

Jonah Devotionals & Sermon Illustrations

Jonah 1

QUESTION - [Who was Jonah in the Bible?](#)

ANSWER - Proud, stubborn, disobedient, unfaithful, a grumbler, and altogether a bad-tempered, cantankerous old curmudgeon—this was Jonah, whose name means “dove”! Jonah was the son of Amittai, who came from Gath-hepher in Zebulun (called Gittah-hepher in Joshua 19:10-13). He was the earliest of the prophets and close behind Elisha in his place in the Old Testament. Jonah’s story is told in the short (just 48 verses) but powerful book of Jonah.

When God called Jonah to go and warn the violent and godless Ninevites of their impending doom, all his pride in being a Hebrew—and therefore uniquely favored by the Almighty (so he thought, no doubt along with many others of his nation)—rose up in rebellion. Pagans, to him, were the worst kind of human garbage, not even fit to pollute the good earth by living on it. They were the “untouchables,” and that God should take an interest in them was unthinkable. Therefore, not being one to put up with that which was not to his mind, he fled to Joppa and got himself a passage on a ship bound for Tarshish, which was in the opposite direction from Nineveh.

A human father would probably have shrugged Jonah off in disgust and found someone else more willing to take his message to Nineveh, but not so our Heavenly Father. If God has a purpose for someone, then, the gifts and calling of God being irrevocable, he will either fulfill His purpose, or He will simply roll over him to accomplish what He has foreordained (Isaiah 46:9-10). God rolled over Jonah with a vengeance, causing a violent storm to threaten the safety of his ship and its crew, so that their indignation at his contented snoring through their danger soon put an end to his satisfaction. This unceremonious awakening also awakened Jonah to the fact that, far from being an “artful dodger,” he was being followed by the Almighty. There was nothing for it but to confess what he had been up to and tell the sailors that only by dumping him overboard could they be saved. This they did, and the huge fish sent by God (not a whale as commonly supposed, but some sea creature common to that time) promptly swallowed him up (Jonah 1:17). This, and the immediate stilling of the storm, brought the ship’s crew to faith and salvation as a result (Jonah 1:16). The Lord is not one to miss out on His opportunities!

At this point Jonah has now found himself in a situation worse than anything he could have imagined, but like Jacob, he has by now awakened to the fact that God is with him wherever he ends up, in obedience or disobedience. The result is a beautiful prayer of faith rising up from the belly of the great fish, but still with a hint of spiritual pride: “Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD” (Jonah 2:8-9).

In response to this prayer of contrition and faith, on his Creator’s orders, the fish then vomits up Jonah on what was probably the shores of Israel. Researchers tell us that it must in all probability have been there because it was a three-day journey on foot from that point to the great city of Nineveh, which is in line with the statement in Jonah 3:3. Ancient cave drawings from this time indicate that Ninevite fishermen lived on the shores of the Mediterranean. This fact is important in illustrating the wonderful way in which God paves the way for His servants to fulfill His commands. The principal goddess worshiped by the Ninevites at that time was Ashtoreth, but they also deferred to the god Dagon who had a man’s upper body and a fish’s tail. Jonah, so the researchers say, would have been bleached completely white from his head to his toes by the acids present in the belly of the fish, and on the sudden appearance of this ghostly figure from the waves the fishermen may have been convinced that this was Dagon’s messenger and fallen flat in worship. These men would have fed and housed Jonah until he was recovered enough from his experience and then, as he was a stranger in those parts, given him directions on how to find their city. Of course, the biblical narrative doesn’t give us these details, but it is fascinating to theorize.

In any case, the biblical text is a masterful expression of understatement: “Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you’” (Jonah 3:1-2). This time, there is no arguing from Jonah, who, although he may be complying on the outside, is still stubbornly disobeying on the inside. He finally arrives at Nineveh and strides vengefully through the city announcing doom and destruction on the people in forty days because of their wickedness and their ignorance of the Lord and His ways. He then retires to a flimsy shelter he builds for himself, probably on a hill overlooking the city, and waits for the fireworks to start (Jonah 4:5). Result? Utterly and absolutely nothing! To his utter chagrin, he finds not just the people from the king down, but their animals as well, clothed in sackcloth and sprinkled with ashes as an indication of their absolute acceptance of the prophetic word sent to them by God, their deep repentance, and their fervent anxiety to get right with the

Lord (Jonah 3:5-10). This does not suit our friend Jonah at all and he flies into a fury at God and lets Him have no small piece of his mind (Jonah 4:1-3). God's answer is to cause a leafy gourd to grow up to help protect Jonah from the blazing sun, for which Jonah is somewhat sullenly grateful, and then to promptly remove it the next day! His reply to Jonah's bitter complaints about this is that if Jonah can have so much compassion on himself for his loss of comfort in spite of being aware of what a faulty child of God he is, then how much more compassion will Almighty God have on a people who are utterly ignorant of right from wrong (Jonah 4:9-11).

So that is Jonah—a very great comfort to all who fall flat at times when it comes to obedience and who run away from what they know God wants them to do. Jonah's story is also an object lesson to those who are possessed of a short fuse and those who are at times guilty of a superior attitude to the spiritually ignorant or immature. Like the Ninevites, many around us are in darkness, and but for the grace of God, so would we be. May we all by that grace read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Word!

QUESTION - [What is the sign of Jonah?](#) - GOTQUESTIONS.ORG [WATCH VIDEO](#)

ANSWER - The phrase "sign of Jonah" was used by Jesus as a typological metaphor for His future crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. Jesus answered with this expression when asked by the Pharisees for miraculous proof that He was indeed the Messiah. The Pharisees remained unconvinced of Jesus' claims about Himself, despite His having just cured a demon-possessed man who was both blind and mute. Shortly after the Pharisees accused Jesus of driving out demons by the power of Satan, they said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here" (Matthew 12:38–41).

To fully appreciate the answer that Jesus gave, we must go to the Old Testament book of Jonah. In its first chapter, we read that God commanded the prophet Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and warn its people that He was going to destroy it for its wickedness. Jonah disobediently ran from the Lord and headed for the city of Tarshish by boat. The Lord then sent a severe storm that caused the crew of the ship to fear for their lives. Jonah was soon thrown overboard and swallowed by a great fish where he remained for "three days and three nights" (Jonah 1:15–17). After the three-day period, the Lord caused the great fish to vomit Jonah out onto dry land (Jonah 2:10).

It is this three days that Jesus was referring to when He spoke of the sign of Jonah. Jesus had already been producing miracles that were witnessed by many. Jesus had just performed a great sign in the Pharisees' presence by healing a deaf man who was possessed of a demon. Rather than believe, they accused Jesus of doing this by the power of Satan. Jesus recognized their hardness of heart and refused to give them further proof of His identity. However, He did say that there would be one further sign forthcoming, His resurrection from the dead. This would be their final opportunity to be convinced.

Jesus' paralleling of the Pharisees with the people of Nineveh is telling. The people of Nineveh repented of their evil ways (Jonah 3:4–10) after hearing Jonah's call for repentance, while the Pharisees continued in their unbelief despite being eyewitnesses to the miracles of Jesus. Jesus was telling the Pharisees that they were culpable for their unbelief, given the conversion of the people of Nineveh, sinners who had received far less evidence than the Pharisees themselves had witnessed. Interestingly, from the time of Jonah's preaching, the people of Nineveh had 40 days to repent, and they did, sparing their city from destruction. From the time of Jesus' preaching, the people of Jerusalem had 40 years, but they did not repent, and Jerusalem was destroyed.

But what are we to make of the phrase "three days and three nights"? Was Jesus saying that He would be dead for three full 24-hour periods before He would rise from the dead? It does not appear so. The phrase "three days and three nights" need not refer to a literal 72-hour period. Rather, according to the Hebrew reckoning of time, the days could refer to three days in part or in whole. Jesus was probably crucified on a Friday (Mark 15:42). According to the standard reckoning, Jesus died at about 3:00 PM (Matthew 27:46) on Friday (day 1). He remained dead for all of Saturday (day 2) and rose from the dead early on Sunday morning (day 3). Attempts to place Jesus' death on Wednesday to accommodate a literal 72-hour period are probably unnecessary once we take into account the Hebrew method of reckoning of each day as beginning at sundown. So it seems that the expression "three days and three nights" was used as a figure of speech meant to signify any part of three days.

God would often use signs (or miracles) in the Bible to authenticate His chosen messenger. The Lord provided Moses with several miraculous signs in order to prove to others that he was appointed by God (Exodus 4:5–9; 7:8–10; 19:20). God sent down fire on Elijah's altar during Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:36–39). He performed this miracle to prove that the God of Israel was the one true God. Jesus Himself would perform many miracles (or "signs") to demonstrate His power over nature (Matthew 4:23; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 8:22–24; John 6:16–24). The "sign of Jonah" would turn out to be Jesus' greatest miracle of all.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead would be God's chief sign that Jesus was Israel's long-awaited Messiah (Acts 2:23–32) and establish Christ's claims to deity (Romans 1:3–4).

QUESTION - [Why did Jonah try to go to Tarshish instead of Nineveh?](#)GOTQUESTIONS.ORG

ANSWER - The word of the Lord came to Jonah with the command to preach against the wickedness of [Nineveh](#), the capital of the Assyrian Kingdom (Jonah 1:1-2). However, Jonah chose to flee from the presence of the Lord instead (Jonah 1:10). In his flight, Jonah left his home of Gath-hepher, near Nazareth in Israel (2 Kings 14:25), and traveled to Joppa (Jonah 1:3), a coastal city. There he boarded a ship bound for Tarshish, a city near Gibraltar in the southern part of Spain.

The contrast between Nineveh and Tarshish was vast. Nineveh was located east of the Tigris River in modern-day Iraq. It was more than 500 miles east of Jonah's hometown. Tarshish, in contrast, was west of Gath-hepher. In fact, Tarshish stood more than 2,500 miles from Israel in the opposite direction of Nineveh. It was the most remote destination available to Jonah. Jonah was trying to put as much distance as he could between himself and the Assyrians. Whatever happened to Nineveh, Jonah would not be there to see it.

Jonah's reason for running was that, quite simply, he did not like the Assyrians. Assyria was an idolatrous, proud, and ruthless nation bent on world conquest and had long been a threat to Israel. When God sent Jonah as a missionary to the capital, Nineveh, the prophet balked. At the end of his story, Jonah specifies his reason for resistance: "That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (Jonah 4:2). In other words, Jonah wanted Nineveh to be destroyed. He felt they deserved God's judgment. Jonah didn't want to see God's mercy extended to his enemies, and he knew in his heart that God's intention was to show mercy. Jonah discovered that God's salvation is available to all who repent, not just to the people of Jonah's choosing.

Jonah also discovered that no one can run from God. "'Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him?' declares the LORD. 'Do I not fill heaven and earth?' declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 23:24). Jonah's ill-advised attempt to escape from God was doomed to fail. He soon realized God was with him everywhere he went. Even in the stomach of the great fish, God knew where Jonah was and could hear his prayer (Jonah 2:2).

We are not to run *from* God but *to* Him. As Proverbs 18:10 says, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe."

Related Resources:

- [What was the practice of casting lots?](#)
- [What is the significance of Joppa in the Bible?](#)

QUESTION - [What is the significance of the city of Nineveh in the Bible?](#)

ANSWER - Nineveh is notable in the Bible as the capital city of [Assyria](#), a longtime enemy of Israel. Located in what is now modern Iraq, Nineveh is mentioned in Scripture as a place that turned away from sin through a warning by God, but which was later destroyed.

The first mention of Nineveh is in the [Table of Nations](#), which describes the many cities Nimrod built in Assyria including "Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah—which is the great city" (Genesis 10:11–12). Nineveh was known for its great wealth, power, and prestige. The Assyrians were notorious for their cruelty and idolatry (Nahum 3:19). Their capital, Nineveh, contained many temples, including one to Ishtar, the Assyrian goddess that some scholars believe was the namesake of Nineveh.

In 2 Kings 19:36 and Isaiah 37:37, Nineveh is depicted as the center of the Assyrian Empire and home to [King Sennacherib](#). Sennacherib led a successful campaign against many nations, but he failed to take Jerusalem due to the Lord's intervention. He returned to Nineveh and was later killed in the temple of the Assyrian god Nisrok (2 Kings 19:35–37).

Nineveh is well-known as the place where the [prophet Jonah](#) was sent by God to preach (Jonah 1:2). Jonah was reluctant to go, probably because of the Assyrians' great wickedness, and he tried to run from the Lord's command. God intercepted Jonah and sent him to the Ninevites by making a great fish swallow him (Jonah 1:3, 17). In Nineveh, Jonah proclaimed the coming judgment on that city (Jonah 2:10; 3:1–4). Instead of rejecting the Lord's warning, the Ninevites humbled themselves and repented of their sin, from

the king on down. The whole city fasted, put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes—they even dressed their animals in sackcloth (Jonah 3:5–9). Seeing that the city of Nineveh repented of their wickedness, “God relented concerning the judgment he had threatened them with and he did not destroy them” (Jonah 3:10, NET).

Jesus mentioned the Ninevites and their repentance, contrasting that response to the unbelief of the Pharisees and teachers of the law (Matthew 12:39–41). Rejecting Christ has no excuse: “The people of Nineveh will also stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for they repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah. Now someone greater than Jonah is here—but you refuse to repent” (Luke 11:32, NLT). Being far greater than the prophet Jonah, Jesus had shown Himself to be the Messiah, but the Jewish people still refused to believe in Him or repent of their sin (Matthew 12:22–24). The Ninevites had responded to God’s message delivered by a lesser man (Jonah 3:5), and here was God’s message delivered by the Son of God Himself.

Although Nineveh escaped destruction during the time of Jonah, a later generation still had to face a reckoning. The prophet Nahum prophesied of the destruction of the city because of the people’s evilness. [Nahum’s predictions](#) for Nineveh’s destruction came to pass when the Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians sacked the city in 612 BC. Nineveh’s walls had been breached by flood waters, allowing their attackers to enter the city. The city’s ruin was ultimately a product of God’s divine wrath (Nahum 1:8–10). The Lord declared judgment on the city because of Nineveh’s wickedness: “Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims!” (Nahum 3:1).

God’s judgment on Nineveh and the nation of Assyria as a whole was holy and just, given their cruelty, bloodshed, and idolatry (Nahum 1:2–3). The Ninevites during Jonah’s time, who believed God’s message and repented, will forever be remembered as a people who turned their hearts toward the Lord and believed despite their overall lack of knowledge about Him (Jonah 4:10–11). The Ninevites who were spared judgment should be a motivation for all people to seek God’s mercy and choose the path of humility and repentance.

Spurgeon - Travelling expenses on the two great roads - [click full sermon](#)

‘So he paid the fare thereof.’ Jonah 1:3

With all your kicking and rebelling, you will have to go where you were originally ordered to go; you might as well go at first—you will go with better grace; you will go with your master’s comfortable presence; but you will have to go one way or another. Many men have found this true. They have struggled against duty, and perhaps, year after year they have drawn back from it, finding miserable excuses for their consciences; but they never prospered in business, they could not get on in the world, they had trouble on trouble, and at last it came to this, they had to go back to the very place where they were ten or twenty years ago, and there they discharged the duty which they had been so long seeking to avoid, which had proved a burdensome stone unto them until they were rid of it by yielding to its demands. Now, my dear brother, do not play the Jonah, for you will have to pay the fare of it. If you know your duty, do it. I may be speaking very pointedly to some of you. ‘I should have to sever the bonds of many a fond connection.’ Do it for Christ’s sake. ‘I should have to leave the camp and go outside of it, take up a very heavy cross, and bear Christ’s reproach.’ You may as well do it now as by and by, for you will have to do it. ‘But,’ says one, ‘this business of mine—I have nothing left to live upon; I feel it is a bad business, but I do not like to give it up just yet.’ You will have to do so sooner or later, you may as well do it now, before, like Jonah, you have had to pay for your wit; remember that ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and a good understanding have all they that keep his commandments.’

