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## **THE PROPHET JONAH**

What do you know about the Prophet Jonah and the Book of Jonah?

The Book of Jonah is a part of the 12 books of the Minor Prophets. Chronologically those 12 books fall into three groups: the first seven books belong to the Assyrian Period; the next two books belong to the Babylonian Period; and the last three books constitute the Restoration Period, i.e. the period after the Jews had returned from the Babylonian captivity.

The book of Jonah is book five in the Assyrian Period, i.e. the period when Assyria was the dominant power in the Middle East.

### **THE MAN JONAH**

The first verse of this book identifies Jonah.

Now the word of the LORD came unto **Jonah the son of Amittai**, saying, (Jonah 1:1)

This book represents the end stage of Jonah's work as a prophet. This was the last time that Jonah ever functioned as a prophet. Before this time Jonah had preached amongst the Israelites. This is recorded in 2 Kings chapter 14.

He (i.e. the king of Israel at that time) restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which He spake by the hand of **His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai**, the prophet, which was of **Gath-hepher**. (2 Kings 14:25)

This Scripture identifies Jonah as coming from Gath-hepher. Jonah is here identified as a faithful servant of God. Now in the days of Joshua Gath-hepher had been given to the tribe of Zebulun. Zebulun's territory is presented in Joshua 19:10-16.

And from thence passes on along on the east to **Gittah-hepher**, to Ittahkazin, and goes out to Remmonmethoar to Neah; (Joshua 19:13)

"Gittah-hepher" is another name for "Gath-hepher". So the Prophet Jonah was most likely from the tribe of **Zebulun**. In the past God had used Jonah to preach that certain lands would be restored to the

House of Israel. Earlier those lands had been taken away from Israel by neighboring enemy nations, and King Jeroboam, the son of Joash, restored those lands to Israel. Jonah had predicted this restoration. See 2 Kings 14:23-27. This gives us a little bit of background on the man Jonah. Jonah had a track record of having worked as a faithful servant of God.

## **THE BOOK OF JONAH**

Now let's take a look at the Book of Jonah. This book is very unusual for a number of reasons.

First of all, this is the only prophetic book that is written **entirely in the third person**. When we have Jonah speaking in the first person, that is only the writer of the book quoting Jonah. But it is never Jonah himself writing the narrative in the first person.

It is **never** "I did this or that", or "I said this or that". It is always a case of the unidentified writer stating what Jonah said or did. In other words, this book does not present a personal touch from the prophet himself. It is all presented as an objective account recorded by an unidentified writer.

So could Jonah have been the writer of this book?

Yes, he could, though to me personally that seems very unlikely.

If Jonah himself wrote this book, then the abrupt ending of the book raises some questions. **Why** did Jonah clearly record God's question, but then deliberately **leave out** his own answer to God's question? I mean, Jonah must have given God some answer to this question. It's not that Jonah could or would have just ignored God ... that would have been extremely offensive. No servant of God can tell God "I'm not going to talk to You, Lord". So Jonah must have given God some kind of an answer. But then Jonah, if he wrote this book, deliberately left out the answer he gave God. Why?

Also, this is not a book that Jonah himself would have wanted to write. At best Jonah would have been an extremely reluctant scribe, writing about his own really bad attitude towards God.

We should note that this is **the only prophetic book that ends with a question mark**, leaving the reader wondering as to the prophet's own answer to God's last question.

So could this book have been written by someone other than Jonah?

Yes, it could.

That would explain the use of the third person throughout the entire book. **Another writer could not have used the first person** to record events in which that writer himself had not been involved.

Compare this to Luke's account of Paul's travels in the Book of Acts, where Luke uses the pronoun "we" when he himself is involved in some of the events which concerned Paul.

A different writer for the Book of Jonah would also explain the abrupt ending with an unanswered question. God may have decided that Jonah's answer to God's last question should not be recorded.

