). Jesus fasted (Mt. 6:16-18). The bible speaks for abstaining from certain types of food (Dan. 1:8-14), from food entirely (Dan. 10:2-3), from food and water (Lk. 4:2; Acts 9:9), and even from the physical relationship between a man and his wife (1 Cor. 7:5).

This fast was not one that had been required by the law. It was the result of broken and contrite hearts. They neglected their physical needs because they were more interested in their spiritual needs. They refused food and drink in an effort to touch the heart of God. Fasting, though almost a forgotten practice, is still a viable means of drawing closer to God.

They put on "*sackcloth*". Please note the comments in verse six.

The move toward God was widespread. This movement went from the "greatest" to the "least". This speaks of the individuals. Every individual had been guilty and needed to repent of their personal sin. This also speaks of the entire community. Their sin had been citywide, so was their repentance.

The words, "*greatest*" and "least", can refer to age or importance. It could mean, from the oldest to the youngest. It also could mean, from the most important to the least important. We would say, this move of God went from the powerful to the powerless, from the banker to the beggar, and from the White House to the poor house. No one was excluded. Those who had everything to lose, believed and repented. Those who had relatively nothing to lose, believed and repented.

Jonah was one man, a foreigner, and claimed to have a message from a God they did not know. Amazingly, they did not simply run him out of town. Yet, they listened, they believed, and they repented.

Some have said the stomach acids of the fish bleached Jonah's skin and his appearance had an effect on the people of Nineveh. If his skin was bleached it would have been an object lesson of the consequences of ignoring God. But, I do not think that is why the people of Nineveh believed Jonah's message. They believed his message and repented because of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit.

We must not miss the work of the Holy Spirit here. It was not Jonah's skin, his style, or his enthusiasm that convinced these ungodly people to repent. It was the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. That, and that alone is what touches the hard heart of wicked sinners. And, that is what is missing in our day. We have some of the most gifted preachers and teachers the church has ever had. We have more technology to aid us to get the message out. But, we lack the power of God that brings conviction. And, that is why we see so little of a move of God.

Jon 3:6 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.

This verse tells us of the king's reaction to Jonah's message.

The word, "*For*" begins the details of the repentance in Nineveh. Verse five was a summary of the reaction to Jonah's message. Beginning in this verse, a more detailed description is given.

While Jonah was still preaching to the people of the city the word reached the King of Nineveh. When he heard he also was convicted of his sin and repented. It seems as though he took the lead role in the repentance. The king reacting in such a manner is certainly a miracle. He could have easily seen Jonah's message as an attack of his position.

He "*arose from his throne*". This indicates his willingness to humble himself. He stepped away from his throne and his place of authority.

He removed "*his robe*". He laid aside his royal garment. Once again, this was an act that demonstrated his humility. Suddenly, he was like any other man.

He "*covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes*". Sackcloth and ashes were used as a public sign of repentance and humility before God. He was truly smitten over the wickedness of his sin.

Sackcloth was a thick coarse cloth, usually made of goat's hair. Wearing it was an outward expression of their inward feelings. It was extremely uncomfortable. It was a sign of humiliation and was worn in times of extreme grief (Gen. 37:34; 2 Sam. 3:31; 1 Kgs. 21:27; Neh. 9:1; Es. 4:1-4; Lam. 2:10; Dan. 9:3; Joel 1:8). It was also a sign of contrition and repentance of sin.

Ashes were from burnt wood. Sitting in ashes was a sign of mourning or grief (2 Sam. 13:19; Ezk. 27:30; Job 2:8; 42:6; Es. 4:1). The grieving person would sit in the ashes, and at times, sprinkle them on the top of their head.

The king's actions could have cost him his throne. He had no idea how the people would respond. By these simple actions, he had taken himself from the top of society to the bottom. His reaction revealed the genuineness of his repentance.