Spurgeon - Runaway Jonah, and the convenient ship - see full sermon [Runaway Jonah, and the Convenient Ship](#)

‘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.’ Jonah 1:3

The three holy children would have escaped the fire and Daniel would never have been in the lion’s den, if they had been guided by what men call providences. But note other plain instances, such as Joseph. Joseph’s mistress is so kind to him and he is in such a splendid position as head of the household; it is hard for him to deny her desire and lose his place. Had not providence put him into his fortunate position? Shall he throw it away? When his mistress tempts him, shall he risk all? Would it not be better to think that providence plainly hinted that he should comply? Joseph was not so base as to reason in that fashion. He knows that adultery cannot be tolerated and so he flees from his mistress and leaves his garment in her hands, rather than remain near her seductions. Look at David, too. He is brought out by Abishai upon the field at night. There lies king Saul, sound asleep and Abishai says to David, ‘God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time.’ What a providence, was it not? The cruel foe was altogether in David’s hands and the executioner was eager to settle all further conflict by one fatal stroke! What could be clearer or simpler? Wonderful providence! Yet David never said a word as to providence, but replied, ‘Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against

the LORD's anointed, and be guiltless?' He therefore came away and left the king sleeping as he was. He would not follow opportunities, but would keep to the law of his God. I pray you, do the same, and if ever everything seems to lead up to wrong-doing and many circumstances unite to steer you in that direction, do not yield to them. Your guide in life is not a so-called providence, but an unquestionable precept of the Lord. Do as God bids you and do it at once.

C H Spurgeon - What meanest thou, O sleeper? - full sermon [What Meanest Thou, O Sleeper?](#)

'But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.' Jonah 1:5-6

Men can be so careless about the ruin of men's souls. Let us hear the cry of 'Fire! fire!' in the streets, and our heart is all in trepidation lest some poor creature should be burned alive; but we read of hell, and of the wrath to come, and seldom do our hearts palpitate with any compassionate trembling and fear. If we are on board a vessel, and the shrill cry is heard, 'Man overboard!' whoever hears of a passenger wrapping his overcoat around him, and lying down upon a seat to contemplate the exertions of others? But in the church, when we hear of thousands of sinners sinking in the floods of ruin, we behold professed Christians wrapping themselves up in their own security, and calmly looking upon the labours of others, but not even lifting a finger to do any part of the work themselves. If we heard tomorrow in our streets the awful cry, more terrible than fire, the cry of 'Bread! bread! bread!' and saw starving women lifting up their perishing children, would we not empty out our stores? Who among us would not spend our substance to let the poor ravenous creatures satisfy the pangs of hunger? And yet, here is the world perishing for lack of knowledge. Here we have them at our doors crying for the bread of heaven, and how many there are that hoard their substance for avarice, give their time to vanity, devote their talents to self-aggrandisement, and centre their thoughts only on the world or the flesh! Oh! could you once see with your eyes a soul sinking into hell, it would be such a spectacle that you would work night and day, and count your life too short and your hours too few for the plucking of brands from the burning.

C H Spurgeon - Labour in vain - full sermon [Labour in Vain](#)

'Jonah 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. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not.' Jonah 1:12-13

Jesus came down into this ship of our common humanity to deliver it from tempest. The vessel had been tossed about on all sides by the waves of divine wrath. Men had been tugging and toiling at the oar; year after year philosopher and teacher had been seeking to establish peace with God; victims had been offered and rivers of blood had flowed, and even the first-born of man's body had been offered up; but the deep was still tempestuous. But Jesus came, and they took him and cast him overboard. Out of the city they dragged him; 'Away with him, away with him, it is not fit that he should live.' As he, Jesus dies, there is a calm. Deep was the peace which fell upon the earth that dreadful day; and joyous is that calm which yet shall come as the result of the casting out of that representative man who 'suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.' Brethren I wish I had suitable words with which I could fitly describe the peace which comes to a human heart when we learn to see Jesus cast into the sea of divine wrath on our account. Conscience accuses no longer. Judgment now decides for the sinner instead of against him. Memory can look back upon past sins, with sorrow for the sin it is true, but yet with no dread of any penalty to come. It is a blessed thing for a man to know that he cannot be punished, that heaven and earth may shake, but he cannot be punished for his sin.

RESULTS OF A BARNA SURVEY:

Among Christians:

- 61% knew that Jonah is a book of the Bible
- 27% said it is not,
- 12% had no idea.

Among non-Christians in the survey:

- 29% knew that the Book of Jonah could be found in the Bible
 - 27% said it could not,
 - 34% were not sure.
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Many people find it difficult to take the Book of Jonah seriously because they find it hard to believe that a man could be swallowed by a whale and live to tell the story. The following account of a modern-day man who underwent a similar experience and did live to tell his story may be of help. The following account is taken from the Princeton Theological Review, Vol. 25, 1927, p. 636:

In February 1891, the whaling ship Star of the East was in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands and the lookout sighted a large sperm whale three miles away. Two boats were launched and in a short time one of the harpooners was enabled to spear the fish. The second boat attacked the whale, but was upset by a lash of its tail and the men thrown into the sea, one man being drowned, and another, James Bartley, having disappeared, could not be found. The whale was killed and in a few hours was lying by the ship's side and the crew were busy with axes and spades removing the blubber. They worked all day and part of the night. Next morning, they attached some tackle to the stomach which was hoisted on the deck. The sailors were startled by something in it which gave spasmodic signs of life, and inside was found the missing sailor doubled up and unconscious. He was laid on the deck and treated to a bath of sea water which soon revived him.... He remained two weeks a raving lunatic.... At the end of the third week he had entirely recovered from the shock and resumed his duties.

Bartley affirms that he would probably have lived inside his house of flesh until he starved, for he lost his senses through fright and not from lack of air. He remembers the sensation of being thrown out of the boat into the sea.... He was then encompassed by a great darkness and he felt he was slipping along a smooth passage of some sort that seemed to move and carry him forward. The sensation lasted but a short time and then he realized he had more room. He felt about him and his hands came in contact with a yielding, slimy substance that seemed to shrink from his touch. It finally dawned upon him that he had been swallowed by the whale.... He could easily breathe, but the heat was terrible. It was not a scorching, stifling nature, but it seemed to open the pores of his skin and draw out his vitality.... His skin was exposed to the action of the gastric juice ... face, neck and hands were bleached to a deadly whiteness and took on the appearance of parchment ... (and) never recovered its natural appearance ... (though otherwise) his health did not seem affected by his terrible experience.¹⁵²³

The sea wrought, and was tempestuous Jonah 1:11

Sin in the soul is like Jonah in the ship.

It turns the smoothest water into a tempestuous sea.

Too Close to Ignore

God is so close you can't get away from Him. That means He's near you today. I don't know what you are facing, but He's right beside you—and because He's omniscient, He knows what's going on. He's not a "do nothing" God.

A man in Scripture tried to run from God. Jonah was a prophet, a man whose job it was to carry the truth of God to people who needed to hear it. But when God told him to go to the Ninevites, Israel's cruel enemies, Jonah didn't want to do it. So Jonah basically said no to God and bought a ticket to go to Tarshish in the opposite direction (Jonah 1:1–3).

Jonah thought he had run away from God, but he forgot something. You can't run from God without running through Him and winding up running toward Him. Jonah got on that ship, but God took care of the problem by ordering the sea to track Jonah down. A fierce storm erupted on the sea. The waves rose and pointed a finger right at Jonah.

Jonah was trying to go two thousand miles west to Tarshish when he should have gone just five hundred miles east to Nineveh. When you run from God, the trip is always longer and harder than it would be if you stayed with Him.

But that was just the beginning. After the sailors tossed Jonah overboard, God sent him a "whale-o-gram," a fish to pick him up out of the water. God brought Jonah back and finally got him to Nineveh. The people repented, but Jonah wasn't happy about it and took off again, going out east of the city to pout over God's sparing of Israel's enemies (Jonah 4:5).

What a lineup God used to go after Jonah this time: a plant, a worm, and a "scorching east wind" (4:8). It's all at His command, and God can tell the waves or the wind what to do with you when you get to where you think you have moved beyond His presence. (Tony Evans in his discussion of the Omnipresence of God - Theology You Can Count On)

Jonah 1 - JONAH ROSE UP TO FLEE- Now, I very commonly meet with persons who say, 'I felt that I must do so and so. It came upon me that I must do so and so.' I am afraid of these impulses—very greatly afraid of them. People may do right under their power, but they will spoil what they do by doing it out of mere impulse, and not because the action was right in itself. - Spurgeon

Many people take their inner impulses and say, "The LORD told me this or that." This is dangerous even when it doesn't seem so immediately. "What have you to do with the devices and desires of your own hearts? Are these to be a law to you? I pray you, be not

among the foolish ones who will be carried about with every wind of fancy and perversity. ‘To the law and to the testimony,’ should be your cry, and you may not appeal to inward movements and impulses.” (Spurgeon)

“All the while the ship sailed smoothly over the sea, Jonah forgot his God. You could not have distinguished him from the veriest heathen on board. He was just as bad as they were.” (Spurgeon)

Jonah might have wondered: “I can go to Tarshish if I want to. I paid the fare. I’m not a stowaway.” Yet, “Apologies for disobedience are mere refuges of lies. If you do a wrong thing in the rightest way in which it can be done, it does not make it right. If you go contrary to the Lord’s will, even though you do it in the most decent, and, perhaps, in the most devout manner, it is, nevertheless, sinful, and it will bring you under condemnation.” (Spurgeon)

“Jonah was asleep amid all that confusion and noise; and, O Christian man, for you to be indifferent to all that is going on in such a world as this, for you to be negligent of God’s work in such a time as this is just as strange. The devil alone is making noise enough to wake all the Jonahs if they only want to awake ... All around us there is tumult and storm, yet some professing Christians are able, like Jonah, to go to sleep in the sides of the ship.” (Spurgeon)

Spurgeon preached a sermon with four wonderful points based on the actions of the crew in this chapter.

1. Sinners, when they are tossed upon the sea of conviction, make desperate efforts to save themselves
2. The fleshly efforts of awakened sinners must inevitably fail
3. The soul’s sorrow will continue to increase as long as it relies on its own efforts
4. The way of safety for sinners is to be found in the sacrifice of another on their behalf

Jonah

Start Where You Are: Agreeing That Healing Takes Time

To start fresh, to start over, to start anything, you have to know where you are. To get somewhere else, it’s necessary to know where you’re standing right now.

That’s true in a department store or in a big church, on a freeway or on a college campus . . . or in life, for that matter. Seldom does anybody “just happen” to end up on a right road. The process of redirecting our lives is often painful, slow, and even confusing. Occasionally, it seems unbearable.

Consider Jonah, one of the most prejudiced, bigoted, openly rebellious, and spiritually insensitive prophets in Scripture. Other prophets ran to the Lord; he ran from Him. Others declared the promises of God with fervor and zeal. Not Jonah. He was about as motivated as a six-hundredpound grizzly in mid-January.

Somewhere down the line, the prophet got his inner directions cross-wired. He wound up, of all places, in a ship on the Mediterranean Sea bound for a place named Tarshish. That was due west. God had told him Nineveh. That was due east. (That’s like flying from Los Angeles to Berlin by way of Honolulu.) But Jonah never got to Tarshish, as you may remember. Through a traumatic chain of events, Jonah began to get his head together in the digestive tract of a gigantic fish.

What a place to start! Sloshing around in the seaweed and juices of the monster’s stomach, fishing for a match to find his way out, Jonah took a long, honest look at his short, dishonest life. He yelled for mercy. He recited psalms. He promised the Lord that he would keep his vow and get back on target. Only one creature on earth felt sicker than Jonah—the fish, in whose belly Jonah bellowed. Up came the prophet, who hit the road running—toward Nineveh.

THE BLESSING OF NEW One of the most encouraging things about new years, new weeks, new days, and new opportunities is the word new.

Friend Webster reveals its meaning: “refreshed, different from one of the same that has existed previously; unfamiliar.”

Best of all, it’s a place to start again.

To catch a fresh vision.

To change directions.

To begin a new phase of your life’s journey.

But that requires knowing where you are. It requires taking time to honestly admit your present condition. It means facing the music, standing alone inside the fish and coming to terms with whatever needs attention, nosing around in the seaweed for a match. Before you find your way out, you must determine where you are. Only once that is accomplished are you ready to start (or restart) your journey.

Consider what the prophet Joel writes to all the Jonahs (or Joans) who may have picked up this book. God is speaking: “I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the creeping locust, the stripping locust, and the gnawing locust” (Joel 2:25).

If God can take a disobedient prophet, turn him around, and set him on fire spiritually, He can do the same with you. He is a

Specialist at making something useful and beautiful out of something broken and confused.

Where are you, friend? Start there. Openly and freely declare your need to the One who cares deeply. Don't hide a thing. Show God all of those locust bites. He's ready to heal every one . . . if you're ready to run toward that Nineveh called tomorrow.¹ (Charles Swindoll- Start Where You Are)

MISSIONARY DROPOUTS - How about those notable missionary dropouts, Jonah and John Mark? Jonah never really dropped in, you know; he was a refugee from the will of God from Day One. After he made that curious amphibious landing there on the shores, he hurried to Nineveh and preached in the greatest revival of all time. An entire city—the capital of a mighty empire—repented. Every human being in that vast municipality fasted and prayed. Even the animals were required to fast. Think of it! Every man, woman, and child in that great metropolis donned sackcloth, including the animals. After he had fled from God, rebelling against God's clearly-stated will, that old prophet had all kinds of broken piñons (and wet ones, too). Yet God said, "Jonah, I still want to use you. Let's get back on track." And Jonah went on to lead a spiritual awakening that shook the ancient world. (Charles Swindoll - Great Lives: Moses)

Norman Geisler - JONAH 1:1—Is the Book of Jonah fact or fiction? - [When Critics Ask](#)

PROBLEM: Traditional Bible scholarship has held that the Book of Jonah records events that actually took place in history. However, because of the literary style of the book and the amazing adventures that are said to have befallen the prophet Jonah, many modern scholars propose that it is not a book of actual historical events, but a fictional story designed to communicate a message. Did the events of Jonah actually happen or not?

SOLUTION: There is good evidence that the events recorded in the Book of Jonah are literal historical events that took place in the life of the prophet Jonah.

First, the tendency to deny the historicity of Jonah stems from an antsupernatural bias. If miracles are possible, there is no real reason to deny that Jonah is historical.

Second, Jonah and his prophetic ministry is mentioned in the historical book of 2 Kings (14:25). If his supernatural prediction is mentioned in a historical book, why should the historical nature of his prophetic book be rejected?

Third, the most devastating argument against the denial of the historical accuracy of Jonah is found in Matthew 12:40. In this passage Jesus predicts His own burial and resurrection, and provides the doubting scribes and Pharisees the sign that they demanded. The sign is the experience of Jonah. Jesus says, "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." If the tale of Jonah's experience in the belly of the great fish was only fiction, then this provided no prophetic support for Jesus' claim. The point of making reference to Jonah is that if they did not believe the story of Jonah being in the belly of the fish, then they would not believe the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. As far as Jesus was concerned, the historical fact of His own death, burial, and resurrection was on the same historical ground as Jonah in the belly of the fish. To reject one was to cast doubt on the other (cf. John 3:12). Likewise, if they believed one, they should believe the other.

Fourth, Jesus went on to mention the significant historical detail. His own death, burial, and resurrection was the supreme sign that verified His claims. When Jonah preached to the unbelieving Gentiles, they repented. But, here was Jesus in the presence of His own people, the very people of God, and yet they refused to believe. Therefore, the men of Nineveh would stand up in judgment against them, "because they [the men of Nineveh] repented at the preaching of Jonah" (Matt. 12:41). If the events of the Book of Jonah were merely parable or fiction, and not literal history, then the men of Nineveh did not really repent, and any judgment upon the unrepentant Pharisees would be unjust and unfair. Because of the testimony of Jesus, we can be sure that Jonah records literal history.

Finally, there is archaeological confirmation of a prophet named Jonah whose grave is found in northern Israel. In addition, some ancient coins have been unearthed with an inscription of a man coming out of a fish's mouth.

QUOTES FROM CHARLES SWINDOLL RELATED TO JONAH

The rebellious prophet **Jonah** must have wondered, Can I find any place that will remove me from God? He found out the hard way that the answer is an emphatic "No!"

In Scripture, such failures happened time and again. When did Bathsheba cross the gaze of David? At a time when he had not known defeat in battle. From the time he took the kingdom until he fell with Bathsheba, David had not known defeat—politically, militarily, or personally. **When did Jonah fall into self-pity?** After the greatest revival that had ever swept over a city. When did

Joseph receive that temptation from Mrs. Potiphar? Soon after he had been promoted under Mr. Potiphar's leadership and had been granted free run of the house. Frankly, some of my most discouraging times occur on Mondays. I can't explain why. After a great Sunday, when we've been uplifted in one service after another, when we've heard testimonies and words of encouragement, when we've sung, had fellowship, worshiped and really enjoyed the Lord together, I sink into discouragement come Monday. I've also found when I am approaching a tremendous, mountaintop experience, I tend to slump into a low tide. Maybe you too have found this to be true.