But **if the author was someone else**, then God would have had to, by way of inspiration, give the entire account verbatim to that author, because nobody else could have presented Jonah's thoughts and experiences while Jonah was inside that great fish. This is certainly a possibility, because this book is after all a part of "the Word of God". Since God is the Author, the name of the actual scribe is immaterial or optional.

God would have inspired the entire account word-for-word. And God would also have decided to not reveal the identity of the actual author, so that this book would be identified exclusively with Jonah.

That would be very much the same as God giving Moses the exact text for things that Adam and Eve and Cain and Abraham and others had said. Those statements had not been written down for Moses to read. No, those quotations from people like Adam, etc. had been given to Moses by God.

This possibility for the authorship of the Book of Jonah would also mean that God **deliberately** did not present Jonah's final answer to God's question. It was God who withheld Jonah's answer, rather than Jonah himself refusing to put it down in writing.

The message of the Book of Jonah is clearly true and inspired.

And **it makes no difference** whether Jonah himself wrote this, or whether someone else actually wrote this book under inspiration from God. In the same way, it makes no difference whether Paul himself wrote all his letters, or whether Paul only dictated his letters to a scribe, who then did the actual writing.

Now Jesus Christ Himself referred to this Book of Jonah on two separate occasions.

When the scribes and the Pharisees asked Jesus Christ for a miracle to prove that He is the Messiah, Jesus Christ said:

But He answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but **the sign of the prophet Jonah**: For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because **they repented at the preaching of Jonah**; and, behold, **a greater than Jonah is here**. (Matthew 12:39-41)

In this incident Jesus Christ referred to “**the sign of Jonah**”. That sign was that Jonah had spent 72 hours (three days plus three nights) in the belly of the great fish. Christ also referred to “the preaching of Jonah”.

But at no point did Jesus Christ actually say or imply that Jonah himself wrote this book. The author, be it Jonah himself or be it someone else, is not really important. The account is true because it has Jesus Christ's approval, and that is all that matters.

A little later the Pharisees with the Sadducees again tried to tempt Jesus Christ. At this later occasion Jesus Christ said:

A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but **the sign of the prophet Jonah**. And he left them, and departed. (Matthew 16:4)

The most important thing about the Book of Jonah is not what Jonah did, or the message he eventually proclaimed. From a New Testament perspective the most important thing about this book is **the period of time** Jonah spent in the belly of the great fish. This is what is meant by “the sign of the Prophet Jonah”.

Nothing of what Jonah said or did is worth quoting in a prophetic context. And so nothing in the New Testament is actually a quotation from the Book of Jonah. The Book of Jonah is only referred to, but not quoted. Yes, there are lessons to be learned from the Book of Jonah. But the really important thing with the Book of Jonah is **how long** Jonah was in the belly of the great fish.

The next thing that is extremely unusual about the Book of Jonah is that this is the only book in the Bible where **a prophet of God has a bad attitude towards God**! This is the only book where we see the prophet fighting with God and **arguing with God**. The prophet does not show any respect at all for God's point of view.

That is certainly extremely unusual for a prophet of God! It is in fact totally unexpected.

First Jonah tried really hard to get out of doing the job. And then he did the job reluctantly and with a bad attitude. Jonah was hoping that the Ninevites would not heed the warning he presented to them. That's also unexpected. Jonah basically said: I have to give you this warning, but **I hope that you don't listen to me**, and I hope that you don't repent.

In this regard **Jonah was just like Balaam**. God forced Balaam to pronounce a message that Balaam himself didn't really want to pronounce (i.e. a blessing on the people of Israel). And Jonah was forced to pronounce a warning, which Jonah himself also didn't want to pronounce (i.e. a warning for the people of Nineveh). And both of these men almost died before they carried out God's instructions: Balaam faced an angel with a drawn sword (Numbers 22:31), and Jonah was thrown into the very turbulent sea (Jonah 1:15). This parallel doesn't put Jonah in good company, does it?