Jon 3:7 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:

The king's reaction is found in verse six. Beginning in this verse, we see his reaction regarding his people. He took a leadership role in this citywide repentance. Setting an example, he demanded the people of Nineveh follow his lead.

He demanded his instructions be given to all the inhabitants of the city. None were to be excluded. Those

who were guilty, which caused the coming judgment, were the ones who needed to repent.

His proclamation came from the authority of the "king and his nobles". Those hearing this proclamation would know it came straight from the king himself.

He declared a fast for man and "beast". Why would the king's appeal include their livestock? I can think of three possible reasons.

One, their animals were a part of their sin. As is so in our day, they took great pride in the quality and quantity of their animals.

Two, the coming judgment would consume the livestock along with the people. The people did not want their animals to have to suffer for something they had caused. God cares for man and beast. Later, God would include these animals as He spoke to Jonah about the results of the judgment (cf. 4:11).

Three, perhaps the king's hope were that the moaning of the hungry animals, along with the cry of the people, might touch the heart of God.

Jon 3:8 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.

The king went further than just requesting the people fast. He requested that man and beast be "covered with sackcloth". This speaks of a complete public display of their sorrow over their sin. Usually, the people of Nineveh proudly adorned their livestock with costly clothing. Now, they were to be covered with sackcloth.

The entire population was called upon to "cry mightily unto God". The cry of their wickedness had reached the ears of God (1:2), perhaps the cries of their repentance would also. The word, "cry" means, "to call out". They were to call out to God as a drowning person would call for help.

The word, "mightily" carries with it the idea of "violence". It has the idea of not giving up. Jacob said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen. 32:26). Abraham repeatedly asked God to spare Sodom (Gen. 18:23-32). Jesus talked about this (Mt. 11:12). He was talking about an almost violent attitude of asking God to answer a request and meet a need.

The king's call was for everyone to "turn". He was asking for more than just an outward display. He realized their repentance had to be real if they were to escape the coming judgment.

I believe there was more to his actions than just a desire to escape the judgment of God. I believe he was genuinely broken about his sin. He truly wanted to get right with God. If escaping God's wrath is the only reason we do right, we will be miserable creatures indeed.

Repentance means we are willing to turn away from our sinful actions and attitude. It involves a change. True repentance begins with a change in mind about our sin. Where we had seen it as something that wasn't so bad, now we see how vile it really is. We see how it hurts us, those who care about us, and especially God.

When a person truly repents, they suddenly become very serious about their sin and about their God. They are awakened to the fact of how desperately they need God's mercy and forgiveness. True repentance offers no excuses for sin. Our modern version of repentance is not real repentance at all. Much of what we call repentance is an excuse for sin and an attempt to escape the consequences of wrong behavior. If we have sinned, there simply is no excuse for it.

Repentance is a turning from, and a turning towards. It is turning away from that which displeases God and turning to that which pleases Him.

The word, "way" means, "road" or "course of life". This speaks of more than single acts of sin. It is referring to their lifestyle. God wanted them to get right and stay right.

The word, "violence" means, "damage, injustice, or wrong". It refers to the damage their sin had done to others. They needed to see how their actions had hurt other people. No man is an island. What we do has an effect on someone else.

It is likely the people of Nineveh were already doing what the king requested. The move of God had begun to spread throughout the city. God's conviction can spread like wildfire once it begins.

Jon 3:9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

The king's words summarize the entire situation. He said, "Who can tell". Their only hope was that God would have mercy on them. He realized they must have mercy or they would certainly perish.

His pleading sounds much like the pleading of the captain of the ship (cf. 1:6). The desperate call is one that

knows no pride. Both, the captain and the king, realized their only hope was that God might hear.

Their only hope was that God might “*turn away from his fierce anger*” and not consume them. They knew what God was about to do and they knew they deserved it. One of the key elements of repentance is the acknowledgment of guilt.

The word, “*fierce*” means, “burning”.