Elijah was an heroic prophet, without question. He was also a man of great humility, as we have seen. But let's not forget that he was just a man—a human being, subject to the human condition, as we all are. He suffered discouragement, despondency, and depression. On one occasion, he couldn't shake it. If you are a student of Scripture, you know that such feelings were not uncommon among many of those we would consider successful men of God. Moses once became so blue and discouraged that he asked God to take his life. **Jonah, after the great revival at Nineveh, did the very same thing.** Paul “despaired even of life” at a certain point in his Asian ministry (2 Corinthians 1:8).

I suppose each one of us would have our favorite biblical film clips. Being a preacher, I can think of several original “preacher scenes” I would find extremely interesting—like when the prophet Jeremiah wept through a few sermons he preached, or when **Jonah made that first amphibious landing and instantly hightailed it to Nineveh.** Think of those men of Scripture who failed the Lord. On the heels of the greatest revival in history, Jonah defected. Elijah begged God to take his life only hours after he had come down from Mount Carmel, where he had reached great popularity and power in the eyes of the people. Our most vulnerable moment is when we are enjoying times of prosperity. God gave the children of Israel the fruit of the land to eat, and they defiled it and made it an abomination. Warning: When you are making top grades in school, you're most vulnerable. When your family seems the closest and the strongest, you're most vulnerable. When your business has reached a level you never dreamed possible, that's a vulnerable state. Fellow pastor, when you are enjoying God's blessings and the church is growing and your fame is spreading, you're vulnerable. Be on guard! That is when things like boredom and complacency set in. If you have served in the military, you know that the most vulnerable time for an attack is right after a battle has been won. The tendency is to sit down to a feast and take it easy. I was taught during my days in the Marine Corps that the correct maneuver immediately following victory is to set up a “hasty defense.” You instantly establish communications with your forces in order to handle that early period of victory. It's tougher to remain victorious than it is to become victorious!

RAW TRUTH FOR REAL LIFE One of the characteristics I find most attractive about the Bible is its raw realism. When God paints portraits of His servants in the Scriptures, He resists airbrushing away all the warts and blemishes. Moses was a murderer. David has adultery and hypocrisy on his record. **Jonah was a proud and stubborn prophet, who nearly missed an opportunity of a lifetime because of his ugly bigotry.** Jacob had deceitful ways. Abraham lied, more than once. Peter waffled when the pressure was on. Even John the Baptizer struggled with doubt. So did Thomas. So we shouldn't be shocked that Paul and Barnabas had their conflict.

You cannot continue life as usual or stay where you are, and go with God at the same time. That is true throughout Scripture. Noah could not continue life as usual and build an ark at the same time. Abram could not stay in Ur or Haran and father a nation in Canaan. Moses could not stay on the back side of the desert herding sheep and stand before Pharaoh at the same time. David had to leave his sheep to become the king. Amos had to leave the sycamore trees in order to preach in Israel. **Jonah had to leave his home and overcome a major prejudice in order to preach in Nineveh.** Peter, Andrew, James, and John had to leave their fishing businesses to follow Jesus. Matthew had to leave his tax collector's booth to follow Jesus. Saul (later Paul) had to completely change directions in life in order to be used of God to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

God constantly uses the lives of Bible characters to teach us, to encourage us, to warn us. Who can forget the impact of the truths lived out in the lives of David and Esther, of Moses and **Jonah**, of Peter and Paul? It's impossible to leave truth in the theoretical realm when you see it revealed in the lives of real-life men and women. That is what these divinely inspired biographies do; they distill truth and weave it into the fabric of everyday living. God's training manual is full of lives that inspire and instruct. Romans 15:4 states, “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (emphasis added). This reference to “earlier times” encompasses all the truths written in the Old Testament. And if I read this verse correctly, there are two basic reasons God has allowed us to have the Old Testament available for study and application: first, for present instruction, and second, for future hope. God has given us this information so that our minds can learn the truth about Him and about life, and so that we will be encouraged to persevere in the future.

Following the Spirit's leading is reality, not theory. We have discussed some of the prerequisites and requirements for following the Spirit's lead; now comes the bottom line: we have to do it in the real world. Again, Henry Blackaby gives some good advice about following the Spirit's lead in his fine book *Experiencing God*. He said it almost always begins with a “crisis of belief.” Following God's leading will demand a change. You cannot continue life as usual or stay where you are and go with God at the same time. Faith and

action are like twins; they go together. Imagine how hard it must have been for Moses to combine faith and action when he took that first step into the Red Sea. And as he did, God opened up a dry path through the sea. Imagine the step of faith Noah took in quitting his job and building an ark. **Jonah had to leave his home and overcome a major prejudice in order to preach in Nineveh** The disciples Peter, Andrew, James, and John had to walk away from their fishing businesses to follow Jesus. The list of examples is long. In every generation, the people who wanted to follow God went through major crises of faith and adjustment. Blackaby wrote:

The kind of assignments God gives in the Bible are always God sized. They are always beyond what people can do because He wants to demonstrate His nature, His strength, His provision, His kindness to His people and to a watching world. That is the only way the world will come to know Him. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that “without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” Following Christ means that we must believe God is who He says He is and He will do what He says He will do. That sounds so elementary, but it has profound ramifications.

THE PERIL OF DISCOURAGEMENT AND DEPRESSION Even though you may be a godly person, you can hear that kind of depressing stuff only so long before it begins to demoralize your spirit, dragging you down. You want to walk with God, but you're with a few people who just won't. Invariably they're vocal, petty, and negative. They don't want to go God's way, they want to go their way. And they're always looking back to how great things used to be (before you came along). Dr. Howard Hendricks used to say, “Those good old times are what created these bad new times that we're having these days.” My faithful mentor is right on target, isn't he? We like to look back on those “good old times,” and we don't even want to give the challenging new times a chance. The rabble never realizes that. Moses heard this sad bunch gripe and complain and grumble. He heard it continually. He heard it so much he wanted to gag. “Now Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, each man at the doorway of his tent; and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly, and Moses was displeased” (v. 10). Can't you see Moses walking up and down those lines of tents, listening to the constant complaining? There's griping. There's crying. There are frowns and long faces, wagging heads and grim countenances. And before long it begins to wear the old man down. The text says he was “displeased.” Now, I wish I could say that Moses passed all these perils with flying colors. Three out of four, he did. But here's the one he just didn't handle. I can identify with him. I really understand. Moses wanted so much for his people to see the God he had seen in the burning bush, to trust the cloud that moved unerringly toward Canaan, but they didn't. He wanted them to develop a heavenly appetite that delights in heavenly food, but they wouldn't. Finally, they wore him down, and he became discouraged. It should be no surprise that we hear him blurt this out to God: Why have You been so hard on Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all this people on me? Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who brought them forth, that You should say to me, “Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant”. . . ? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me, saying, “Give us meat. . . !” I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. So if You are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once [he's really low, isn't he?], if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness. (vv. 11–15, brackets mine) Can you understand how he felt? Have you ever been that low? The deeper you commit yourself, the heavier the burden. The faster the pace, the heavier the anchor. Listen, the greater the dreams God may give you, the more persistent will be the rabble who puts them down. They will complain, and fuss, and fume. And if you listen to 'em long enough, you'll get downright depressed. I once knew a young man who taught in a West Los Angeles junior high school. He was trying to teach math to a group of kids that included a “rabble” who didn't want to learn anything. He told me, “Pastor Chuck, what I'm really doing is teaching a class on discipline. And in the meantime I throw in a little math.” He told me he once spent part of a class getting hold of a kid, finally tackling him on a desk. “I wanted to tell him some things,” he said. That actually happened in his classroom. Do you think that teacher ever faced discouragement? He had a Master's degree in mathematics, was passionate about his subject, and knew how to teach. But he spent most of his time putting out fires unrelated to his calling. Instead of wrestling with formulas and equations, he found himself wrestling with unruly students. May I give you a tip? (No extra charge for this insight.) As soon as a group gets large enough, the rabble will show up. As that Bible class you teach increases in size, sooner or later you'll get the rabble. You go to a Bible school, a seminary, a Christian college, you'll find the rabble there. You visit a church of any size, you will find the rabble. You start a church, it's only a matter of time. It's true of groups in the church, Sunday school classes, choirs. No matter what, when you get a large enough group together, you will find the rabble. That means that when you want your life to please the Lord, when you want very much to count for Christ, sooner or later you will be rubbing shoulders with the rabble, with those who don't want to please God at all. And if you don't watch it, you will let them get the best of you, and you will succumb to discouragement and depression. One of the greatest battles I faced as a seminary student involved the rabble. I was naive enough to believe that the men who taught us were all men of God. I was strange enough to think that if you really applied yourself in study, it would be worth it all. But a small percentage of my fellow students couldn't have cared less about their studies. I had to battle discouragement around those guys. Now, I wasn't the super saint who never sinned and who came through life untarnished. But my goals clashed with a number of fellow students, and we had some confrontations. It was unpleasant, even depressing. If you focus on those confrontations, however, you will stay discouraged. That's what happened to Moses. He heard weeping behind one too many tent flaps and finally whimpered, “Lord, take my life.” That's the ultimate expression of depression. An exhausted Elijah once muttered similar words beneath a scrawny tree in the wilderness. **Jonah said the same thing under a withered vine outside the walls of Nineveh** (Jonah 4:1-3). Both were ready to quit; both asked the Lord for a quick death. But the Lord refused to take the life of Elijah or Jonah, and He wasn't about to take Moses' life, either. But He did take care of the problem. Again Moses had been

trying to do too much, so the Lord spread out his work load. You can read it for yourself in Numbers 11:16-25. God took care of his need. But as soon as that peril exited stage right, another one emerged stage left. Right on the heels of the first came the second. That's how it is when we determine to walk with God. The perils can come one after the other. (Great Lives: Moses)

MIRACLES - Gary Richmond said, "If they were happening every day, they wouldn't be called miracles, they'd be called regulars." I think that's a great statement. Miracles aren't regulars. They're every once in a while, maybe once in a lifetime, maybe twice. A parking place at Christmas time in Nordstroms' parking lot isn't a miracle. (I know it seems like a minor miracle, but it isn't a miracle, you know.) The fact that your toothache stops hurting isn't a miracle ... or that your appendectomy scar isn't large. That isn't a miracle; that's a very good surgeon. Jonah swallowed by a fish? I'd believe it if Scripture said Jonah swallowed the fish! It's not difficult to believe if you believe in a God of miracles.—Billy Graham (Quoted in Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes)

THINK IT OVER - God's Word is filled with examples of those who believed God and "commenced prayer." David certainly did. "I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay; And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm" (Ps. 40:1–2).

Paul and Silas experienced the same thing in that ancient Philippian prison when all seemed hopeless (Acts 16:25–26). And it was from the deep that **Jonah** cried for help. Choking on salt water and engulfed by the Mediterranean currents, the prodigal prophet called out his distress: "Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, 'I called out of my distress to the LORD, and He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; Thou didst hear my voice. . . . All Thy breakers and billows passed over me. . . . But Thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God'" (Jonah 2:1–6). **Often it is the crucible of crisis that energizes our faith. Think it over.** (Day By Day with Charles Swindoll)

Jonah 1 - When God Cleans House

November 19, 2011

Read: Jonah 1

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. —Ephesians 4:31

God did some fall housecleaning this week. He sent a mighty wind through our neighborhood that made the trees tremble and shake loose their dead branches. When it finished, I had a mess to clean up.

In my own life, God sometimes works in a similar way. He will send or allow stormy circumstances that shake loose the "lifeless branches" I've been refusing to release. Sometimes it's something that once was good, like an area of ministry, but is no longer bearing fruit. More often it's something that's not good, like a bad habit I've slid into or a stubborn attitude that prevents new growth.

The Old Testament prophet Jonah discovered what can happen when one refuses to get rid of a stubborn attitude. His hatred for the Ninevites was stronger than his love for God, so God sent a great storm that landed Jonah in a giant fish (Jonah 1:4,17). God preserved the reluctant prophet in that unlikely place and gave him a second chance to obey (Jonah 2:10; 3:1-3).

The lifeless limbs in my yard caused me to think of attitudes that God expects me to dispose of. Paul's letter to the Ephesians lists some of them: bitterness, anger, and evil speech (Eph 4:31). When God shakes things up, we need to get rid of what He shakes loose.

Lord, give me a listening heart and help me to cooperate with You when You point out changes that need to be made in my life. I want to honor You and please You. Amen.

Christ's cleansing power can remove the most stubborn stain of sin.

By Julie Ackerman Link

Don't Go Down There

This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. —2 John 1:6

Today's Scripture : John 14:15-24

In his book *Lessons Learned Early*, Jerry Jenkins tells a story about his freshman year in college. It was 1968, a year of tremendous political and social upheaval in the US.

Riots had broken out in many major cities. From the rooftop of his dorm in Chicago, Jerry heard sirens and saw fires burning.

Students had been told to stay on campus, but Jerry wanted to see what was happening.

As he ran toward a store that was blazing a few blocks away, a police car pulled up beside him. "Don't go down there," the officer warned.

Jerry waited till the car pulled away and then kept walking. The officer returned. This time he made it more clear as he repeated, "Don't go down there"—and leveled a shotgun out the window.

Our rebellious or willful streaks often lead to unhappy outcomes. In anger, Moses struck the rock to get water rather than just speak to it as God had commanded. He forfeited the privilege of entering the Promised Land with his people (Num. 20:7-12). Jonah disobeyed an order to go to Nineveh and was given 3 days to think about his choice—inside a big fish (Jonah 1).

What does it take for us to obey Him? Will we obey simply because we love Him? (John 14:15,21).

By: Cindy Hess Kasper (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Jonah 1:1-10

January 23, 2007

Running From God

READ: Jonah 1:1-10

Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. —Jonah 1:3

Why do people run away from God? Is it because of anger, disappointment, despair, disobedience, or a web of rebellion woven from our own desires?

The book of Jonah looks at a prophet who rejected God's call to deliver His word to the people of Nineveh. In the first chapter (vv.3,10), we read that Jonah deliberately headed for Tarshish to run away from the Lord. He knew exactly where he was going and why. After being given a second chance (3:1-2), Jonah delivered God's message but reacted angrily when the Lord spared the repentant city (3:10–4:2).

The book ends with the Lord speaking to Jonah about His compassion: "Should I not pity Nineveh?" (4:11). But there's no indication that the disgruntled prophet changed his attitude. The people of Nineveh repented; Jonah did not.

The story of Jonah should cause each of us to be honest about our feelings toward the Lord. Do we harbor resentment for His leniency toward people we feel deserve judgment? Have we forgotten that God has forgiven us? Are we ready to obey His call and leave the outcome to Him?

The story of Jonah illuminates our reactions to God and measures our willingness to trust Him when we can't understand His ways. —David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread](#). Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

Sometimes it's hard to trust the Lord
When you don't understand;
But fight the urge to run from Him—
Reach out and take His hand. —Sper

He pleases God best who trusts Him most

Jonah 1:1-11 - **AN ILLUSTRATION**

The second wireless operator of the Titanic said: "In the first place the Californian had called me with an 'ice report' about five o'clock. I was rather busy, and I did not take it. They did not call me again, but transmitted it to the Baltic, I took it down as it was transmitted to the Baltic about half an hour afterward. I was doing some writing at the time, sir, writing some accounts on the table. I continued to work on the accounts for about thirty minutes. Then I took the report she sent to the Baltic. It was an 'ice report,' so I knew it was the same she had for me. I acknowledged it direct to the Californian. It was that the Californian had passed three large icebergs, and gave their latitude and longitude.

"I wrote it on a slip of paper and handed it to the officer on the bridge."

"Did you make a record of it?"

"No, sir. If we made a record of all these messages we could not begin to make up our accounts."

Bride said he did not recall the name of the officer on the bridge to whom he gave the warning.

Christians are too busy with their daily toil to take warnings. Sometimes the warnings are in a sermon, in the Scripture, or they come while we are praying. We soon forget them.

Second Officer Lightoller of the Titanic told the Senate Investigating Committee that Capt. Smith and the other officers expected to encounter ice at 11 o'clock on the Sunday night of the disaster, or forty minutes before the ship struck; that Capt. Smith showed him a message of warning. He himself worked out the probable position of the ice, and he in turn warned Chief Officer Murdock. He also cautioned the lookout men to keep a sharp watch ahead for ice. Publisher Unknown. ([Robert Neighbour](#))

Jonah 1: AN ILLUSTRATION

"The vicarious atonement for sin accomplished by the Cross of Jesus Christ is everywhere taught in the Scriptures by symbol, by direct teaching, by event and by the expression of believers. The symbols of the Old Testament persistently tell of a Sin-bearer who carries the load of sin for men. Old Testament Poet and Prophet teach the covering up of sin, and in most exalted language tell of Him who was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, upon whom was the chastisement of our peace, and by whose stripes we are healed.