The third thing that is unusual about this book is that God took a prophet living in the area of Israel, and sent him with a warning to a non-Israelite city, whose people God would select considerably less than 100 years later to take the House of Israel into national captivity, as punishment for all their sins.

Yes, God sent Daniel with a warning to the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. But Daniel was already living in Babylon. And Daniel presented a personal warning to the king. It wasn't a warning so that the kingdom of Babylon would not be destroyed. And later the handwriting on the wall wasn't a warning either. That handwriting was simply a statement of fact of something that would happen within a few hours.

So when God wasn't really dealing with the non-Israelite nations back in Old Testament times, **why did God want Assyria warned** (Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire)?

Yes, there are some prophecies about other nations in the Old Testament. But those prophecies didn't involve sending a prophet from Israel to actually preach a warning message to all the people in the foreign capital. What is unusual as well with the Book of Jonah is that **God was looking for an immediate response** from the people of Nineveh. It was a case of: either you change within 40 days, or you will be destroyed right then.

Now obviously, amongst all the non-Israelite nations in the world at that time Assyria (i.e. Nineveh) was not the only society on earth that was filled with "wickedness". So why did they get a special warning? After all, God said that those people in Nineveh could not "discern between their right hand and their left hand" (Jonah 4:11), meaning that those people were totally clueless as far as what is right and what is wrong in the sight of God is concerned. This would have in some regards made them a little less accountable for their wrong conduct, than other people who had a better understanding of right and wrong.

But a special warning? Perhaps their conduct was so bad that they were facing a destruction like the one God carried out on Sodom and Gomorrah? And the warning God wanted Jonah to give to those people was **one last chance to avoid total destruction**?

We know the story: the Ninevites did repent to some degree and they did make some changes. Those changes were sufficient for God to not destroy them at that time. Instead, a decade or two later God selected those people to become "the rod of My anger" and "the staff of My indignation" (see Isaiah 10:5) for the purpose of punishing Israel.

## **CHAPTER 1**

The Hebrew name "Jonah" means "**dove**". That wasn't exactly a very suitable name for Jonah, was it? He was anything but "a dove" in his desire to see the Assyrians destroyed.

Notice God's instruction in verse 2.

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

It would have been around 500 miles for Jonah to go to Nineveh. And he would have had to walk. So that walk would have taken him a few weeks.

Jonah had previously received instructions from God, and he had always carried them out faithfully. Jonah had a track record as a faithful servant of God. But this time something was different.

**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. (Jonah 1:3)

So instead of going about **500 miles northeast**, as God had instructed him, Jonah intended to go **over 2000 miles west**, to the Iberian Peninsula, where Tarshish was located.

So first of all Jonah had **a rebellious attitude** towards God. He didn't like God's instruction. And he had no intention of obeying God. He simply wasn't going to do what God had told him to do.

On top of that, Jonah was **incredibly stupid**! He had worked for well over a decade as a prophet of the true God. And for anyone in that position to think that we could run away from God, that God somehow wouldn't find us if we go somewhere far away, is rank stupidity. I mean, that type of reasoning is what you might expect from someone in a movie like "Dumb and Dumber", but not from a seasoned servant of God.

However, we should also recognize that this attempt to flee 2000 miles away tells us that Jonah's mind was hardened and set. This was a calculated attempt to **deliberately** disobey God.

It is perverse to seek to "understand" Jonah's motivation! Like reasoning: Jonah knew that those mean Assyrians were going to take his own people into captivity, and therefore Jonah didn't want them to have the chance to repent of their sins.

That line of reasoning is garbage! But **that is how Satan would want us to reason** ... to somehow justify and even feel sorry for the person who is flagrantly disobeying the God whose instructions he has previously carried out faithfully. Maybe Jeremiah should also have taken a ship to Tarshish, because God told Jeremiah to tell the Jews to surrender to the enemy, the Babylonians? I speak as a fool a la 2 Corinthians 11:23.