How refreshing would it be if the leaders of America suddenly saw the condition of this wicked nation and made such a decree. Who knows, perhaps such a call would bring about the spiritual resurrection our country so desperately needs.

The word “*repent*” in this verse is not saying God needed to repent of some wrong He had done (cf. Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29). It simply means God would change His plans and do differently.

The word, “*anger*” is referring to God's wrath (Ex. 4:14; 22:24; 32:12; Num. 25:4; 32:14; Dt. 9:19).

The king acknowledged the fact that they did not deserve mercy and forgiveness. God's wrath was great and their sin was great, but perhaps they could find mercy at the foot of God's throne.

GOD'S MERCY IS RECEIVED 3:10

God did turn from His plan to judge them and did forgive them.

Jon 3:10 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.

And God “*saw their works*”. I am glad, He did not just see their sin, but He saw their belief and repentance.

Their “*works*” refers to their fasting, the sackcloth and ashes, and their prayers. These works revealed the fact that they had genuinely “*turned from their evil way*”. Their actions revealed the attitude of their hearts.

Some believe the repentance of the Ninevites was not genuine. They did fall back into sin later but I believe their repentance was real. I believe it because God stopped His plan to judge them. Certainly, God knew their hearts and He knew if they were sincere. He would not have stayed His hand of judgment if their repentance was not genuine.

God did not do “*that he had said he would do unto them*”. He had told them He would judge them if they did not repent. They repented, so He did not judge them. Sincere confession and repentance will stay the hand of God's judgment. Even though their sin made them worthy of punishment, God's judgment was stayed.

Not only do we see God's mercy in this story, but we see His power. It was the power of God that convicted these ungodly people.

Our modern methods of evangelism are quite different than Jonah's. We would schedule strategy meetings, organize, delegate, and initiate our plans. After months of planning and preparation, and thousands of dollars for advertisement, we rent would an auditorium and wait to see if anyone comes. And after all our effort, and all our plans, and all our strategy, we probably would make an absolute mess of it all.

I am afraid our modern churches are full of people who are running around like ants but getting very little accomplished. But, God simply sent one man with one message and turned the entire city around. I think God does it better. When are we going to get back to doing it God's way?

Did God turning from His judgment make Jonah a liar? Of course, it did not. To begin with, we are not told the full extent of Jonah's message. Jonah's message was not only a message of judgment, but it was also an invitation to forgiveness.

God's message through Jonah implied not only judgment if they refused to repent, but forgiveness if they did. God spoke through Jeremiah and said if a nation He has promised to judge turns from their sin, He will withhold His judgment, and bless them instead. He went on to say, if a nation He promised to bless turns to sin, He would withhold His blessing and judge them instead (Jer. 18:7-8).

The very nature of God compelled Him to judge them if they did not repent. He would have had no choice but to judge their sin had they not repented. That same nature compelled Him to forgive them when they did repent. It would have been wrong not to, and God never does wrong.

God “*repented*”. This does not mean God had done something wrong and needed to repent. God is not like man and does not need to repent of sin (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29). God never changes (Num. 23:19; Ezk. 24:14; Mal. 3:6; Jam. 1:17). Why should He? He never does anything wrong. He never makes a mistake.

He knows the end from the beginning.

The word "*repented*" means, "a change of mind". This simply means God changed His plan (cf. Ex. 32:14; Ps. 90:13; Jer. 18:8; Am. 7:3,6). He had planned to judge Nineveh because they deserved it. However, when they repented, He determined to withdraw His judgment.

The word, "*evil*" means "bad". It is not speaking of anything sinful. It is simply talking about the bad things that were going to happen to the people of Nineveh.

The same God who spared Jonah also spared the people of Nineveh. Neither deserved it.

I believe this is one of the most overlooked verses in the bible. Six hundred thousand sinners believed and turned to God. Someone has said this was the greatest recorded revival in the history of man. Another great revival will take place during the Tribulation Period (Rev. 7:9-17).