John the Baptist pointed to Christ as the "Lamb * * which taketh away the sin of the world." Our Lord declares He gave His life "a ransom for many," and He teaches unmistakably that His death was not a defeat, but a voluntary sacrifice for the life of His people. "I lay down My life for the sheep." "Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father" (John 10:15-18). * * *

This great truth of Scripture has ever been an offense to sinful men, although for them it is the most precious truth ever given. "Christ crucified, unto the Jews" (the ritualists) "a stumblingblock," and "unto the Greeks" (the rationalises) "foolishness," "but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. The Presbyterian. ([Robert Neighbour](#))

James Smith -

THE COST OF HIDING FROM GOD - What is the book of Jonah about? It's not about fish, for the great fish is mentioned only four times. Jonah is named eighteen times, but the Lord God is mentioned thirty-seven times! The book is about God and how he deals with people who want their own way and therefore refuse to obey his will. Surely Jonah knew that he could not run away from God. "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?" (Ps. 139:7). If we ever attempt to hide from God, the consequence will be painful.

The direction of life will be down. Jonah went down to the seaport of Joppa and then went down into the ship (Jonah 1:3), and then went down into the lowest part of the ship where he went to sleep (Jonah 1:5). You would think that the combination of his guilty conscience plus the storm would have kept him awake, but he slept soundly. Often when we disobey God, we enjoy a period of quiet confidence that lulls us into a false peace. This is one of Satan's tricks. But that was not the end. Though the Gentile sailors tried to spare Jonah, he insisted that they throw him into the sea, so he went down into the sea where a great fish was awaiting him. The fish swallowed Jonah, who went down into its stomach. Down, down, down, down! Jonah had a message from God that would save the lives of nearly a million people in Nineveh, but being a patriotic Jew, Jonah wanted the Ninevites to be killed.

The circumstances of life will be stormy. God called the Jewish people to be a blessing to the world (Gen. 12:1-3), but every time they disobeyed God, they brought trouble instead of blessing. The name Jonah means dove, but Jonah brought to the ship anything but peace. One child of God out of the will of God can cause more trouble than a troop of unconverted people. Once Jonah was on his rebellious way, the Lord could no longer speak to him but had to use the storm to get his attention. He also lost his prayer power (Jonah 1:6) and his testimony before the Gentile sailors (vv. 7-9), and by seeking to run away from the Lord, he almost lost his life and endangered the lives of the crew. But once Jonah was off the ship, the storm ceased! I have seen families go from storms to blessed quietness once the sin in the home was confessed and forsaken—and it happens in churches too.

The hope of life will be repentance. Jonah probably hoped for a quick death, but God had other plans. It took Jonah three days to get around to praying and seeking forgiveness, but once he repented, God rescued him and put him back on his feet on dry land. Jonah's prayer is a composite of quotations from the book of Psalms, so the Scriptures he memorized came in handy. When the fish vomited Jonah out on dry land, the people who saw it must have been amazed and alarmed, and the news quickly traveled to Nineveh. When Jonah showed up, they were ready to listen, repented of their sins, and were spared judgment. The Lord gave Jonah another chance, just as he did with Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, and Peter.

Only a gracious God such as the One we worship can take a stubborn, disobedient servant and use him to bring spiritual awakening to a great city. Jesus used Jonah's experience to picture his own resurrection and to emphasize the importance of hearing the Word of God and repenting (Matt. 12:38–41; 16:4). I trust you are not running from God. If you are, change directions and run to him and he will give you a new beginning. "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here." - Matthew 12:41 (**From recommended resource** - Warren Wiersbe - [Old Testament Words for Today: 100 Devotional Reflections](#))

THREE STORMS From D L Moody's Bible

1. The storm of Jonah 2, which was sent as a punishment against Jonah for his sin, ceasing only when he was cast into the sea. Type of Jesus who could say, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." Ps. 42:7.
 2. The storm in Acts 27, which did not cease, but a message from the Lord was sent to comfort His people in the midst of it. Picture of believers who in the midst of fierce tossings are encouraged by His word, knowing that they are "drawing near to some country" (Acts 27:27), "that is, an heavenly." Heb. 11:16.
 3. The storm in Mark 4, which was stilled at once by the word of Jesus. Picture of the great calm He commands within the believer's heart.
-

Jonah 1:3 - It is Impossible to Hide From D L Moody's Bible

God's first question—"Where art thou?" Man asked the first question in the New Testament—"Where is he?" See Matt. 2:2.

God's second question was—"Where is Abel thy brother?" Ch. 4:9.—Human responsibility.

"Where art thou?" Hiding from God. Why? From fear.

Reasons for fear:—

- a. God's holiness. Ex. 3:6; Isa. 6; Rev. 1:17.
- b. Man's sinfulness. Job. 42:5, 6.

Behind what to hide?

It is impossible—Prov. 28:13; Amos 9:2–4; Ps. 139:7–12; Jonah 1:3.

Only one safe hiding-place—Jesus. Rev. 6:12–17.

Jonah 1:3 - PICKING UP THE TAB

Whenever you run from the will of God, you get to pick up the tab. Whenever you rebel against God and go the other way, you pay the freight.

Jonah, as you'll recall, was the rebellious prophet who took off toward Tarshish when God told him to go to Nineveh, which was in the opposite direction. Jonah "paid the fare" himself to go to Tarshish (Jonah 1:3). But the beautiful thing about going to Nineveh is that God would have paid the fare. The horrible thing about going to Tarshish is, you pick up the tab.

You know what? Many of us are paying a high price for our "Tarshish trip" when, if we had done things God's way, He would have picked up the tab. Many of us are paying high emotional, psychological, and physical tabs because we rebel against the will of God for our lives.

This is the part of church people don't want, but doctors are supposed to help you stay well. You have to follow their advice, however. If there's a problem, hospitals are designed to fix what's wrong. But you have to submit to the treatment.

That's why a part of every church service should be judging your sin. (Tony Evans)

Jonah 1:2-3 Sign-Seekers

June 26, 2004

Read: Luke 11:29-32

This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. —Luke 11:29

A skeptic once said to me, "I'll believe in Jesus if He comes down and appears visibly above my house." Not necessarily!

The Christ-rejecting religious leaders who requested a sign from Jesus had plenty of evidence for believing. They had undoubtedly heard of, if not seen, His miracles of healing, casting out demons, and even raising the dead. What more did they need?

Jesus therefore called them an "evil generation" (Luke 11:29). The only sign they would be given was the sign of Jonah the prophet, who had been thrown into a stormy sea (Jonah 1:2-3). When the Ninevites heard Jonah's message of repentance after he had spent

3 days in the belly of a fish, they believed God had sent him and they repented.

Likewise, the religious leaders who already knew of Jesus' words and works would soon see Him crucified and securely entombed. And in the following weeks they would hear personal testimonies from those who had seen Him alive, and had even touched Him, but they still wouldn't believe.

Today we have in the Gospels a record of what Jesus said and did, written by people who knew Him. If we are open to the truth, we have all the evidence we need to believe. We don't need to be sign-seekers.

If we desire to honor God,
We take Him at His Word
And ask Him not for special signs,
But trust, "Thus saith the Lord." —D. De Haan

The sign of genuine faith is faith that needs no sign.

By Herbert VanderLugt (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Christ is our Jonah! ([William Dyer, "Christ's Famous Titles"](#))

"Then they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea--and the sea stopped its raging!" Jonah 1:15

Christ is our Jonah, who threw Himself into the sea of His Father's wrath--to save us from everlasting perdition!

Jonah: Reluctant Obedience

The prophet Jonah provides another good example— or, rather, a counterexample —of what it means to live by faith. When the Lord commands him to go to Nineveh, he immediately begins to question and calculate, worrying about all the possible consequences of his actions and second guessing the Lord in his own mind (Jonah 4:2). He quickly decides not to obey the Lord, attempting instead to flee from His presence by boarding a ship bound for Tarshish:

"He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD" (Jonah 1:3).

You can run, as the saying goes, but you cannot hide. The ship that he is on encounters severe storms and the cargo is jettisoned in an attempt to save the ship and passengers (Jonah 1:4-6). Shipwreck is narrowly avoided, but only after Jonah explains himself to his comrades and persuades them to throw him overboard, as well (Jonah 1:7-16). He is then swallowed by a great fish and, after calling upon the Lord from within its belly, is spit back up onto dry land. (Jonah 1:17 – 2:10).

The moral of this story— quite clearly —is that much of what we experience as external adversity actually reflects our own inner conflicts—often our own stubborn refusal to submit to the will of God for our life. Jonah's decision to go to Tarshish was a desperate attempt to evade both his duty and his destiny; to live in deference to his fears instead of his faith; to substitute his short-sighted preferences for God's perfect will—a desperate attempt to circumvent God's clear leading in his life. Alas, at the end of the story, Jonah remains very troubled, reluctantly obeying God, to be sure, but still not trusting him wholly (Jonah 3:10 – 4:8) ([See this blogsite Yeshua21](#))

Jonah 1:2, 3. Arise, go to Nineveh.... But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish.

Ruminating upon trouble is bitter work. Children fill their mouths with bitterness when they rebelliously chew the pill which they ought obediently to have taken at once. SPURGEON.

Jonah 1:2-3

June 26, 2004

Sign-Seekers

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Today we have in the Gospels a record of what Jesus said and did, written by people who knew Him. If we are open to the truth, we have all the evidence we need to believe. We don't need to be sign-seekers.—Herbert Vander Lugt ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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We take Him at His Word
And ask Him not for special signs,
But trust, "Thus saith the Lord." —D. De Haan

The sign of genuine faith is faith that needs no sign.

Jonah 1:1-11

Headed The Wrong Way?

Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. --Jonah 1:3

Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh. So, instead of obeying God's command to go there and "cry out against it" (Jonah 1:2), he headed for the docks. A ship was about to depart, so he paid the fare and left.

A classmate of mine in seminary had a good mind and was a gifted teacher. When he was finishing seminary, some wonderful opportunities were open to him. But he wasn't sure he wanted what he thought would be "the humdrum" of a pastorate, even though he felt God wanted him to be a pastor. He was looking for something more exciting. About that time he was offered a position in a brokerage firm. There he became a successful investor.

I had coffee with him a while ago, and he expressed regret that he had not followed God's leading into the ministry. "I still think about taking a church someday," he sighed. It seems to me that when he was running from God, the ship of financial opportunity was there. He "went down into it" and, to use his words, "wasted my life."

If you believe that God is calling you to a specific task, answer yes immediately and go as quickly as you can. Don't run from God and board a ship that's going in the wrong direction. —David C. Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Here is my heart, Lord Jesus,
I have but one for Thee;
Oh, let my heart be Thine alone,
Thy will be done in me. --Mick

You can never go wrong when you choose to follow Christ.

Jonah 1:3

December 30, 1999

A Ticket To Tarshish

READ: Jonah 1:1-11

Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. --Jonah 1:3

An elderly follower of Christ was talking to me about her personal journey with the Lord. At one point in her life, after a couple of terms of missionary work, she lost her enthusiasm for serving God. Although she continued to fulfill her responsibilities, she tried to flee from God. She bought a "ticket to Tarshish," to use her own words, by burying herself in reading.

Our loving and persistent God did not let this missionary just sail away from Him. As He did with Jonah, the Lord caught her attention and drew her back to Himself. She now serves Him with a willing, compassionate, and joyful heart.

Any person who serves the Lord--leader or layman--can face the temptation to "walk out" on God. Whether we feel like running away from His will, as Jonah did, or if we slowly and quietly try to escape as this reluctant missionary tried to do, we let our hearts grow cold and we silence our ears to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord will not let you "sail away to Tarshish." Right now He may be calling you back to Himself. If so, fall on your knees and cry out to God. Let Him know that you've torn up your ticket to Tarshish, and that you're returning to Him. —David C. Egner ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

I've strayed, O Lord, and turned aside,
I've disobeyed Your voice;
But now contrite of heart I turn
And make Your will my choice. --D J De Haan

It's never too soon to turn back to God.

Jonah 1:1-17

June 27, 1999

He Is In Control

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord. --Proverbs 16:33

Flipping a coin, drawing straws, or taking a number out of a hat have long been ways of resolving disputes. I once read of an election in an Oklahoma town where the two leading candidates each received 140 votes. Rather than go through the expense of another election, city officials used a chance method to decide the winner, and everyone accepted the outcome. What the writer of Proverbs said proved to be true: "Casting lots causes contentions to cease, and keeps the mighty apart" (Pr. 18:18).

Many people view all of this as nothing more than a matter of chance. But the amazing thing about what the Word of God calls "casting lots" is that the Lord is ultimately the One who controls the outcome. This was true in the story of Jonah, where God showed Himself to be Lord even through the actions of superstitious, unbelieving sailors.

So, what does all of this say to us as believers? From the Christian's perspective, there is no such thing as chance. God is either directly or indirectly involved in everything that happens to us. He can therefore be trusted and obeyed in any circumstance, because even the smallest details are under His control. —Mart De Haan ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Things don't just happen to those who love God,
They're planned by His own dear hand,
Then molded and shaped, and timed by His clock;
Things don't just happen--they're planned. --Fields

God is behind the scenes and controls the scenes He is behind.

Jonah 1:1-17

June 2, 2001

Swallowed Up

When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord. --Jonah 2:7

You've probably heard the story of Jonah and the great fish. But did you know that the disobedient prophet was "swallowed up" not once but three times? Let me explain.

First, Jonah was swallowed up by prejudice. The Ninevites were a wicked and idolatrous people (Jonah 1:2), and God wanted Jonah to preach repentance to them. But Jonah wanted them to feel God's wrath (4:2), so he boarded a ship and headed in the opposite direction (1:3).

Second, Jonah was swallowed up by the sea. A wild storm was battering the boat, so the superstitious sailors cast lots to find out who was to blame, and "the lot fell on Jonah" (v.7). He said, "Throw me into the sea" (v.12). As the swirling waters engulfed him, he sank toward certain death.

Third, Jonah was swallowed up by a large fish that God had prepared to rescue him (1:17). Inside the fish 3 days, he confessed his sin and promised to obey God (2:1-9). After he was delivered, he followed God's directive and preached judgment to Nineveh, and all the people repented (3:1-5).

God sometimes allows us to face frightening circumstances so that we will learn to trust and obey Him. It's always best to obey the Lord right away—then we won't be "swallowed up." —David C. Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will, He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey. —Sammis

**The way of obedience is the way of blessing.
Obedience is another word for love and loyalty.**

Jonah 1:3 Morning and Evening C H Spurgeon

"But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa." — Jonah 1:3

Instead of going to Nineveh to preach the Word, as God bade him, Jonah disliked the work, and went down to Joppa to escape from it. There are occasions when God's servants shrink from duty. But what is the consequence? What did Jonah lose by his conduct? He lost the presence and comfortable enjoyment of God's love. When we serve our Lord Jesus as believers should do, our God is with us; and though we have the whole world against us, if we have God with us, what does it matter? But the moment we start back, and seek our own inventions, we are at sea without a pilot. Then may we bitterly lament and groan out, "O my God, where hast thou gone? How could I have been so foolish as to shun thy service, and in this way to lose all the bright shinings of thy face? This is a price too high. Let me return to my allegiance, that I may rejoice in thy presence." In the next place, Jonah lost all peace of mind. Sin soon destroys a believer's comfort. It is the poisonous upas tree, from whose leaves distil deadly drops which destroy the life of joy and peace. Jonah lost everything upon which he might have drawn for comfort in any other case. He could not plead the promise of divine protection, for he was not in God's ways; he could not say, "Lord, I meet with these difficulties in the discharge of my duty, therefore help me through them." He was reaping his own deeds; he was filled with his own ways. Christian, do not play the Jonah, unless you wish to have all the waves and the billows rolling over your head. You will find in the long run that it is far harder to shun the work and will of God than to at once yield yourself to it. Jonah lost his time, for he had to go to Nineveh after all. It is hard to contend with God; let us yield ourselves at once.

DOWN, DOWN, DOWN - [Lessons from Jonah - Ray Pritchard](#)

1. Every step out of the will of God is a downward step.

No one ever disobeyed God and went up. You only go down.

"Down" to Joppa.
"Down" into the ship.
"Down" into the sea.
"Down" in the belly of the great fish.

2. We get away quickly, we recover slowly.

It's easy to go down, easy to get off the right path, easy to fall into sin. But the road back is difficult and often very painful.

3. Satan can work through circumstances just like God can.

Satan has his ships, and he always has room on his ships. His ships always go where we want to go when we're running from God. He can make disobedience look good by means of favorable circumstances.