That line of reasoning places our own human reasoning above the reasoning of the Creator God. That's really bad reasoning.

In the first three verses of this book we have already learned that we are dealing with someone who has

**“hardened his own heart”**. That is bad, it is very bad. When people deliberately harden their hearts against God, **they seldom recover**. It is not the same as sinning on impulse or out of weakness. Those situations can be overcome because they don't involve calculated deliberate acts of disobedience. But what Jonah did was a knowing and deliberate disobedience.

I mention this because we need to understand that, even before Jonah was swallowed by the fish, and before he eventually preached to Nineveh, **Jonah's ultimate fate is pretty well set** (make that at least 95% certain) **when he gets on that ship to Tarshish!** He has made his decision, and he has hardened his heart against God. And statistically his chances of totally getting rid of that hardness of heart after getting on that ship were way less than 1 in 20.

As the Apostle Paul explained:

For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for **necessity is laid upon me**; yes, **woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!** (1 Corinthians 9:16)

Very clearly necessity was also laid upon Jonah. And yes, woe is Jonah because he did not want to preach what he had been told to preach. There's no room for the attitude of Jonah 1:3 in the Family of God, is there?

Let's continue.

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. (Jonah 1:4)

Did Jonah really expect God to say: “oh well, I'll just have to send someone else”? That isn't ever going to happen, is it, that we force God to do something that God does not want to do? So the ship is about to sink.

When Jonah is chosen by lot (Jonah 1:7), he then tells the sailors the following:

And he said unto them, I *am* an Hebrew; and **I fear the LORD, the God of heaven**, who has made the sea and the dry *land*. (Jonah 1:9)

**That statement was no longer true!** Jonah was kidding himself! His action showed that he didn't really “fear” the Creator God. When we knowingly and deliberately disobey God, we demonstrate that we don't really fear God. All knowing, deliberate disobedience is evidence of a lack of the fear of God.

At this point Jonah already lacked the fear of God, even if he himself didn't fully realize that. I mean, Jonah surely knew that God was going to punish his disobedience, but **he went ahead and disobeyed anyway**. That is proof for a lack of the real fear of God.

Notice Jonah's next statement.

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 1:12)

Do you understand what this verse is telling us? Is Jonah being the hero in being willing to die? No! What this verse tells us is this:

**Jonah is still unrepentant! His mind is still hardened!**

Guess what? If Jonah had said:

"I have sinned against God and I repent. If you will now make the decision to turn this ship around and head back to Joppa, then **this storm shall surely cease!** And **then I will obey the voice of my God** and go and preach in Nineveh, as God has commanded me to do."

But Jonah didn't say this, did he?

Had Jonah said the above statement, **then the storm would also have ceased immediately**. Why? Because that type of statement would have shown God a very, very valuable attitude, a repentant attitude. And the storm would have fulfilled its purpose, which was to motivate Jonah to repent.

There is a very valuable lesson here for all of us. And that is this:

When God sends us a trial to motivate us to repent, all too often instead of repenting **we just harden our hearts even more!** That's what Jonah did. He basically said: I'd rather die in that turbulent sea than preach in Nineveh. That is the response of a bitter mind, a hardened heart.

That's what the human mind is like. After God has poured out the first and second woe in Revelation 9, the people who have lived through those terrible events are more rebellious than ever!

And **the rest of the men which were not killed** by these plagues **yet repented not** of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: (Revelation 9:20)

And later even after the first five of the seven last plagues have been poured out, the few people who survive have hardened their hearts even more.

**And blasphemed the God of heaven** because of their pains and their sores, **and repented not** of their deeds. (Revelation 16:11)

Punishments from God are supposed to motivate us to repent and to change. But rebellious hardened human minds will not do that. The more God punishes people, the more they curse and blaspheme God.

