

JONAH

By Dr. Peter Hammond, Frontline Fellowship,
Cape Town, South Africa.
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“But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.” Jonah 2:9.

A Prophet from Galilee

Jonah (dove) the son of Amittai (2 Kings 14:25), from Gath Hepher, ministered in the reign of King Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.) The pharisees were wrong when they claimed that “*No prophet has arisen out of Galilee*” (John 7:52). Jonah was a Galilean. By Jewish tradition, Jonah was the son of the widow of Zarephath, whom Elijah raised from the dead (I Kings 17: 8-24).

The Lord Jesus Christ refers to the Book of Jonah as historic (Matthew 12: 38-41; Luke 11: 29-32). For those who think it impossible that a man could be swallowed whole by a whale, the *Daily Mail* of 14 December 1928 reported a whale carcass displayed for a week in Birmingham, where 12 men could fit through its mouth and into its belly at one time.

Swallowed by a Whale

Sir Francis Fox in *Sixty Three Years of Engineering*, recorded that in one sperm whale they actually found the skeleton of a shark, 16-feet in length. M. De Parville, scientific Editor of *Le Journal des Debats* of Paris reported in 1891, near the Falkland Islands, the whaleship *Star of the East* harpooned a large sperm whale, which, with a lash of its tail, threw two men into the sea.

Later, the whale was killed and the sections brought on deck. They were astounded to find signs of life in the stomach. Inside was found the missing sailor, James Bartley, doubled up and unconscious. He remained unconscious for some time and only recovered from the shock three weeks later.

The Sign of Jonah

Jonah speaks of being cast into the deep, into the heart of the seas, with the waves passing over him, “*the waters surrounded me, even to my soul. Weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me forever; yet you have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord My God.*” It only takes three minutes being deprived of air for a person to die. To sink to the bottom of the sea takes a lot longer than 3 minutes. Jonah describes himself as being in Sheol, the abode of the dead. So when Jesus speaks of the sign of Jonah, he is referring to dying and being raised to life. Jonah is the most outstanding example of Resurrection in the Old Testament.

Nineveh

Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was one of the greatest cities of the ancient world, and was situated on the East bank of the Tigris River, 400 miles from the Mediterranean Sea. The stronghold of the city was 30 miles long and 10 miles wide. There were 5 walls and 3 moats surrounding it. The walls were 100 feet high and so thick that four chariots could be driven abreast on the tops of these walls. **The city was as great in wickedness as it was in wealth and power.**

Jonah and Israel

Jonah is a type of Israel.

As Jonah was called to world missions, so too was Israel.

As Jonah was punished by being cast into the sea, so was Israel exiled by Assyria and Babylon.

As Jonah was preserved in the whale, so too was Israel to return from the exile.

As Jonah repented and was restored to life, so Israel was restored to the land in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.

As Jonah became obedient to God and carried out his mission to Nineveh, so Christ's disciples from the Day of Pentecost have been taking the Word of God to the ends of the earth.

As Jonah's ministry was blessed with the repentance of Nineveh, so Israel has been blessed in the conversion of people from every tribe and nation.

Jesus and Jonah

Jesus Christ Himself drew attention to the Book of Jonah and gave it great importance. When the Lord Jesus Christ was asked for a sign to prove His claims, He told the people that the only sign they would be given, would be the sign of the prophet Jonah. *"An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it..."* Matthew 12: 39-41. Jesus rebuked the people of Judah saying that the men of Nineveh will rise up in the Judgment and condemn them because Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed Jesus is greater than Jonah.

Miracles in Jonah

There are eight miracles recorded in Jonah:

1. *"But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up."* Jonah 1:4.
2. When the sailors cast lots *"the lot fell on Jonah."* Jonah 1:7 – God controlled the outcome of an apparently random selection.
3. When the sailors *"threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging."* God calmed the sea.
4. *"Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah."* Jonah 1:17.
5. *"So the Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah onto dry land."* Jonah 2:10.

6. “So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed the fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them” Jonah 3:5 – the remarkable city-wide repentance and faith of the people of Nineveh was a work of God’s grace.
7. “And the Lord prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery...” Jonah 4:7.
8. “But as morning dawned the next day, God prepared a worm and it so damaged the plant that it withered.” Jonah 4:7.
9. “And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement East wind...” Jonah 4:8.

Mission to the Gentiles

Joppa, from where Jonah embarked on his sea journey to Tarshish, to avoid preaching to Nineveh, was the very place which God chose, 800 years later, to reveal to the Apostle Peter his commission to receive men of other nations. At the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), the Apostle Peter refuted the Judaizers by reporting on what God had revealed to him at Joppa, and by the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Roman centurion Cornelius’ household (Acts 15: 7-17.)

Mission Rejected

God had commanded His prophet to go to Nineveh and warn the people that they had 40 days to repent, or He would destroy their city. Nineveh was a wicked, brutal, pagan city. They were an enemy of the people of Israel. Jonah did not want to see the people of Nineveh repent. He wanted to see them destroyed. Jonah took a ship to Tarshish (present-day Spain) to flee from the Lord, going in the very opposite direction to where Nineveh was.

A Mighty Tempest

“But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.” Jonah 1:4. The mariners were so afraid that they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the load.

When the captain saw that Jonah was fast asleep, he challenged him: “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us so that we may not perish.” (Jonah 1:6).

Confession

Jonah confessed: “I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of Heaven, Who made the sea and the dry land.” He admitted that he was fleeing from doing his duty. As “the sea was growing more tempestuous” Jonah said that they should “pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that this great tempest is because of me.” Jonah 1:12.