As he gets ready to take a nap, Jonah may have thought, "Things are going so well for me. This must be God's will." But if he thought that, he was wrong. The Lord had already made his will clear. No set of favorable circumstances can override what God has clearly said. Down deep he knew God's will. He just didn't want to do it.

No set of favorable circumstances can override what God has clearly said.

I began by saying that I am calling this series on Jonah "Outrageous Grace." You may wonder, "Where is the grace of God in this story?" The answer is simple. He let Jonah disobey. He didn't kill him on the spot. He gave him the freedom to mess up his own life. That didn't seem like grace at the time, but it was. God works even in the midst of our disobedience to bring us to himself. Sometimes God lets us go way off course so that when we finally see our sin for what it is, we are ready to return to the Lord.

Meanwhile Jonah's disobedience looks pretty good so far. "Happy sailing, Jonah. Watch out for that big fish."

This is how life really works. Sin looks good for awhile. Jonah experienced the "pleasures of sin for a season." If sin always brought immediate misery, it would be a lot less attractive to us. Stolen water may be sweet, but it leads you to the gates of hell.

The bitterness comes later.

The sadness comes later.

Sin is fun for a while. Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Jonah is about to find that out the hard way.

Jonah 1:3 F B Meyer Our Daily Homily

Jonah 1:3 Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

He went down to Joppa. — Sin is always a going down. Down from the heights of fellowship with God; down from the life of high and noble purpose; down from self-restraint and high endeavor. Yes, and we know we are going down; that our self-discipline is relaxed; that our holy separation from the world is slacker.

He found a ship. — Opportunity does not necessarily indicate either expediency or duty. Because the ship happened at that moment to be weighing anchor and the sails to be filled with a favoring breeze, Jonah might have argued that his resolution was a right one. Whether he did or not, there are many times in our lives when we are disposed to argue that favoring circumstances indicate the right course. But it must be remembered that they never can belie God's summons to the soul to do his will. The court of conscience is the supreme court of appeal; and to run away from known duty cannot be right, though circumstances seem at first to smile.

He paid the fare thereof. — Yea, if we go opposite to God's will, we always have to pay for it. The loss of self-respect, the broken piece of conscience, the deprivation of God's blessed presence, are part of the fare. And even when we have paid and lost it all, we fail to get what we purchased; we are dropped out of our chosen vessel in mid-ocean; and God brings us back to land at his own expense, and in a ship of his own construction. The morning may be fine, but it is soon overcast: the sky may be clear at starting, but God sends a great storm after the runaways to bring them back to Himself: the ship may seem to be opportunely leaving the wharf, but disaster will over-take it.

Jonah 1:4-5, 7 Walter Kaiser 1:4–5, 7 Casting Lots Encouraged? - [Hard Sayings of the Bible](#)

The use of "lots," or the throwing of dice, in order to discover what is unknown seems more at home in the world of divination and enchantment than in the biblical world of the will of God. It is not surprising, I suppose, that these sailors would have resorted to this means of discovery in such terrifying circumstances. But it is surprising to learn that this method did uncover the real culprit—that it worked. How can this fact be explained and reconciled with the rest of Scripture?

The sailors' use of divination in order to learn the source of their problem was altogether fitting to the culture of those times. As far as they were concerned, a storm of this intensity and ferocity must have represented some sort of divine punishment. Someone on their ship must have angered his god in some way, they reasoned. If they were to come out of the experience alive, they had to find out who the offender was and what he had done.

As best we can tell, lots were very similar to our dice, usually with alternating light and dark sides. Some think the mysterious Urim (possibly "lights") and Thummim (possibly "darks") may have been lots used by the high priest and kept in his ephod for discerning the will of God (Ex 28:30).

The casting of lots was probably interpreted along these lines: two dark sides up meant no, while two light sides up meant yes. A combination of a light and a dark side might have meant that one should throw again. On this system, the sailors probably asked the lots “yes” or “no,” taking each sailor in turn until it came Jonah’s turn and the lots both came up light.

The use of lots was not altogether foreign among the people of God. At several key points in the history of Israel, lots had been used with the apparent approval and blessing of God. This may be one more case where it was not the use but the abuse of a cultural tool that made it objectionable. Lots were used to determine which of the two goats would be sacrificed on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). Joshua used lots to ferret out Achan as the guilty party after the defeat at Ai (Josh 7:14). Lots were used in the allocation of land (Josh 18–19; Ps 16:6) and in the assignment of temple duties (1 Chron 24:5). In the New Testament, our Lord’s clothes were gambled for by the casting of the dice (Mt 27:35). In fact, the whole church decided between two men to fill the position left by Judas’s death by the use of lots (Acts 1:15–26). True, here the casting of lots was accompanied with prayer, but my point is that lots were used. Some are fond of pointing out that all these examples were prior to Pentecost, but there seems to be no scriptural significance to such an observation.

The best way to explain the use of lots is by noting the mild endorsement expressed in Proverbs 16:33: “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.” Though this proverb is quite brief, its point seems to be that the Lord, not fate, is the reason for success, if there is any. It also seems to warn that the casting of lots does not carry with it an automatic validity, for in every case the freedom to answer lies with God, who is not at the beck and call of the thrower.

It may please God to use this means to give further confidence that one’s decision, when it does not conflict with Scripture or with one’s best discernment, is indeed his will. But in no sense should the casting of lots be used or viewed as a means of bypassing what can be known of God and his will through Scripture, prayer and the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Accordingly, what might appear to be no more than raw superstition to a twentieth-century Westerner was an evidence of divine intervention and providence. Even the casting of lots came under the controlling eye of God.

Jonah 1:17 Myth or History? Walter Kaiser 1:4–5, 7 - [Hard Sayings of the Bible](#)

Could Jonah really have been swallowed by a great fish, survive for three days inside that creature and live to tell about it? Is this a myth, a parable, an allegory or real history?

The Bible, of course, does not speak of Jonah being swallowed by a “whale”; it specifically mentions a “great fish” (Jon 1:17). Some English versions of Matthew 12:40 use the word “whale,” but the Greek original is *kētos*, a general word meaning a huge sea-monster. Taken as such, there are several sea-monsters that would be able to swallow a full-grown man easily enough, but the true whale, which has its home in the Arctic seas and is not found in the Mediterranean Sea, has a narrow throat that would generally prevent such a swallowing. There is another species of the same order in the Mediterranean Sea, however, which could swallow a man.

Ambrose John Wilson in the Princeton Theological Review for 1927 mentions a case of a sailor on a whaling ship near the Falkland Islands who was swallowed by a large sperm whale. The whale was later harpooned, and when it was opened up on deck the surprised crew found their lost shipmate unconscious inside its belly. Though bleached from the whale’s gastric juices, he recovered, even though he never lost the deadly whiteness left on his face, neck and hands.¹

The problem with claiming that this text is a parable, allegory or myth is that each “solution” presents its own problems of literary genre. For example, parables are simple; they treat one subject. But the book of Jonah has at least two distinct parts: his flight and his preaching. Neither does Jonah fit the category of allegory, for there is no agreement on what the values are for each of the characters and events. The very diversity of answers is enough to state that allegory is not the solution. The same judgment would hold for suggesting that Jonah is a myth.

The book of Jonah, up until modern times, was everywhere treated as an historical record of the repentance of the city of Nineveh under the preaching of a man named Jonah. The apocryphal book Tobit has Tobit commanding his son Tobias to go to Media, for Tobit believes the word of God spoken about Nineveh. The Greek Septuagint text says that the preacher who predicted judgment on Nineveh was Jonah. In New Testament times, Jesus and the early believers took Jonah to be a real character. Thus, the objections to the book come down to this: it has too many miracles! But that is hardly an adequate basis on which to reject the internal claims of the book itself. Jonah is a believable account of a harrowing sea experience and of an unprecedented Gentile response to an ever-so-brief exposure to preaching about the need for repentance. But it happened!

Jonah 1:1-17

You brought my life up from the pit, O Lord my God. - Jonah 2:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

In Francis Thompson's poem, "The Hound of Heaven," the speaker flees from God. He hides, seeks fulfillment in other things, and runs in fear from God's overwhelming love. But as the title implies, God pursues him through the years, relentlessly and patiently.

Why? Not because the speaker in the poem is lovable or worthy or deserves God's favor, but because God knows that he will find fulfillment and joy only in Him:

All which thy child's mistake

Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home

Rise, clasp My hand, and come!"

Yesterday, we saw that God welcomes back the prodigal. But that's only part of the truth. In fact, God is more aggressive—He's always working to pursue us and woo us and discipline us back to His side. We often call people who are considering the claims of Christ "seekers," but the truth is that God is the great Seeker. Jesus said, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10; cf. Rom. 5:10).

Jonah is a classic case study in regard to this principle. There he was, a man in full-time ministry with clear directions from God about where to go and what to do, rebelliously heading in the exact opposite direction. Why did he disobey? He let his human perspective—the fact that Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, the enemy of Israel—override God's command. Did he really think he could run from God? When we sin, our own stubbornness and rebelliousness blind us to the truth.

How did God pursue Jonah? By means of a storm,

lots (or dice) thrown by pagan sailors, and a great fish. Notice that the prophet had the correct beliefs about God (v. 9), but this was not enough to keep him on the path of obedience. Given a second chance, Jonah took it, but his attitude still wasn't right. At the book's close, God was still working to teach His servant more about His love.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY - Now is a good time to review the "Today Along the Way" applications from earlier in the month. Is there one you skipped before, but feel like returning to now? There may even be one that you did already but feel led to do again! ([Today in the Word. Moody Bible Institute. Used by Permission. All rights reserved](#))

Jonah 1:17 Jesus and Jonah

"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)

The Bible's most famous "fish story" has been the target of skeptics for hundreds of years, but it was confirmed by none other than the one who Himself had prepared the great fish: "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40).

Jonah may actually have died and gone to "hell." "Out of the belly of hell [Hebrew Sheol] cried I," said Jonah, "and thou heardest my voice" (Jonah 2:2). The testimony of Jesus was similar: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [i.e., Sheol]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (Psalm 16:10; also Acts 2:27). Jonah also prayed: "Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God" (Jonah 2:6). His prayer ended: "Salvation is of the LORD" (v. 9), and this is the very meaning of the name "Jesus."

Thus, 900 years before Christ died and rose again, Jonah died and rose again, a remarkable prophetic type of the mighty miracle that the Lord would accomplish one day to bring salvation and life to a world dead in sin. Only the power of God could direct a prepared fish to save Jonah, then three days later allow him to preach repentance and salvation to the lost souls in Nineveh. Then, finally God Himself, in Christ, died on a cross for the sins of the world, and this time it took the infinite power that created the very universe itself to bring His own soul back from hell and, three days later, to rise again. This is "the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead" (Ephesians 1:19-20). Truly, "a greater than Jonas is here" (Matthew 12:41). HMM

Jonah 1:17 - Once Upon A Time

May 20, 2014

Read: Matthew 24:32-44

The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. —Jonah 1:17

Some people say that the Bible is just a collection of fairy tales. A boy slaying a giant. A man swallowed by a big fish. Noah's boat-building experience. Even some religious people think that these events are just nice stories with a good moral.

Jesus Himself, however, spoke of Jonah and the giant fish, and Noah and the flood, as actual events: "As the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt. 24:37-39). His return will happen when we're not expecting it.

Jesus compared Jonah's 3 days inside the big fish to the 3 days He would experience in the grave before His resurrection (Matt. 12:40). And Peter talked about Noah and the flood when he equated it to a future day when Jesus comes back (2 Peter 2:4-9).

God gave us His Word; it's a book that is filled with truth—not fairy tales. And one day, we will live happily ever after with Him when Jesus comes again and receives His children to Himself.

We're waiting for You, Lord, to come
And take us home to be with You;
Your promise to return for us
Gives hope because we know it's true. —Sper

We have reason for optimism if we're looking for Christ's return.

INSIGHT: In His teaching, Christ often used examples from nature, as He did here with the fig tree (Matt. 24:32). He communicated to His listeners with word-pictures that would be familiar to them. They were part of an agricultural society that mostly lived outdoors, so nature became the perfect vehicle for His presentation of spiritual truths.

By Cindy Hess Kasper

J Wilbur Chapman on Warnings from God - Jonah was one. God said to him, "Go to Nineveh," and yet, with the spirit of rebellion, he attempted to sail to Tarshish and we know his miserable failure. Let it never be forgotten that if Nineveh is God's choice for you, you can make no other port in safety. The sea will be against you, the wind against you. It is hard indeed to struggle against God. Jacob was a warning. Deceiving his own father, his sons in turn deceived him. May we never forget the Scripture which declares, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." Esau was a warning. Coming in from the hunt one day, weary with his exertions, he detects the savory smell of the mess of pottage, and his crafty brother says, "I will give you this for your birthright," which was his right to be a priest in his household; a moment more and the birthright is gone; and in the New Testament we are told he sought it with tears and could find no place of repentance. But many a man has sold his right to be the priest of his household for less than a mess of pottage, and in a real sense it is true that things done cannot be undone. Saul was a warning. He was commanded to put to death Agag and the flock, and he kept the best of all the flock and then lied to God's messenger when he said that the work had been done as he was commanded. He had no sooner said it than, behold, there was heard the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen. "Be sure your sin will find you out." (Numbers 32:23)

Jonah 1:17; Matt. 12:39–41 THE BIG FISH - THE BIG fish that swallows Jonah is no big deal. In 1891 off of the Falkland Islands, there were two fishing boats that were whale hunting. They came across a huge sperm whale. One fishing group shot harpoons into the whale. The other boat came around and began to do the same thing to get this whale, but the whale's tail hit the second boat and knocked it over. There were two men on the second boat. One of the men drowned. The other man was not found. Two days later, a few other boats got this same whale and killed him. They brought the whale up to the shore, slit it open, and found the second man. The man was unconscious but still alive, and after care, resumed his life. This "Jonah and the whale" story isn't that far-fetched. Similar things have happened before. People read the Bible and say that the story of Jonah and the big fish doesn't make sense, but it does. The miracle is not that a fish swallowed a man, because that has happened before. The miracle is that the fish paid attention to the Lord.

Not All Storms Are Bad Read Psalm 18:7-15

These verses present one of the greatest descriptions of a storm found in the Bible. It is a graphic picture of the way God works when He comes to the aid of His children. David was saying in these verses that God the Creator, God the Deliverer, used everything in nature to come to his aid. The earth shook, down to its foundations. Smoke came up, and fire came out. Coals were kindled. The heavens bowed down. The wind began to blow, for God was coming on the wings of the wind. We see darkness, dark

waters, thick clouds, even hailstones and coals of fire. Thunder, lightning--the very breath of God was blowing across the fields. When the child of God is in His will, all of nature works for him. When the child of God is out of His will, everything works against him. Remember Jonah? He ran away from God in disobedience, and what happened? A storm appeared. The wind and waves were violent. That little boat went up and down on the ocean like a cork. Even the mariners were worried. Jonah disobeyed God, and everything in nature worked against him. David obeyed God, and everything in nature worked for him. God can use the storms of life to fulfill His will. Is the wind blowing? He is flying on the wings of the wind. Are the clouds thick? He will bring showers of blessing out of them. Don't be afraid of the storm. Storms can come from the hand of God and be the means of blessing. - Warren Wiersbe - Prayer, Praises and Promises.

Other Quotes from Warren Wiersbe related to Jonah -

God has an army. "Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word" (Psalm 103:20). The angels act at His command. If we read and study the Word of God and obey it, everything in the universe will work with us. If we disobey the Word of God, everything will work against us--just as it did against Jonah, who was running in the wrong direction, going on the wrong ship, with the wrong motive, for the wrong purpose. God finally brought him to a place of obedience. Don't be like Jonah. Have faith that God is in control and working on you in every situation. No matter how difficult your day or how discouraging the news might be, lean on the wonderful assurance that God is on His throne. He is ruling, and His servants are at work accomplishing His Word. Obey God's Word today and keep walking by faith.

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Did anybody see Jonah emerge when the great fish disgorged him on the dry land? If so, the story must have spread rapidly and perhaps even preceded him to Nineveh, and that may help explain the reception the city gave him. Had Jonah been bleached by the fish's gastric juices? Did he look so peculiar that nobody could doubt who he was and what had happened to him? Since Jonah was a "sign" to the Ninevites (Matt. 12:38-41), perhaps this included the way he looked.

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When I was a youngster, my family took an annual vacation in Door County, Wisconsin, where we would spend the week fishing. Since I have never been a good swimmer, I have never felt comfortable in a boat. One evening, we were out on the bay fishing, and we saw a storm coming across the water. My older brother started the motor on the boat, and we raced that storm across the bay! We arrived at the pier just in time to gather our equipment, cover our heads with the boat cushions, and run to the cottage, before the deluge hit.