Jonah's statement "just throw me into the sea and you'll be okay" is **the same attitude** as Revelation 9:20 and 16:11. It is an unwillingness to humble self and to change. His attitude is: **I'd rather die** than do what God wants me to do. And Jonah, with his level of understanding, would also have understood that for him that death in the sea would be **a permanent death!** He would have realized that he will not have a part in God's Kingdom. And **he just didn't care!**

So Jonah is thrown into the sea, and the storm stopped immediately.

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.** (Jonah 1:17)

And then some people have the foolish question: was Jonah dead or was he alive?

## **CHAPTER 2**

Let's look at verse 1.

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

**Dead people don't pray!** The fact that Jonah "prayed" while he was in the belly of the fish proves that he was obviously alive.

Notice verse 2.

And said, **I cried by reason of my affliction** unto the LORD, and He heard me; out of the belly of the grave cried I, *and* You heard my voice. (Jonah 2:2)

As an aside, notice that in verse 1 it is someone else who records that Jonah prayed, rather than Jonah saying "and I prayed". Here in verse 2 his statement "I cried by reason of my affliction" is preceded by the words "**and said**". Those two words tell us that the unidentified writer is going to present a quotation from Jonah.

What does the statement "I cried by reason of my affliction" tell us? It tells us that now **Jonah is feeling**

**sorry for himself.** Now he is in serious trouble, and he doesn't really want to die, in spite of the front he put up in Jonah 1:12. Now he is scared.

And obviously, this line of reasoning in Jonah 2:2 proves that he was alive for all of those 72 hours. Dead men don't think and reason! I guess we could also say that this was a 3-day fast for Jonah. Let's also realize that at this point Jonah is really, really desperate. He wants to live. He had anticipated a quick death, but now he would rather continue to live.

So now Jonah says all the right things. And I don't mean to imply that he didn't mean it. We are the same. When we are in a really desperate situation, and we cry out to God for help, we are very sincere ... precisely because we are desperate.

In such circumstances the key is not what we say in that situation. The real key is **what we do after God has helped us to come out of that extremely desperate situation.** Was our change of heart really permanent when we were desperate? Or do we go back on the commitments we made in those desperate circumstances?

That's the story of the people of Israel in the wilderness, isn't it? They cried out for help when they were desperate, so God helped them. And then they went back and again disobeyed God. So the key is not what Jonah said while he was in the fish's belly. The real key is **what Jonah said and did after he was again walking on dry land.** That will reveal whether he had really changed his attitude, or whether his change of heart had only been superficial.

So here are some of the things Jonah prayed:

For You had cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all Your billows and Your waves passed over me." (Jonah 2:3)

Then I said, I am cast out of Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple. (Jonah 2:4)

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

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

When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto You, into Your holy temple. (Jonah 2:7)

They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. (Jonah 2:8)

But I will sacrifice unto You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay *that* that I have vowed. Salvation *is* of the LORD. (Jonah 2:9)

where along the coast the fish had vomited him out. That walk took Jonah a few weeks. By the time he got to Nineveh there was nothing about his person that looked like he had spent time inside a huge fish. He didn't have any "weeds wrapped around his head" (see Jonah 2:5). And he didn't smell of fish. And he certainly didn't tell anyone in Nineveh that he had spent three days inside a fish.

The people in Nineveh had no idea about what had happened to Jonah before he came to them. Those 2-4 weeks of walking to Nineveh had erased any traces of his "fishy experience".

The statement "Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey" means that **it took three days to walk through this great city**. In the last verse of this book (i.e. Jonah 4:11) it tells us that the population was over 120,000 people, as well as a large number of livestock. So the city would very likely have included fields for the animals to graze, contributing to the great size of this city.

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 3:4)

"A day's journey" would have taken Jonah into the middle of the city. In verse 2 God had told Jonah to preach the message "that I bid you". So "yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" was the message God had told Jonah to preach. And Jonah delivered this message to the people.