How simple this wonderful work of God. Jonah preached, they listened and believed. It did not take a lot of methods, motivation, and madness. It came because of the Word of God and the Spirit of God. What working then, is the only thing that will work now. What they had then, we desperately need now.

Sadly, within 150 years, Nineveh returned to their sin. Nahum tells us God judged them (Nah. 3:1). The city was destroyed in 612 B.C. That does not mean their repentance here was not real. It simply reveals how the sin nature is never completely defeated.

10. JONAH WAS SAD 4:1-4

I wonder if Jonah did not wish there had not been a chapter four in his life. How much better it would be if this chapter had not had to be written. The end of Jonah's story is a sad one. I am sure many people wish the end of their story could be changed.

Jon 4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

God forgiving Nineveh "*displeased*" Jonah. The word literally means, "to be broken up". It carries with it the idea of grieving. Jonah was not only mad, but he was also sad. He was not just a little upset about it, he was "*exceedingly*" displeased.

It is easy to criticize Jonah, but most of us have been upset because God did not do what we wanted, or give us what we asked for. In many ways, we are just as guilty as Jonah. We should ask ourselves how we would feel if God told us to go and witness to one of our enemies. How would we respond if God told us to go to Al-Qaeda and tell them about Jesus? We must not forget the fact that loving God means loving the same people He loves. And, that is not always easy.

The word, "*angry*" means, "to blaze up". We would say he was red hot.

Why was Jonah so angry?

He was angry because he thought the people of Nineveh had gotten away with their horrible deeds. As I have mentioned, the Assyrians had a history of violence, torture, and killing. They were the enemy of God's people. Jonah could not understand why God was willing to forgive them.

He was angry because, in his view, the people of Nineveh were getting the blessings of God instead of his beloved Israel. His people, the people of Israel, were the people with the promise of blessing from God. Jonah did not want anyone getting that type of blessing.

Perhaps he was angry because he thought he would be viewed as a false prophet since the judgment he predicted did not take place.

As I have mentioned before, I believe Jonah was a man of God and had been faithful to serve Him well. But, this was one area of his life that had not yet been mastered by the Spirit of God. And so it is with most of God's children. God is not content to be the master of part, or even most, of our lives. He wants our all. By the way, that is not asking too much. Paul said it is "*reasonable*" (Rom. 12:1). He deserves our all. He certainly gave His all for us (Jn. 3:16).

Jon 4:2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

Once again we see Jonah praying. He initiated the conversation with God. He admitted what the Lord knew all along. He did not want the people of Nineveh to escape God's judgment. He sounds like the prodigal's

elder brother (Lk.15:25).

Jonah tried to explain why he did what he did. He was trying to justify himself for his behavior. His attempt was futile. There was no justifiable reason for him doing what he had done. By the way, we have no excuse to run from God's will either.

Jonah's view of God was accurate. He said, "*thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness*". He may have been displeased with how God dealt with Nineveh, but he certainly knew who God was. He knew God well enough to know what He would do if the Ninevites repented.

And so we find the reason behind all of Jonah's strange behavior.

Jon 4:3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

Jonah actually asked God to kill him because people repented. He wanted to die earlier instead of going to Nineveh to preach (1:12). But, this is worse, now he was wanting to die so he would not have to see the results of the Ninevites repentance. He did not want to see God bless them. Jonah had some major issues. How different Jonah was from Paul. Paul was so burdened about the Jews he was willing to go to hell for them (Rom. 9:3). However, Jonah would rather have died himself than to see people saved.

Many people want a God with love and no wrath. Jonah wanted a God with wrath and no love.

Jonah was not the first servant of God that wish to die. Moses (Num. 11:15) and Elijah (1 Kgs. 19:4) did the same. The difference between them and Jonah is they mourned over the hardness of the heart of God's people.

Jonah should have been glad God was a "*gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness*". Had He not been, He would have done as Jonah requested, and put him to death immediately. I am glad there are times when God refuses to grant our requests.