But we don't always have the luxury of escaping the storm. Sometimes we have to experience it. Then what?

The image of the storm teaches us that God is ultimately in control of circumstances. There are some storms that we bring on ourselves. Jonah is a good example of this truth. "You hurled me into the deep," Jonah said to the Lord, "into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me" (Jonah 2:3). It took a storm to bring Jonah to his senses and back into the place of obedience.

But there are some storms that God sends for our own good. "We went through fire and water," wrote the psalmist, "but you brought us to a place of abundance" (Ps. 66:12). When David looked back on a difficult and stormy period in his own life, he concluded, "I love you, O LORD, my strength.... As for God, his way is perfect.... The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior!" (Ps. 18:1, 30, 46). David was a better man after the storm....God does not promise to keep us out of the storms and floods, but He does promise to sustain us in the storm, and then bring us out in due time for His glory when the storm has done its work.

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LET PEACE RULE - In the Greek games there were judges (we would call them umpires) who rejected contestants who were not qualified, and who disqualified those who broke the rules. The peace of God is the "umpire" in our believing hearts. When we obey the will of God, we have His peace within; but when we step out of His will (even unintentionally), we lose His peace.

If we have peace in our hearts, we will be at peace with others in the church. We are called to one body, and our relationship in that body must be one of harmony and peace. If we are out of the will of God, we are certain to bring discord and disharmony to the church. Jonah thought he was at peace, when actually his sins created a storm!

When a Christian loses the peace of God, he begins to go off in directions that are out of the will of God. He turns to the things of the world and the flesh to compensate for his lack of peace within. He tries to escape, but he cannot escape himself! It is only when he confesses his sins, claims God's forgiveness, and does God's will that he experiences God's peace within.

Applying God's Truth:

1. How do you feel when an umpire makes what you feel is a bad call against your favorite team? How do you feel when God expects something from you that you don't feel is fair?
2. Have you ever experienced a false peace (like Jonah) ? How long did it last? What were the results?

3. What situations are you facing today for which you need to experience God's peace

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Jonah got into trouble because his attitudes were wrong. To begin with, he had a wrong attitude toward the will of God. Obeying the will of God is as important to God's servant as it is to the people His servants minister to. It's in obeying the will of God that we find our spiritual nourishment (John 4:34), enlightenment (7:17), and enablement (Heb. 13:21). To Jesus, the will of God was food that satisfied Him; to Jonah, the will of God was medicine that choked him. Jonah's wrong attitude toward God's will stemmed from a feeling that the Lord was asking him to do an impossible thing. God commanded the prophet to go to Israel's enemy, Assyria, and give the city of Nineveh opportunity to repent, and Jonah would much rather see the city destroyed. The Assyrians were a cruel people who had often abused Israel and Jonah's narrow patriotism took precedence over his theology. Jonah forgot that the will of God is the expression of the love of God (Ps. 33:11), and that God called him to Nineveh because He loved both Jonah and the Ninevites.....Jonah also had a wrong attitude toward the Word of God. When the Word of the Lord came to him, Jonah thought he could "take it or leave it." However, when God's Word commands us, we must listen and obey. Disobedience isn't an option. "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46, (NKJV)).....Jonah had a wrong attitude toward circumstances; he thought they were working for him when they were really working against him.....It's possible to be out of the will of God and still have circumstances appear to be working on your behalf. You can be rebelling against God and still have a false sense of security that includes a good night's sleep. God in His providence was preparing Jonah for a great fall. (Be Amazed)

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The book (of Jonah) emphasizes God's grace both to Nineveh and to Jonah. Though Nineveh was a wicked city, God gave the inhabitants opportunity to be spared. Though Jonah was a rebellious servant, God forgave him, used him, and tenderly sought to help him overcome his anger.

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Storms do come to our lives. What causes them? Sometimes other people cause them. In Acts 27 Paul got into a storm because the people in charge of the ship would not listen to the Word of God. Sometimes God causes the storm to test us and build us. In Matthew 14 Jesus sent His disciples directly into a storm to teach them an important lesson of faith. **Sometimes we cause the storm by disobedience--we are like Jonah running away from God, and the only way He can bring us back is to send a storm.**.....Do you find yourself in a storm today? Ask God for the strength and courage to weather it and for the wisdom to understand it, not waste it.

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Matthew 12:38-40. When the religious leaders asked Jesus for a sign from heaven, they were rejecting the miracles they saw Him do on earth. They wanted miracles such as Moses did in Egypt and the wilderness. The only sign He offered Israel was His death, burial, and resurrection. This is what Jonah experienced, and it was powerful enough to impress the people of Nineveh. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had predicted His death and resurrection (John 2:18-21), and He would mention Jonah again in Matthew 16:1-4. Note that it was the resurrection—the sign of Jonah—that the apostles preached in Acts 2-12.

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THE SECRET OF JOYFUL OBEDIENCE - Everything in creation—except man—obeys the will of God. "Lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds . . . do his bidding" (Ps. 148:8). **In the Book of Jonah, you see the winds and waves, and even the fish, obeying God's commands; but the prophet stubbornly wanted his own way.** Disobedience to God's will is a tragedy—but so is reluctant, grudging obedience. God does not want us to disobey Him, but neither does He want us to obey out of fear or necessity. What Paul wrote about giving also applies to living: "not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). What is the secret of joyful obedience? It is to recognize that obedience is a family matter. We are serving a loving Father and helping our brothers and sisters in Christ. We have been born of God; we love God, and we love God's children. And we demonstrate this love by keeping God's commandments.

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Jonah, who is a type of Christ in death, burial, and resurrection (Matt. 12:38–40), went through the storm of God's wrath because of his disobedience, but Jesus went through the storm in obedience to God's will. Jesus could say, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me" (Ps. 42:7; Jonah 2:3). Our Lord's suffering on the cross was the "baptism" Jesus referred to in Luke 12:50 and that was pictured when John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River.

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The prophet Jonah finally obeyed the Lord but not because he had experienced a change of heart. Even after the people of Nineveh repented, Jonah still despised them and wanted the Lord to destroy them. This reminds us that it isn't enough simply to know God's will or even to do God's will; we must "[do] the will of God from the heart" (Eph. 6:6 NASB, italics mine). That's why Charles Simeon asked three questions of the sermons he preached: "Did it humble the sinner? Did it exalt the Savior? Did it promote holiness?" Like every faithful preacher of the Word, he longed to see hearts and lives changed by the grace of God.

GOD'S WAY IS THE BEST WAY Jonah 1:1–10

1. God's Way Is the Way of Love
 2. God's Way Is the Way of Peace
 3. God's Way Is the Way of Righteousness
 4. God's Way Is the Way of Forgiveness
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Jonah's Journey By Melvin Worthington

Scripture: Jonah 1–4, especially Jonah 1:1–3: "Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.' But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD."

Introduction: The Book of Jonah differs from other minor prophets. It is a narrative, biographical rather than prophetic. It's the story of a servant, a storm, and a sovereign God. Jonah is God-called but disobedient; the storm is God-appointed and God-controlled, and God's powerful attributes are evident throughout the story. Jonah himself is a strange paradox: a prophet of God, and yet fleeing from God; thrown into the sea, yet alive; a preacher of repentance, yet needing repentance. He is pictured as sanctified in spots, self-willed, godly, courageous, prayerful, obedient after chastisement, bigoted, concerned with his own reputation, zealous for the Lord. As if this was not enough, Jonah is a great missionary book, and Jonah himself a great evangelist.

1. The Rebellious Prophet (ch. 1).

A. The Word Heard (vv. 1, 2). God spoke to Jonah and instructed him to go to the wicked city of Nineveh and cry against it because of its wickedness. This word from God was a definite word, a disturbing word, a distinct word, and a disobeyed word.

B. The Will Hardened (v. 3). Jonah understood God's Word and yet he was uncomfortable with God's Word and unwilling to obey God's Word. He acted as people often do who don't like God's commands—he rebelled and ran away, thus removing himself as far as possible from being under the influence of God.

C. The Wrath Hurlled (vv. 4–16). The truths embedded in these verses include the directed storm (v. 4), the discovered sin (vv. 5–13), and the devoted sailors (vv. 14–16).

D. The Whale Handy (v. 17). The sailors cast Jonah into the sea and a huge fish swallowed him. Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Truths found in this verse include the prepared fish, the providential fact, the prophetic figure, and the prophet's fate.

2. The Repentant Prophet (ch. 2).

A. The Servant Speaks (vv. 1–9). These verses record Jonah's supplication (v. 1), suffering (v. 2), statement (vv. 3–6), submission (vv. 7–8), and singing (v. 9). Jonah's prayer reveals a note of triumph. He prayed out of the belly of the fish but with an absolute confidence in God and in His deliverance. He had disobeyed God and God had disciplined him and now he abandoned his disobedience and vowed to be obedient—obey God's Word.

B. The Sovereign Speaks (v. 10). This verse reminds us of the faithfulness of Jehovah, the freedom of Jonah, and the focus on Jehovah and Jonah. God caused the fish to vomit Jonah up on dry land. God hears and heeds the prayers of His people.

3. The Re-commissioned Prophet (ch. 3).

A. The Willing Prophet (vv. 1–4). The Renewed Commission (vv. 1–2). God is a God of second chances. Illustrations abound that confirm this—Peter, Thomas, John Mark, and Samson. God disciplines Jonah for his rebellion, Jonah repents, and the word of the Lord comes a second time. This time Jonah is ready to obey God's word. He recognized that this second chance was undeserved, unexpected, unparalleled, unique, and unequivocal. God did not change the task but changed His man. The Ready Compliance (vv. 3–4). Jonah is as ready to obey now as he was to disobey in the beginning.

B. The Wicked People (vv. 5–9). The people of Nineveh responded to the message of Jonah. They believed (v. 5). It affected their behavior (v. 5). The repentance began with the leaders and extended to the people (vv. 6–7). They beseeched God for mercy (vv. 8–9).

C. The Wondrous Pardon (v. 10). God saw their conduct and spared the city. Divine judgment was averted.

4. The Raging Prophet (ch. 4). Jonah was filled with rage when God spared the city.

A. The Grieved Prophet (vv. 1–5). His grief (v. 1) in light of God's action reveals his shortsightedness, selfishness, stubbornness, and superficiality. His grip (v. 2) indicated that he knew this would be God's response to the repentance of the people of Nineveh and he didn't want God to withhold judgment. His groaning (v. 3). Jonah wanted to die. His grace (v. 4). God responded to Jonah's attitude and actions with gentle, gracious grace. His grudge (v. 5). He went out of the city and made a booth and sat in its shadow waiting to see what God would do.

B. The Gracious Provision (vv. 6–11). God dealt with Jonah by using: the plant (v. 6), the pest (v. 7), the passion (v. 8), and the principle (vv. 9–11).

Conclusion: The love of God in our hearts will constrain us to that full commitment which God sought from Jonah and which he received so joyfully from Paul. To be an effective servant of the Lord one must, like Jonah, die to the lusts, the attractions, allurements, and rewards which man has to offer and be content with the compensation which God gives. We must be worldwide witness. We must hear God's call to a solemn, sacred stewardship of life and possessions.

John Kitto - The Great Fish—Jonah 1

Jonah is the earliest of the prophets whose books compose the volume of prophecy. In II Kings 14:25–27, there is mention of a prophecy by him, respecting the recovery of a portion of the territory of the kingdom of Israel from the Syrians; and as this was fulfilled in the time of king Jeroboam II., Jonah must have exercised his prophetic office not later than the early part of that king's reign, and probably in that of his father Joash. It will thus appear that the commencement of his prophetic ministry approached nearly to the close of that of Elisha. It, therefore, seems that during the early part of Jonah's life, he and Elisha were contemporaries; and it is quite possible that the former may have been one of the "sons (or pupils) of the prophet," so often mentioned in the history of the latter.

We have lately shown, that at this time the Assyrians had made their power felt in Israel, and that certain relations subsisted between them and the Israelites, which must have made them well known to each other. Indeed, if Colonel Rawlinson's interpretation of the black obelisk be correct, the figures of the Israelites and inscriptions regarding their gifts of homage, already existed among the sculptures of Nineveh, which "great city" was assuredly well known to most of them from report, and to many of them personally, from visits paid on political or commercial business.

It was not, therefore, from unacquaintance with the people, or from the idea of visiting a remote foreign city being strange to him, that Jonah received with dismay the command to repair to Nineveh, and proclaim its approaching destruction; but it may be that he feared peril to himself from delivering a message like this in the great metropolis of a proud and powerful people. He did not remonstrate, but, being a man apparently of a dogged and refractory temper, he determined in his own mind not to execute the command he had received. He left the country, indeed; but, instead of proceeding eastward, he hurried down to Joppa, and took his passage in the first ship that was to sail, in order to flee across the western sea. Flee from what? Avowedly, "from the presence of the Lord." That he could entertain so gross a conception of the Lord, whose servant he was, affords most lamentable evidence of the lowered notions of the Divine character and attributes which were entertained by the best instructed minds, in the presence of the corrupted religion and maimed observances of the northern kingdom. He was, however, doomed to learn something more of God than he had known before. That God sent after the ship a tremendous storm; and the danger was so imminent, that, after doing all in their power to retain the mastery of the vessel, the sailors concluded, with a superstition still common among seafaring men, that they were pursued by an angry God, on account of some guilty person in the ship. Him they resolved to detect by lot; and when the lot fell upon Jonah, he confessed that he believed the storm to be sent upon them on his account, by the God from whose face he fled; and he advised them to rid the ship of him, by casting him into the sea. Although this had been their object in casting lots, the honest sailors were still unwilling to act upon it, and made one great effort more to bring the ship to land; but, finding all they could do unavailing, they cast the prophet into the sea, which forthwith ceased its raging. But the runaway prophet was not to be drowned. The Lord, who had prepared the storm, prepared also a great fish to swallow him up—not to destroy him, but to afford him refuge from the water, and to give him a passage to the shore from which he had embarked. Jonah remained three days and nights in the stomach of the fish, until he had, in that strange and comfortless position, been brought to a better state of mind; and then, but not before, the Lord impelled the fish to cast him up upon the sea-shore.

Now, we must not conceal that this circumstance of the fish has been treated with much scorn and some derision by unbelievers; and even believers have sometimes endeavored to avoid the difficulty by supposing the prophet was picked up by some ship that had a fish for its sign.

But where are these difficulties? Let us see.

The whale has not a swallow large enough for a man to pass through. Well, but the text does not say that the fish was a whale, but "a great fish;" and although a whale is mentioned in the reference to this passage which our Savior makes in Matthew 12:40, this name, particularly when collated with the original narrative, is to be understood not as the name of any one fish in particular, but as a common name for all the larger inhabitants of the deep. Until, therefore, it shall be proved that there is no great fish capable of

swallowing a man entire, the objection is equally puerile and unsound. Besides, as it strikes us, it has been too hastily assumed, from the dimensions of a fish's throat in a state of collapse when dead; what it can or cannot swallow. The living throat is doubtless capable of much expansion. Indeed, we are certain this is the fact; for we have often seen taken from the bellies of large fish, other fish entire, and so large, that no one unacquainted with the fact, and seeing them apart, would be ready to believe that the latter had been swallowed by the former. Since the days of Bochart, it has generally been supposed that "the great fish" may have been some species of shark; and it is known that entire human bodies have been found in some fishes of this kind.

Under this explanation, the objection that there have been any whales in the Mediterranean, loses its force. But the alleged fact is, after all, not true. There is evidence of whales being sometimes found in the Mediterranean, though certainly far more rarely than in the ocean. At the very place from which Jonah sailed—Joppa, now Jaffa—there was displayed for many ages, in one of its pagan temples, the huge bones of a species of whale, which the local legends pretended to be those of the sea-monster which, at that place, was slain by Perseus for the deliverance of Andromeda. An eminent naturalist gives other instances: "Procopius mentions a huge sea-monster in the Propontis, taken during his prefecture of Constantinople, in the thirty-sixth year of Justinian (A.D. 562), after having destroyed vessels, at certain intervals, for more than fifty years. Rondoletius enumerates several whales stranded or taken on the coasts of the Mediterranean.... In the Syrian seas, the Belgian pilgrim Lavaers, on his passage from Malta to Palestine, incidentally mentions a 'Tonynvish,' which he further denominates an 'oil fish,' longer than the vessel, leisurely swimming along, and which, the seamen said, prognosticated bad weather. On the island of Zerbi, close to the African coast, the late commander Davies, R.N., found the bones of a cachalot whale on the beach. Shaw mentions an orca more than sixty feet long, stranded at Algiers; and the late Admiral Ross Donelly saw one in the Mediterranean, near the island of Albaran. There are, besides, numerous sharks of the largest species in the seas of the Levant, and also in the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea, as well as cetacea, and two species of halibut or dugong, which are herbivorous animals, intermediate between whales and seals."¹⁰¹¹ After this, and after what we have stated as to the swallow of fishes, Jonah's fish might possibly be a whale, if any one wishes thus to limit the signification of the word employed. In that case, it may not have been necessary for the fish to swallow the prophet at all; for in the mouth of the common whale there is a cavity as large as a room, in which he might have been retained with less discomfort to himself than in the stomach of any fish.