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. (Jonah 3:5)

It doesn't say that they believed "Jonah". It says that they believed "God". Also, this doesn't sound like Jonah is writing this. It is unlikely that Jonah would have written "and **he cried and said ...**" (Verse 4) when he was writing about himself. Rather, it sounds like some objective writer is acknowledging that this message of impending destruction came from God, and that the people of Nineveh also recognized this (verse 5).

To the Assyrians in Nineveh Jonah was clearly a foreigner, who probably spoke with a foreign accent. Their response to this foreign preacher is unique in history. The way they responded with fasting and humbling themselves is something that Jonah could only have wished for when he had preached to the people of Israel back home. It was **the exact response that God was looking for** when He sent Jonah to Nineveh with this specific message.

This may well be the only time when the preaching of a servant of God was 100% successful? Everyone accepted Jonah's message, from the king on down. The interesting thing is that the king also accepted this warning message without actually having seen Jonah himself. Rather, other people had simply told the king what this foreigner was saying. But that was sufficient for the king to take action.

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. (Jonah 3:6)

Now Jonah's message was **blunt and to the point**. Jonah didn't present any explanations to prove that the people were evil. He didn't try to reason with anyone. He simply spelled out an imminent penalty.

And the king didn't argue with what Jonah had said. He didn't deny that they were all evil and violent. He accepted that they were guilty before God. He made no excuses. And so he proclaimed a fast for everyone (verse 7).

Incidentally, the reference to "nor beast, herd nor flock" in verse 7 again implies that there were large agricultural areas within the city, where herds and flocks were kept.

Notice what the king then said:

But **let man and beast be covered with sackcloth**, and cry mightily unto God: yes, **let them turn every one from his evil way**, and from **the violence** that *is* in their hands. (Jonah 3:8)

He acknowledged that they were evil and violent. He did not try to justify or rationalize the ways of his people. He was readily confessing their sins, based on nothing more than the sayings of some foreign preacher. And he believed the message Jonah had brought.

**Who can tell if God will turn and** repent (i.e. **change His mind**), and turn away from **His fierce anger**, that we perish not? (Jonah 3:9)

The king didn't go to his own pagan gods, of which they had a bunch in Nineveh. No, the king accepted that **the God of this Hebrew preacher** was indeed angry because of the evil ways of the people of Nineveh, and that this God of the Hebrews had the power to destroy Nineveh. He didn't argue with this statement from Jonah. He was looking for mercy, and towards that end he instructed all his people "to cry mightily unto the God of the Hebrews" (verse 8).

Verse 10 shows the results.

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. (Jonah 3:10)

The people of Nineveh did make some changes. They did "turn from their evil way". And so God did not impose the penalty God had already announced. This is the principle of Ezekiel 33 in action.

Again, **when I say unto the wicked, you shall surely die; if he turn from his sin**, and do that which is

lawful and right; *If* the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; **he shall surely live, he shall not die.** (Ezekiel 33:14-15)

This is what happened in Nineveh. And therefore God did not destroy them at that time. Now let's get back to the man Jonah.

## **CHAPTER 4**

To start with, Jonah had a rotten and rebellious attitude towards God. He had been prepared to die rather than change his attitude. Then, when the fish had swallowed him and he had sat in total darkness for 72 hours, he had a bit of a change of heart. So God had again instructed him to go to Nineveh and preach a warning message.

He then obeyed and preached that message, and his preaching had been 100% successful. His job has been completed. So what is Jonah's attitude like now, after completing the job he had initially not wanted to do?

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and **he was very angry.** (Jonah 4:1)

Wow! Jonah is "very angry" that the people of Nineveh had actually heeded the warning from God, which Jonah had brought to them. Jonah knew that when people really repent, then God does not impose the penalties which God has already announced.

Jonah had wanted to see Nineveh destroyed. **He didn't want them to repent.** He wanted them to be destroyed.

What this anger tells us is that Jonah has not really repented of disobeying God and refusing to carry out the job God had given him. **Jonah is still not repentant!** He is still holding to his original wrong attitude!