Into the Deep

After every attempt to row to land, the sailors, in desperation, cried out to the Lord: “‘We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man’s life, and do not charge us with innocent blood...’ so they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased

from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows.” Jonah 1: 14-16. God is sovereign. He called Jonah. The Lord sent the storm to prevent Jonah from fleeing from doing His will. He controls the winds and the waves. He is to be feared.

Deliverance from Death

“Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.” This great fish was God’s instrument to rescue Jonah from the perils of the sea. Our Lord Jesus, during His earthly ministry, referred to the Book of Jonah to communicate truths concerning His own message and mission. The Lord Jesus spoke of “*the sign of the prophet Jonah*”, which was fulfilled, not only in Christ’s Resurrection from the dead, but in the impact of His message, which brought about widespread Repentance.

Salvation is of the Lord

*“Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own mercy, but I will sacrifice to You with a voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. **Salvation is of the Lord!**”*

“So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.” Jonah 2:10. Again Creation responds obediently to the Sovereign commands of the Creator. The fish which might have been God’s weapon of death, by Grace, became God’s tool of deliverance. Jonah declares his loyalty to the Lord and extols Him as the only source of Salvation and Deliverance. God had sovereignly moved the prophet Jonah from rebellion and disobedience to Repentance and obedience, from impairing God’s work of Redemption for the Ninevites to seeking to bring the message of Repentance to the Gentiles.

A City Transformed

As God had sovereignly moved the prophet Jonah from disobedience to Repentance, from being an obstacle to bringing Salvation to the Ninevites, to being a channel, so now God moved the people of Nineveh from idolatry, violence and cruelty, to Repentance and Faith in Jehovah God.

Mercy

“Then God saw their works that they turned from their evil way and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them and He did not do it.” Jonah 3:10. Jonah’s worst fears were realized when the people believed, repented, proclaimed a fast and adorned themselves in sackcloth, the traditional attire of mourning in the Near East. The Repentance was swift, city-wide and complete. The king of Nineveh who ordered the population to Repentance has been identified as Adad-Nirari III (810-783 B.C.). **The royal edict addressed the most prominent of Nineveh’s sins: violence.**

“Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.” As the people of Nineveh responded positively to the proclamation of imminent Judgment, the Lord responded by withdrawing His sentence of destruction on the city.

Blinded by Anger

Jonah felt that he had a right **not** to go to Nineveh. He felt he had the right to preach Judgment and to see Judgment fall. All he could see was his rights, and he wanted

everything to go his way. Jonah seemed oblivious to the spectacular work of God's grace that he had just witnessed. Jonah was so blinded by his rights and offended by what he saw as the wrong actions of God that Jonah fell into a deep and suicidal depression. "*It is better for me to die than to live!*" The Lord asked: "***Is it right for you to be angry?***" Jonah 4:4.

Hoping for Destruction

Jonah was so immersed in self-pity that he did not even reply. Jonah went out of the city and sat on the East side of the city, making himself a shelter. Perhaps Jonah was still hoping the Ninevites weren't sincere in their Repentance and that God would still destroy the city.

Missing the Big Picture

The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. Jonah was missing the big picture. Here he was looking over a vast city which was responding to God's Word in humility and Repentance. But Jonah seemed oblivious to this. All he could see was that his rights had been violated and his enemies were escaping the Judgment they deserved. Jonah was more concerned about his comfort and "*his plant*", than about all the people and animals of the great city of Nineveh.

A Penetrating Question

For a second time God challenges Jonah's selfishness by asking this dangerous and penetrating question: "***Is it right for you to angry about the plant? and he said: 'It is right for me to be angry, even to death!'***" Jonah 4:9. All Jonah could see was the violation of his supposed rights. Jonah complained that God had sent him where he did not want to go. The Lord had given him a message that he did not want to deliver. The people had responded in a way that he had hoped they would not. God had given mercy to people whom Jonah knew did not deserve it. Then the Lord had taken away "*his vine*". In Jonah's mind he had every right to be angry. Angry enough to want to die!

An Object Lesson

"But the Lord said, 'You have had pity on the plant for which you have not laboured, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city in which are more than 120,000 persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left – and much livestock?'" Jonah 4: 10-11. There were more than 120,000 children and many animals in Nineveh. For their sakes, God chose to be merciful. Jonah seemed more concerned about his comfort and "*his plant*" than about all of God's creatures in Nineveh.

Undeserved Favour

In Jonah, chapter 2, Jonah had rejoiced over his own deliverance from the storm. He knew that he had deserved to be thrown overboard and to drown in the ocean. God had poured out His grace upon him. Undeserved favour. Yet, while Jonah was happy to receive grace from the hand of God for himself, he was offended that God had extended similar grace to the Ninevites. Jonah had hoped that God would destroy Nineveh. He

found himself a grandstand seat where he could watch God rain destruction upon the wicked Nineveh.

Demanding our Rights

If God was to give us what we deserve we would receive Eternal Judgment in hell. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). If we were to fully understand the holiness of God, and the depravity of man, we would not allow ourselves to be angered over the apparent violation of our selfish rights. We deserve eternal damnation. Grace is God's undeserved favour.

Do you have any right to be angry? No, you certainly do not have any right to be angry, not against God. God pours out His abundant blessings upon you: Life, family, talents, gifts, opportunities, every drop of rain that falls, every ray of sunshine, every breath that we breathe is a gift from Almighty God.