Another objection—that a man could not live in the stomach of a fish—is answered by the fact, that the animal stomach has no power upon living substances; and one who received no injury from the fish before being swallowed, would remain alive for a considerable time, unless suffocated in so uncongenial a situation and element. In fact, suffocation in any case was the real danger; and to meet this, there is a sufficient answer in the fact, that the Lord prepared the fish, and provided such a fish as was suited to the purpose in view. It was the Lord's doing, and evidently miraculous. If one disbelieves miracles altogether, it is useless to contend with him about this one; but if he does believe in any miracles, he will see nothing too hard for the Lord in all this; and he will not suppose it more difficult for Him to preserve Jonah from suffocation in the mouth or stomach of a fish, than to preserve the three Hebrew youths from harm "in the midst of the burning fiery furnace."

Jonah 2

QUESTION - [Did Jonah die while he was in the belly of the fish \(Jonah 2\)?](#)GOTQUESTIONS.ORG

ANSWER - Those who accept the literal account of Jonah take one of two main views regarding what happened to Jonah during his time in the belly of the great fish (Jonah 2). One view holds that Jonah died and later returned to life. The second view holds that Jonah remained alive for three days in the belly of the great fish. Both views agree on a literal reading of the book of Jonah and affirm God's supernatural ability to rescue His prophet. The difference is whether to see Jonah 2:10 as a description of a weak and bedraggled Jonah or as a truly resurrected Jonah.

Those who argue that Jonah died and later rose again appeal to Jonah's prayer in Jonah 2:2: "From the depths of the grave I called for help." The use of Sheol, the Hebrew term for "the grave," could mean that Jonah actually died. Yet the words "the depths of the grave," seen as a poetic turn of phrase, could easily refer to an agonizing or horrifying experience.

There's another reason that some argue for Jonah's death and resurrection: Jesus said, "For just 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" (Matthew 12:40). The reasoning is that, since Jesus' death and resurrection were actual, then Jonah must have also actually died and later returned to life. However, Jesus' comparison does not mandate perfect congruency between the two events. Jonah's hopeless situation was illustrative of Jesus' death; Jonah's sudden appearance at Nineveh was illustrative of Jesus' resurrection. The three days was an additional similarity. Jonah returned from the edge of death; Jesus, who is greater than Jonah, returned from actual death. Analogies do not require absolute agreement in every detail.

The Bible does not explicitly state that Jonah died in the belly of the great fish. Those who theorize that he did die rely on inference and speculation. What is the evidence that Jonah stayed alive for the three days he spent in the belly of the great fish?

First, it is clear that Jonah prayed from inside the fish: "Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish" (Jonah 2:1). At the very least, Jonah lived long enough to offer his prayer.

Second, the language of Jonah's prayer is poetic in nature. Terms such as Sheol and the reference to "the pit" (Jonah 2:6) do not have to be interpreted so literally as to require physical death.

Did Jonah die in the fish, or was he alive the whole time? Either interpretation is possible, but the traditional understanding, that Jonah was alive for three days in the belly of a great fish, is more likely. Jonah, who everyone thought was a "goner," emerged from the murky depths to bring God's message of salvation to a lost and dying people. In so doing, he became a wonderful representation of Jesus' death, resurrection, and life-giving message.

QUESTION - [Was Jonah truly swallowed by a whale?](#) GOTQUESTIONS.ORG

ANSWER - The [book of Jonah](#) recounts the story of a disobedient prophet who, upon being swallowed by a whale (or a "great fish") and vomited upon the shore, reluctantly led the reprobate city of Nineveh to repentance. The Bible's plain teaching is that, yes, Jonah was truly swallowed by a whale (or a great fish).

The biblical account of Jonah is often criticized by skeptics because of its miraculous content. These miracles include the following events:

- A storm is summoned and dissipated by God (1:4–16).
- A massive fish swallows the prophet after he is thrown into the sea by his ship's crew (1:17).
- Jonah survives in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights—or he dies and is resurrected, depending on how you interpret the text (1:17).
- The fish vomits Jonah upon the shore at God's command (2:10).
- A gourd is appointed by God to grow rapidly in order to provide Jonah with shade (4:6).
- A worm is appointed by God to attack and wither the gourd (4:7).
- A scorching wind is summoned by God to discomfort Jonah (4:8).

God's use of a whale or great fish as Jonah's mode of transportation was sure to capture Nineveh's attention, given the prominence of Dagon worship in that particular area of the ancient world. Dagon was a fish-god who enjoyed popularity among the pantheons of Mesopotamia and the eastern Mediterranean coast. He is mentioned several times in the Bible in relation to the Philistines (Judges 16:23–24; 1 Samuel 5:1–7; 1 Chronicles 10:8–12). Images of Dagon have been found in palaces and temples in Nineveh and throughout the region. In some cases he was represented as a man wearing a fish. In others he was part man, part fish—a merman, of sorts.

Orientalist Henry Clay Trumbull observes: "What better heralding, as a divinely sent messenger to Nineveh, could Jonah have had, than to be thrown up out of the mouth of a great fish, in the presence of witnesses, say on the coast of Phoenicia, where the fish-god was a favorite object of worship? Such an incident would have inevitably aroused the mercurial nature of Oriental observers, so that a multitude would be ready to follow the seemingly new avatar of the fish-god, proclaiming the story of his uprising from the sea, as he went on his mission to the city where the fish-god had its very centre of worship" ("Jonah in Nineveh," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 2, No.1, 1892, p. 56).

Some scholars have speculated that Jonah's appearance, bleached white from the action of the fish's digestive acids, would have been of great help to his cause. It could be that the Ninevites would have been greeted by a man whose skin, hair, and clothes were bleached ghostly white—a man accompanied by a crowd of frenetic followers, many who had witnessed him being vomited upon the shore by a great fish. Given the piscine nature of Jonah's arrival, Nineveh's repentance follows from a logical progression.

Apart from the Bible, there is no conclusive historical proof that Jonah was ever swallowed by a fish and lived to tell about it; however, there is some provocative corroboratory evidence. In the third century BC, a Babylonian priest/historian named Berosus wrote of a mythical creature named Oannes who, according to Berosus, emerged from the sea to give divine wisdom to men. Scholars generally identify this mysterious fish-man as an avatar of the Babylonian water-god Ea (also known as Enki). The curious thing about Berosus' account is the name he used: *Oannes*.

Berosus wrote in Greek during the Hellenistic Period. *Oannes* is just a single letter removed from the Greek name *Ioannes*, which happens to be used in the Greek New Testament for Jonah. As for the *I* being dropped from *Ioannes*, Professor Trumbull writes, “In the Assyrian inscriptions the *J* of foreign words becomes *I*, or disappears altogether; hence *Joannes*, as the Greek representative of *Jona*, would appear in Assyrian either as *Ioannes* or as *Oannes*” (ibid., p. 58).

Nineveh was an [Assyrian](#) city. What this essentially means is that Berosus wrote of a fish-man named Jonah who emerged from the sea to give divine wisdom to man—a remarkable corroboration of the Hebrew account.

Berosus claimed to have relied upon official Babylonian sources for his information. Nineveh was conquered by the Babylonians under King Nabopolassar in 612 BC, more than 300 years before Berosus. It is quite conceivable that record of Jonah’s success in Nineveh was preserved in the writings available to Berosus. If so, it appears that Jonah was deified and mythologized over a period of three centuries, first by the Assyrians, who no doubt associated him with their fish-god, Dagon, and then by the Babylonians, who appear to have hybridized him with their own water-god, Ea.

Jonah was not an imaginary figure invented to play the part of a disobedient prophet, swallowed by a fish. He was part of Israel’s prophetic history. Jonah appears in the chronicles of Israel as the prophet who predicted Jeroboam II’s military successes against Syria (2 Kings 14:25). He is said to be the son of Amittai (cf. Jonah 1:1) from the town of Gath-hepher in lower Galilee. Flavius Josephus reiterates these details in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (chapter 10, paragraph 2).

The city of Nineveh was rediscovered after more than 2,500 years of obscurity. It is now believed to have been the largest city in the world at the time of [its demise](#) (see Tertius Chandler’s *Four Thousand Years of Urban Growth: An Historical Census*). According to Sir Austen Henry Layard, who chronicled the rediscovery of Nineveh, the circumference of Greater Nineveh was “exactly three days’ journey,” as recorded in Jonah 3:3 (*A Popular Account of Discoveries at Nineveh*, New York: J. C. Derby, 1854, p. 314). Prior to its rediscovery, skeptics scoffed at the possibility that so large a city could have existed in the ancient world. In fact, some skeptics denied the existence of Nineveh altogether. Its rediscovery in the mid-1800s proved to be a remarkable vindication for the Bible, which mentions Nineveh by name eighteen times and dedicates two entire books (Jonah and Nahum) to its fate.

It is interesting to note where the lost city of Nineveh was rediscovered. It was found buried beneath a pair of tells in the vicinity of Mosul in modern-day Iraq. These mounds are known by their local names, Kuyunjik and Nabi Yunus. Nabi Yunus happens to be Arabic for “the prophet Jonah.”

As for the whale or great fish that swallowed Jonah, the Bible doesn’t specify what sort of marine animal it was. The Hebrew phrase used in the Old Testament, *gadol dag*, literally means “great fish.” The Greek used in the New Testament is *kētos*, which simply means “sea creature.” There are at least two species of Mediterranean marine life that are able to swallow a man whole. These are the cachalot (also known as the sperm whale) and the white shark. Both creatures are known to prowl the Mediterranean and have been known to sailors since antiquity. Aristotle described both species in his fourth-century-BC *Historia Animalium*.

Skeptics scoff at the miracles described in the book of Jonah as if there were no mechanism by which such events could occur. That is their bias. We are inclined, however, to believe that there is [One](#) who is capable of manipulating natural phenomena in such supernatural ways. We believe that He is the Creator of the natural realm and is not, therefore, circumscribed by it. We believe God sent Jonah to Nineveh to bring about their repentance and that, in the process, Jonah was swallowed by a whale or great fish.

Jesus spoke of Jonah’s ordeal as a real historical event. He used it as a typological metaphor for His own crucifixion and resurrection: “As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here” (Matthew 12:40–41).

The evidence is such that any Christian should have confidence to believe that Jonah was truly swallowed by a whale, and any skeptic should think twice before dismissing the story of Jonah as a fairy tale.

C H Spurgeon - Jonah’s resolve, or ‘Look again!’ - full sermon [Jonah’s Resolve, or “Look Again!”](#)

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

There is a text that Jonah could never have heard, which I commend to you against the time when you get to be where Jonah was. I do not suppose you ever will be buried alive in a fish literally, but you may spiritually sink as deep as the prophet did. What is that text? ‘Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.’ Jonah said, ‘I am cast out’, but that was not true. Poor Jonah! The mariners

'cast him' out, but God did not; he was cast out of the ship, but not out of the sight of God. The Lord of old was faithful, and it was his rule never to cast away his people, even as Jeremiah says, 'For the Lord will not cast off for ever: but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.' Mark the text I quoted from our Lord's own lips: 'him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.' Never question this sacred word. He will never, never cast out a single one that trusts him. So that if ever you should be in a condition which seems to you quite as forlorn as that of this prophet in the midst of the sea, you may yet be sure that you are not cast off, nor cast out. He who says he is cast out, says more than can possibly be true, since the infallible promise is, 'him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.' It is not for us to forge a lie against the God of the whole earth. He does not speak that which is false, but out of his mouth proceeds truth. Even if all things in earth and hell should swear that the Lord has cast away one of his own believing people, it will be our duty to disbelieve them all, for it is impossible that he should cast out any believer, in any wise, for any reason or motive whatsoever.

C H Spurgeon - "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord."—Jonah 2:7.

Man is worldly; he forgets the kingdom of God and the world to come. Man is wilful; he follows his own vain imaginations, and, with head-strong rebellion, opposes himself to his God, that he may pursue his own wayward course, and gratify his wanton passions. To convince a man of his error, to arrest him in his evil pursuits, to reclaim him to the paths of righteousness—this is seldom accomplished without dire trouble and deep affliction

C H Spurgeon -**Salvation of the Lord** - full sermon [Salvation of the Lord](#)

"Salvation is of the Lord." Jonah 2:9

"Salvation is of the Lord," in the application of it. "No," says the Arminian, "it is not; salvation is of the Lord, inasmuch as he does all for man that he can do; but there is something that man must do, which if he does not do, he must perish." That is the Arminian way of salvation. I thought of this very theory of salvation when I stood by the side of that window of Carisbrooke Castle, out of which King Charles, of unhappy and unrighteous memory, attempted to escape. I read in the guide book that everything was provided for his escape; his followers had means at the bottom of the wall to enable him to fly across the country, and on the coast they had their boats lying ready to take him to another land; in fact, everything was ready for his escape. But here was the important circumstance; his friends had done all they could; he was to do the rest; but that doing the rest was just the point and brunt of the battle. It was to get out of the window, out of which he was not able to escape by any means, so that all his friends did for him went for nothing, so far as he was concerned. So with the sinner. If God had provided every means of escape, and only required him to get out of his dungeon, he would have remained there to all eternity. Why, is not the sinner by nature dead in sin? And if God requires him to make himself alive, and then afterwards he will do the rest for him, then verily, my friends, we are not so much obliged to God as we had thought; for if he requires so much as that of us, and we can do it, we can do the rest without his assistance.

When poor Jonah spoke these words he uttered them in the very bitterness of his heart; he felt that he was cast out of God's gracious presence. But he must have known something experimentally of the sweetness of God's manifested presence; he must have tasted that heaven was in it, and that all his happiness centered there. He must have enjoyed this in order to know if God's presence were not felt in the soul, there was but one barren scene of gloom and death; and that to be "cast out of His sight" was the commencement of hell upon earth. Now here a living soul differs from all others, whether dead in sin, or dead in profession. The persuasion that in God alone is true happiness; the feeling of misery and dissatisfaction with everything else but the Lord, and everything short of His manifested presence, is that which stamps the reality of the life of God in a man's soul. Mere professors of religion feel no misery, dissatisfaction, or wretchedness, if God shine not upon them. So long as the world smiles, and they have all that heart can wish, so long as they are bouyed up by the soft breezes of flattery, they are well satisfied to sail down the stream of a dead profession. But it is not so with the living soul; he is at times panting after the smiles of God; he is thirsting after His manifested presence; he feels dissatisfied with the world, and all that it presents, if he cannot find the Lord, and does not enjoy the light of His countenance. Where this is experienced, it stamps a man as having the grace of God in his heart.

J.C. Philpot,
Ears from Harvested Sheaves.

Jonah 2:1

April 22, 2006

Strange Places

READ: Psalm 40:1-8

Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly. —Jonah 2:1

Walking past my barn one day, I heard a frantic chirping inside, and upon investigation I found a bluejay beating its wings against the glass pane of the window. Had it not cried and squawked, I would not have heard it. But its plaintive note prompted me to open the door wide and the jay flew out to liberty.

That bluejay was in a strange place for a bird; and Jonah found himself in a strange place for a human being. Because of his disobedience, Jonah was cast into the sea, swallowed by a sea monster and trapped in its belly. Although it was Jonah's own fault that he was there, God was also there to hear his prayer. And when he confessed, God delivered him.

God's children sometimes get themselves into some strange places and unhappy circumstances because of their folly. Are you in a strange place today? Are you out of fellowship with the Lord, defeated, unhappy? Then cry out to God, confess your sin, and be restored by His abundant mercy (1 John 1:9). God is waiting to hear your faintest cry and accept your repentance.