His own reasons for disobeying God are totally selfish. And **no way was Jonah entitled to be angry,** simply because the people of Nineveh had repented.

Some people come up with **perverse arguments** that Jonah was just concerned for the people of Israel, because he realized that later the Assyrians would conquer the Israelites and take them into captivity. And that is supposed to justify Jonah's rebellious attitude. However, that is really only very selfish arguing. With that line of reasoning it would also have been okay for Jeremiah and for Isaiah to not preach the messages God had given them to preach.

The truth is that God had decided to punish Israel because of their endless disobedience. So God selected Assyria to be the instrument for punishing Israel. But God could obviously also have selected any other nation to carry out the punishment on Israel.

Through the Prophet Isaiah God had earlier said:

O Assyrian, the rod of **My anger**, and the staff in their hand is **My indignation**. (Isaiah 10:5)

It was God's decision to use Assyria to punish Israel. But guess what? If Assyria no longer existed, then **God could use another nation as the instrument of His anger and indignation**.

The problem was not the nation God would use to punish Israel!

**The problem was that Israel refused to repent**, and therefore God determined to punish Israel! Which nation God would use to carry out the punishment is really immaterial.

And **Jonah should have known** that all of his years of preaching to the people of Israel had not caused the Israelites to repent. And therefore God was going to use **someone** to punish Israel. That, God using other nations to punish Israel, was already an established pattern in Israel long before Jonah came on the scene.

During the period of the judges God punished Israel with **one servitude after another** to the nations that lived around Israel. And the reason God had imposed those servitudes was always because the Israelites couldn't stay away from worshiping various pagan idols. Israel could never stay faithful to God for very long.

Jonah's anger here in Jonah 4:1 is really directed **against God**. He is angry because he understood that God was not going to destroy the Assyrians at that time. That is what made him angry.

And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray You, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? **Therefore I fled** before unto Tarshish: for **I knew** that You are a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repent You of the evil. (Jonah 4:2)

... "and **I really want You to destroy those Assyrians**" Jonah might as well have added to that statement. That's really what Jonah was saying.

His justification for refusing to obey is very selfish! Oh yes, Lord, I want You to be merciful **to us**, but **not to other people**! When you know how merciful God really is, Jonah, then you need to persuade your own people to repent, because **that is** where the problem lies. The problem isn't other people repenting; the problem is that **your own people will not repent**. That is the only reason why God is going to use another nation to punish your own people.

The correct solution is for the people of Israel to repent, and then God will not impose any penalties carried out by other nations. But as long as the people of Israel will not repent, so long God is going to use someone to bring punishments upon Israel.

Let's continue with Jonah's prayer to God.

Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech You, my life from me; for **it is better for me to die than to live.** (Jonah 4:3)

Talk about stupid selfish reasoning! If You, Lord, are not going to destroy Nineveh, then it is better for me to die. Talk about a selfish attitude! If you, Jonah, die, that doesn't solve the problem, does it? **Unless Israel really repents**, God is going to use someone to punish Israel. As a prophet of God you know that better than most people in the nation.

Jonah's hardhearted attitude has not changed. Unless he gets his own will, Jonah doesn't want to live. So he is not prepared to try and help solve the real problem. It doesn't occur to him to go back to his own country, and to **devote himself to urging his fellow Israelites to repent**, and to obey God. That might perhaps work towards eliminating the need for God to punish Israel. But wanting to see "the rod and the staff" of God's anger destroyed doesn't do anything towards solving the actual problem.

To help Jonah identify his own personal problems, God then asks Jonah a question.

Then said the LORD, **Do you do well to be angry?** (Jonah 4:4)

God asks Jonah: do you believe that you are entitled to be angry?

God asked this question to help Jonah recognize his own wrong attitude. God asked: **is it okay for you to be angry when I don't do things your way?** Do you know better than I do how I should deal with the Assyrians?