Jon 4:4 Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

God was truly gentle with Jonah considering the significance of his offense.

God asked Jonah if he had the right to be angry. His question required Jonah to take a good look at himself. To answer the question truthfully, he had to acknowledge his wrong and search his motives.

God has every right to ask questions. We need to remind ourselves of the fact that God is God. He is the Master of the universe. He has the right to do what He wants when He wants, and how He wants. We are the creature, He is the Creator.

Why would anyone get mad about God doing something right? Before we respond to that question we need to ask ourselves why we get upset at God.

If Jonah answered this question, it is not recorded.

11. JONAH WAS SITTING 4:5-8

Jon 4:5 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.

Notice how this rebellious preacher left town in a hurry. The words, "*went out*" mean more than just leaving. They include the idea of escaping or getting away.

Jonah was still hoping that God would destroy the city, but he certainly did not want to be there if He did. No doubt, he was hoping the repentance of the people of Nineveh was not real and he would see them judged after all. Jonah is not the only one who had thoughts of seeing someone be consumed by God's wrath. James and John asked Jesus if he wanted them to call fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans (cf. Lk. 9:54).

The "*east side of the city*" had hills where Jonah could go and have a good view of the city.

The "*booth*" mentioned here was a temporary hut, probably made of branches and leaves.

He "*sat*" in the shade of the booth where he could be comfortable. The forty days undoubtedly had not yet ended, Jonah sat down that he "*might see what would become of the city*". Whatever was going to happen, he wanted a front-row seat. No doubt, the longer he sat, the more upset he got. Jonah could have gone to Jerusalem, had a bath, eaten a good meal, and had a nice night sleep. But, he was too interested in

Nineveh to do that. There is little doubt that he was still hoping the judgment would come to the city.

Jon 4:6 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.

There is some question about the exact type of "gourd" this refers to. The fact that God "prepared" it may indicate it was, like the fish, a unique plant made for this particular need. Whatever type of plant it was, it was big enough to provide shade for Jonah. Its growth was obviously assisted by the Lord for it grew extremely fast. Verse ten tells us it came up in a night and perished in a night. He not only made it grow quickly, He made it grow over Jonah. God does indeed have control of all things (Col. 1:17).

The gourd was another act of God's mercy given to Jonah to "deliver him from his grief". This is referring to his discomfort from the heat. If anyone on earth did not deserve this act of kindness, it was Jonah. Most of us would have told Jonah he had better be glad he was still alive. We certainly would not care if he was a little uncomfortable. I am so glad our heavenly Father is not like most of us.

Jonah was "exceedingly glad" about the gourd. This is the first time Jonah has been happy since the book began. He was the perfect example of selfishness. His happiness and his anger came from the same selfish heart.

Jonah was glad for the gourd but we see no evidence that he actually thanked the Lord for it. How often we consume the good things that come from our God without taking the time to thank Him.

Jon 4:7 But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

The next morning, we find God still preparing things. This time, it was a "worm". Once again we see the work of God in that the plant withered quickly.

Jon 4:8 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.

God prepared something else just for Jonah (cf. 1:17; 4:6). The "vehement east wind" was a hot, scorching wind, commonly called "Sirocco". The wind drove the heat of the sun straight on Jonah.

This is the third time Jonah wanted to die (cf. 1:12; 4:3). This time it was because of the heat. Those who are prone to complaining will have little problem finding something to complain about.

The astounding fact is, Jonah was asking God to make him comfortable while he sat, hoping to see the people in Nineveh go to hell.

Jonah could do nothing to keep the gourd green. The same God who blesses is able to remove His blessings. God did not send a plague on Jonah, but He did remove that which comforted Jonah. Some of the worse judgments are those when God withdraws His blessings from us.

God often uses natural resources in an unnatural way.

12. JONAH WAS SCOLDED 4:9-11

God rebuked Jonah for his attitude. He had obeyed by preaching to Nineveh but he still had a bad attitude about it all. God is concerned about our attitude, not just our actions.