Jonah's answer to this question is not recorded. That should tell us that his answer was not the correct one, as is also confirmed a little later in verse 9. However, with this wrong answer Jonah is getting onto really thin ice. Jonah's anger shows that **he resents the decision God has made.**

That is not good!

So Jonah goes out of the city on the east side. That is the opposite side to his own country. The land of Israel was to the west of Nineveh, but Jonah goes to the east of the city. This means that he had gone through the whole city from west to east.

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.** (Jonah 4:5)

He is still **hoping** that God would destroy Nineveh! That is in spite of understanding that the people there had repented in response to his warning message. That is a hard, hard attitude. This reveals that **his attitude** from Jonah 1:3 onwards **had never changed**. Jonah is probably the only prophet of God whose preaching in this instance was 100% successful, and Jonah hated that success.

On the east side of Nineveh Jonah has built himself a small shelter from the sun, and he is still hoping to see Nineveh destroyed. This approach showed a serious lack of understanding God. There is simply no way that God will destroy people who repent. Jonah should have understood this.

So **God tries one more time to help Jonah** identify his own wretched attitude, his own hardheartedness. You know the story.

God has a large leafy gourd grow up to give Jonah some very welcome shade from the blistering sun. And Jonah is extremely happy to have that plant provide shade for him (Jonah 4:6). The next day God has a worm eat through the roots of the gourd, and it withers (verse 7). Then God prepared a vehement hot wind coupled with the scorching sun to beat down on Jonah. The heat is unbearable. And Jonah is getting angry. Once again he wants to die.

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**. (Jonah 4:8)

Jonah is filled with self-pity. And he is upset that the worm had destroyed the gourd which had given him shade. So God again talks to Jonah and asks the same question God had asked earlier. This time Jonah's answer is recorded.

And God said to Jonah, Do you do well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, **I do well to be angry, even unto death**. (Jonah 4:9)

That is a rotten attitude!

Jonah's statement is an expression of **bitterness**! He is oozing with self-pity. He says to the Creator God: yes, I am entitled to be angry. This was very bad. It is never good to be angry with God. If we don't recognize that God knows better what is right and what is wrong than we do, then we are in serious trouble.

So God now spells out the lesson for Jonah.

Then said the LORD, **you have had pity on the gourd**, for the which you have not labored, neither did you make it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: (Jonah 4:10)

You feel sorry for a plant that died. You didn't do anything to produce that plant or to make it grow. But you feel sorry for it dying anyway.

And **should not I spare Nineveh**, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that **cannot discern between** their right hand and their left hand; and *a*lso much cattle? (Jonah 4:11)

This parallel was intended to make Jonah see just how hardhearted he was towards the people of Nineveh. Jonah had far more pity for the plant that had died than he had for the 120,000-plus people who had made an effort to put away evil out of their lives, people who only had very limited understanding of God's standards.

Again God is asking Jonah a question. And again **Jonah's answer is not recorded**. Jonah doesn't repent. He is angry and resentful at God for not destroying Nineveh. From start to finish Jonah is in a rebellious attitude.

God had given Jonah the responsibility to warn the wicked, and that is something Jonah did not want to do. Jonah presents a clear parallel to Ezekiel 3.

When I say unto the wicked, you shall surely die; **and you give him not warning**, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but **his blood will I require at your hand**. Yet if you warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. (Ezekiel 3:18-19)

Jonah didn't want to do this; he didn't want to warn the wicked. And when he was eventually forced to do it, he did it with a resentful attitude, because he still hoped that the wicked (i.e. Nineveh) would be destroyed. Jonah only did the job under duress. His heart wasn't in it. That's not really any better than not doing it.

And Jonah certainly did not pray "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). He didn't agree with God's will. **It was God's will that made Jonah angry.**

Well, that about covers the Book of Jonah.

One major lesson of this book is that it is not enough to obey God when we agree with God's instructions. Rather, we have to fully believe that God's will is always more important than our will. And so we are to pray "Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven".

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