Jon 4:9 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.

God asked Jonah if he was right to be angry about the gourd. This was the second time God asked Jonah if he had a right to be angry (cf. 4:5).

Some of the most abounding words in this book are "*I do well to be angry*". Jonah actually thought he was right to be mad about the drying up of the gourd. It is amazing how deceived a person can be. He saw nothing wrong about his hatred of the Ninevites nor his anger about the gourd.

These are the last words from Jonah in this book. How sad. Thankfully, they are not the last words in the book itself. God still had something to say.

Jon 4:10-11 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?

God compared the gourd to the people of Nineveh.

He compared the labor involved in both.

Jonah had absolutely nothing to do with the creation of the gourd. He had not planted it nor he invested any labor to its survival.

On the other hand, God had bestowed much labor on the people of Nineveh.

He compared the life of both. The gourd was temporary. It "*came up in a night, and perished in a night*". It died and that was the end of it.

On the other hand, the people of Nineveh were eternal. Their bodies would die but they would live forever.

He compared the love involved in both.

Jonah was extremely happy about a plant and extremely angry about Nineveh repenting. He actually cared more about shade than souls and the plant than the people. He was totally self-absorbed. The fact is, Jonah did not want Nineveh to repent. He wanted them to go to hell because he thought that was what they deserved. And, he was right, they did deserve hell, but so do we.

On the other hand, God loved the people on Nineveh. He still called it a "*great city*". He saw every individual as a soul that mattered. He cared about everyone in the city, especially the children who were innocent. The "*sixscore thousand*" (120,000) were undoubtedly children so young they did not know the difference between right and left. God included the "cattle". He even cares about the livestock.

The bottom line was, God was right and Jonah was wrong.

And, this is where the book ends. It has such an abrupt ending. But, if Jonah had said another word, it probably would have been worse.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

The story in this book is not about a fish, it is about the mercy of a loving God. He worked patiently with the wicked sinners and the wayward saint.

This book reveals the power of God. He performed several miracles. He sent and controlled the storm (1:4,15). He made sure the lots pointed to Jonah as the guilty party (1:7). He prepared the fish and made him swallow Jonah (1:17). He kept Jonah alive in the fish for three days and nights (1:17). He guided the fish to land and caused it to spew Jonah out (2:10). He touched the hearts of the people of Nineveh (3:5). He forgave the Ninevites (3:10). He prepared a gourd that grew quickly and provided shade for Jonah (4:6). He prepared a worm that ate the gourd, making it wither overnight (4:7). He sent an east wind (4:8).

The only one who resisted God in the entire story was Jonah. The storm obeyed, so did the sailors, the fish, the gourd, the worm, and even the Ninevites, but not Jonah. The two most serious subjects in this life are sin and death, and Jonah made light of both. He did something we must all guard against. He separated himself from those in need and saw nothing wrong in doing so. Jonah did go to Nineveh, and he preached that which God said to preach, but he did not do it with a compassionate heart. He did it because he knew it would hurt too much not to.

There are more similarities with us and Jonah than we care to admit. Most of us are more concerned about our comfort than the lost souls all around us. We allow our problems, our pleasure, or our prejudice to keep us from sharing Christ.

God is the hero of this story. He rescued Jonah, protected the mariners, and converted the Ninevites.

God is a God who has the right to judge. He would have been right to judge Nineveh. And He was right to forgive them when they repented. He was right to deal with Jonah as He did.

No matter who we look at this situation, we must acknowledge the fact that Jonah thought he was better than the Assyrians. However, he was made of the same dust of the ground. He could have avoided an awful lot of trouble for himself if he had just said, "I am sorry Lord, please forgive me". How many of the problems we have endured could have been avoided had we simply said, "I am sorry"?

And so, we conclude our thoughts on the book of Jonah. May our walk through this book make a difference in our daily walk with our Lord.