Maybe through your own foolish choices you're in a strange place today—but He is with you and waiting to hear your cry. Don't wait another day. —M. R. De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

When I ceased my vain endeavor
And to Jesus yielded all,
Then He came, the Overcomer,
Conquering foes both great and small. —Complin

**When you're in the wrong place,
God always has the right answer.**

Whale of a Story

The Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. Jonah 2:10

Mike Wittmer

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE Jonah 2:1–10

That "salvation comes from the Lord" (Jonah 2:9) is a major theme which can be traced throughout Scripture. The word translated "salvation" (or "deliverance") comes from the root *yasha'* meaning "to save," "to deliver." In the Old Testament, God rescued His people from dangers posed by individuals, nations, or other unfavorable circumstances that threatened their well-being or existence. Exodus 14:30 highlights God's deliverance from Egypt: "That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians."

The salvation theme of Jonah 2:9 is similarly stated in Psalm 3:8: "Salvation comes from the Lord." The name "Joshua" (which means "the Lord saves") is the Hebrew form of the Greek word that's translated "Jesus" (see Matthew 1:21). Indeed, the testimony of all Scripture is that "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Revelation 7:10).

Today's Devotional

Michael was diving for lobster when a humpback whale caught him in its mouth. He pushed back in the darkness as the whale's muscles squeezed against him. He thought he was done. But whales don't prefer lobstermen, and thirty seconds later the whale spit Michael into the air. Amazingly, Michael had no broken bones—only extensive bruises and one whale of a story.

He wasn't the first. Jonah was swallowed by "a huge fish" (Jonah 1:17), and he stayed in its belly for three days before being vomited onto land (1:17; 2:10). Unlike Michael, who was caught by accident, Jonah was swallowed because he hated Israel's enemies and didn't want them to repent. When God told Jonah to preach in Nineveh, he caught a boat going the other way. So God sent a whale-sized fish to get his attention.

I appreciate why Jonah hated the Assyrians. They'd harassed Israel in the past, and within fifty years they'd carry the northern tribes into captivity where they'd vanish forever. Jonah was understandably offended that Assyria might be forgiven.

But Jonah was more loyal to the people of God than to the God of all people. God loved Israel's enemies and wanted to save them. He loves our enemies and wants to save them. With the wind of the Spirit at our backs, let's sail toward them with the good news of Jesus.

Reflect & Pray

Who do you know that needs to follow Jesus? How might you increase your love for them?

Jesus, please show me how to love my enemies as You love them. (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Up a Tree

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Jonah 2:1-10

I cried out to the LORD in my great trouble, and he answered me. -Jonah 2:2

My mother discovered my kitten Velvet atop the kitchen counter, devouring homemade bread. With a huff of frustration, she scooted her out the door. Hours later, we searched our yard for the missing cat without success. A faint meow whistled on the wind, and I looked up to the peak of a poplar tree where a black smudge tilted a branch.

In her haste to flee my mother's frustration over her behavior, Velvet chose a more precarious predicament. Is it possible that we sometimes do something similar—running from our errors and putting ourselves in danger? And even then God comes to our rescue.

The prophet Jonah fled in disobedience from God's call to preach to Nineveh and was swallowed up by a great fish. "Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from inside the creature. He said, 'I cried out to the Lord in my great trouble, and he answered me' " (JONAH 2:1–2). God heard Jonah's plea and, "ordered the fish to spit Jonah out onto the beach" (V. 10). Then God gave Jonah another chance (3:1–2).

After exhausting our efforts to woo Velvet down, we summoned the local fire department. With the longest ladder fully extended, a kind man climbed high, plucked my kitten from her perch, and returned to place her safely in my arms.

Oh the heights—and the depths—God goes to in rescuing us from our disobedience with His redeeming love!

ELISA MORGAN

How has God rescued you? What sins are you struggling with that you need to bring to Him today?

Dear God, thank You for hearing me when I called out to You and for forgiving my sin by Jesus' sacrifice. (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Running from God

From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry. Jonah 2:2

Kirsten Holmberg

Today's Insights

God's pursuit of Jonah is remarkable because at first, everything and everyone obeyed God except the prophet Jonah! In chapter 1, the wind (v. 4), the tempest (v. 15), and the pagan sailors (vv. 12-15) obey God, as does the great fish (v. 17). In chapter 2, the fish still obeys (v. 10), and in chapter 3, the pagan population of Nineveh obey God in repentant faith (v. 5). In chapter 4, the wind and the worm obey Him (vv. 7-8). God pursued Jonah every step of the way, and when the second call came, the prophet himself finally obeyed (3:1-3).

Today's Devotional

Julie and Liz kayaked off the coast of California, scouting for humpback whales. Humpbacks are known for being active near the surface, making them easy to spot. The two women got the surprise of their lives when one surfaced directly underneath them. An onlooker caught footage of their encounter that showed the large mouth of the whale dwarfing the women and their kayaks. After briefly going underwater, the women escaped unharmed.

Their experience offers perspective on the biblical account of the prophet Jonah being swallowed by a "huge fish" (Jonah 1:17). God had instructed him to preach to the Ninevites, but because they'd rejected God, Jonah didn't feel they were worthy of His forgiveness. Instead of obeying, he ran away and took passage on a ship. God sent a dangerous storm, and he was thrown overboard.

God provided a way to preserve Jonah from certain death on the high seas, sparing him the far-worse consequences of his actions.

Jonah “called to the Lord” and God listened (2:2). After Jonah admitted his wrongdoing and expressed his praise and acknowledgment of God’s goodness, he was—at His command—expelled from the fish “onto dry land” (v. 10).

By God’s grace, when we acknowledge our sin and express faith in Jesus’ sacrifice, we’re spared the spiritual death we deserve and experience new life through Him.

Reflect & Pray

When have you “run away” from God? How have you experienced new life through Jesus?

Dear God, I acknowledge my sin and thank You for providing for me a new life through Jesus. (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Jonah 2:1

Unusual Places

READ: Psalm 40:1-8

Walking past my barn one day, I heard a frantic chirping inside. When I investigated, I found a poor blue jay beating its wings against the window. Had it not cried and chirped, I would not have heard, but its cry for help prompted me to come, open the door wide, and allow it to fly out to freedom.

God’s children get themselves into some unusual places and unhappy circumstances. Consider the following incidents:

Jonah in a fish’s belly, running from God (Jonah 2:1)

David in enemy territory, acting insane (1Sa 21:10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15)

Abram in Egypt, lying about his wife (Gen. 12:10, 11, 12, 13)

Lot in Sodom, living with the wicked (Ge 13:12,13)

Elijah in the desert, wallowing in self-pity (1Ki. 19:4)

Peter in a courtyard, denying his Lord (Lk 22:55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62)

God’s children should not be found in such circumstances, but all too often they are.

Are you in a place you shouldn’t be today? Are you far from God, feeling defeated, trapped, and unhappy? Then cry out to the Lord, confess your sin, and be restored by His abundant mercy (1Jn. 1:9). He is waiting to hear your cry of repentance. — M. R. De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

There is only One who knows
All the answers to my woes;
He will all my needs supply
When in faith to Him I cry. --Morgan

No place is beyond the reach of God’s grace.

Jonah 2:1-2

In The Belly Of A Fish

Jonah must have been very uncomfortable in the belly of the fish. Yet there are many people in this dark and suffocating world who seem to think that the place they find themselves is a pretty good place to be. They believe that the world needs only a few social and political improvements. And they also hold that people themselves possess the ability to make all the needed changes.

But this is not the testimony of the Word of God, for it says that “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1Jn. 5:19). It certainly is not the testimony of the Spirit of truth, for He has come to “convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (Jn 16:8). The primary mission of the church is not to introduce social and political changes into the world, but to proclaim salvation as the way out.

Jonah was not so foolish as to suppose that God would make him a little more comfortable in the fish’s belly, but he looked for deliverance out of it. He cried to the Lord, and the Lord heard him.

We are not to look for perfection in this world but to look forward to the time when Christ will recreate the world and bring in everlasting righteousness. — M. R. De Haan

I am a stranger here within a foreign land,
My home is far away upon the golden strand;
Ambassador to be of realms beyond the sea;
I'm here on business for my King. --Cassel

Our main business in this world is to lay up treasure in heaven.

Jonah 2:9 - Thankful In All Things

March 11, 2013

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

In everything give thanks. —1 Thessalonians 5:18

My daughter is allergic to peanuts. Her sensitivity is so acute that eating even the tiniest fragment of a peanut threatens her life. As a result, we scrutinize food package labels. We carry a pre-filled syringe of medicine (to treat allergic reactions) wherever we go. And, when we eat out, we call ahead and quiz the wait staff about the restaurant's menu items.

Despite these precautions, I still feel concerned—both for her current safety and for her future safety. This situation is not something I would naturally be thankful about. Yet, God's Word challenges: "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:18). There's no getting around it. God wants us to pray with thanksgiving when the future is uncertain, when heartbreak hits, and when shortfalls come.

It's hard to be grateful in difficulties, but it's not impossible. Daniel "prayed and gave thanks" (Dan. 6:10), knowing that his life was in danger. Jonah called out "with the voice of thanksgiving" (Jonah 2:9) while inside a fish! These examples, coupled with God's promise that He will work all things together for our good and His glory (Rom. 8:28), can inspire us to be thankful in all things.

Thanks for roses by the wayside,
Thanks for thorns their stems contain.
Thanks for homes and thanks for fireside
Thanks for hope, that sweet refrain! —Hultman

In all circumstances, we can give thanks that God has not left us on our own.

By Jennifer Benson Schuldt

Jonah 2:3, 5 - The Valley of Vision

September 30, 2015

Read: Jonah 2:1-10 | Bible in a Year: Isaiah 9–10; Ephesians 3

I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you. Jonah 2:7

The Puritan prayer "The Valley of Vision" speaks of the distance between a sinful man and his holy God. The man says to God, "Thou hast brought me to the valley of vision . . . ; hemmed in by mountains of sin I behold Thy glory." Aware of his wrongs, the man still has hope. He continues, "Stars can be seen from the deepest wells, and the deeper the wells the brighter Thy stars shine." Finally, the poem ends with a request: "Let me find Thy light in my darkness, . . . Thy glory in my valley."

Jonah found God's glory during his time in the ocean's depths. He rebelled against God and ended up in a fish's stomach, overcome by his sin. There, Jonah cried to God: "You cast me into the deep The waters surrounded me, even to my soul" (Jonah 2:3,5 nkjv). Despite his situation, Jonah said, "I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you" (Jonah 2:7). God heard his prayer and caused the fish to free him.

Although sin creates distance between God and us, we can look up from the lowest points in our lives and see Him—His holiness, goodness, and grace. If we turn away from our sin and confess it to God, He will forgive us. God answers prayers from the valley.

Lord, in the daytime stars can be seen from deepest wells, and the deeper the wells the brighter Your stars shine; let me find Your light in my darkness.

The darkness of sin only makes the light of God's grace shine brighter.

INSIGHT: Jonah initially ministered to the northern kingdom of Israel during the powerful reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23-28). God reassigned him to minister to the Assyrian city of Nineveh and to warn them to repent or face God's judgment (Jonah 1:1). After Jonah refused this new mission and instead fled in the opposite direction (Jonah 1:3), God disciplined him by causing him to be swallowed up by a big fish during a violent storm (Jonah 1:4,17). Jonah 2 records Jonah's prayer of repentance when he was inside the fish. Jesus used this event to foreshadow His own burial and resurrection when He said, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40; Jonah 1:17). Sim Kay Tee

By Jennifer Benson Schuldt

Jonah 2:2 - From Peeker To Seeker

October 17, 2014

Read: Jonah 1:1–2:2

I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, and He answered me. —Jonah 2:2

When our daughter was too young to walk or crawl, she created a way to hide from people when she wanted to be left alone or wanted her own way. She simply closed her eyes. Kathryn reasoned that anyone she couldn't see also couldn't see her. She used this tactic in her car seat when someone new tried to say hello; she used it in her highchair when she didn't like the food; she even used it when we announced it was bedtime.

Jonah had a more grown-up strategy of hiding, but it wasn't any more effective than our daughter's. When God asked him to do something he didn't want to do, he ran in the opposite direction. But he found out pretty quickly there is no place God couldn't find him. In fact, Scripture is full of stories of God finding people when they didn't necessarily want to be found (Ex. 2:11–3:6; 1 Kings 19:1-7; Acts 9:1-19).

Maybe you have tried to hide from God, or maybe you think even God can't see you. Please know this: If God sees and hears the prayer of a rebellious prophet in the belly of a big fish, then He sees and hears you wherever you are, whatever you've done. But that's nothing to be afraid of. It's actually a great comfort. He's always there, and He cares!

Thank You, God, that You are there for us.

We hear Your words: "You will seek Me
and find Me, when you search for Me
with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13).

We need not fear the troubles around us as long as the eye of the Lord is on us.

By Randy Kilgore

Water and God's Wrath - Warren Wiersbe "Biblical Images"

God's Wrath

Ps. 42:7

Ps. 88:7

Jer. 51:42

Jer. 51:55

Ezek. 26:3

Jonah 2:3

Jonah 2 - AN ILLUSTRATION

An experience never to be forgotten is that of those who have encountered prairie fires on the western plains. In the distance they have seen the clouds of smoke, and have smelled the burning grass. If the winds be blowing from the direction of the fire, their position is one of extreme danger. The swiftest horse can scarcely outrun the flames. On they sweep with the fury of the hurricane, consuming everything in their path. In such circumstances, the only safety is to set fire to the grass at one's feet and when it has burned an open space, stand where the fire had been. The surging waves of flame must cease at the border of the newly-burnt zone.

Now, says a writer, in a very graphic way this illustrates the work of Christ, He interposes Himself between the sinner and the waves of destruction that were bearing down upon Him, In His own body He bore the penalty of sin. Sin, so to speak, burnt over Him; and in the Gospel He is calling men to come to Him for safety. Having spent its fury upon Him, it cannot harm those who stand with Him.

It was on the Cross of Calvary that the fire burnt fiercest. It was the hour of the prince of darkness. The fury of Satan exhausted itself on the "Sinless Sufferer" there. And "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Standing where the flames have been, the sinner need not fear the fires of sin. They have no power over him. He has a life that is hid with Christ in God. No power on earth or in hell can pluck him out of the Father's hands. What an assurance of safety! How gladly ought men to avail themselves of it! Publisher Unknown.([Robert Neighbour](#))

Jonah 2 - You Can't Do Anything

God sometimes allows us to enter into discouraging situations for the primary purpose of testing our faith. At such times we must refuse to give up in despair. Like Jonah in the belly of the great fish, we must turn to the Lord when our soul is fainting within us, trusting Him completely. James H. McConkey wrote, "What can you do when you are about to faint physically? You can't DO anything! In your weakness you just fall upon the shoulders of some strong loved one, lean hard, and rest until your strength returns. The same is true when you are tempted to faint under adversity. The Lord's message to us is 'Be still, and know that I am God' (Psalm 46:10). Hudson Taylor was so feeble in the closing months of his life that he said to a dear friend, 'I'm so weak that I can't work or read my Bible, and I can hardly pray. I can only lie still in God's arms like a little child and trust.' And that is all the Heavenly Father asks of you when you grow weary in the fierce fires of affliction." - Our Daily Bread

Jonah 2:2

Lessons From Jonah

Our Daily Bread

The story of Jonah is one of the most discussed and fascinating accounts in the Bible. But for all the debate, one thing is sure: Jonah did a lot of soul-searching in that smelly underwater hotel.

All of us can identify. Sometimes life just goes badly. When it does, like Jonah we need to ask ourselves some hard questions.

Is there sin in my life? In light of Jonah's blatant disobedience, God had to do something drastic to catch his attention and lead him to repentance.

What can I learn from this situation? The wicked people of Nineveh were enemies of God's people. Jonah thought they should be judged and not given a second chance. He obviously needed a lesson in sharing God's compassion for the lost. "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster" (Jonah 3:10).

Can I display God's glory in this? Often our suffering is not about us but about people seeing the power of God working through our weakness. Jonah found himself in a helpless situation, yet God used him to lead a pagan nation to repentance.

Next time you find yourself in a "belly-of-a-whale" problem, don't forget to ask the hard questions. It could mean the difference between despair and deliverance. — Joe Stowell ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

For Further Study

For an in-depth study of the fascinating account of Jonah, read [The Failure Of Success: The Story Of Jonah](#)

We learn lessons in the school of suffering
that we can learn in no other way.

Tell Me The Story Written by Joe Stowell for Our Daily Bread

"All these things happened to them as examples and . . . for our admonition." 1 Corinthians 10:11

Now that I have grandkids, I'm back into the classic children's Bible stories. Wide-eyed stories like David and Goliath, Noah's ark, and **Jonah and the big fish** quickly capture a child's imagination!

But there's a danger here—not with the stories themselves but rather with our attitude toward them. If we view them simply as kids'

stories, kind of like the Grimm's Fairy Tales of the Bible, we miss the point.

The stories of the Bible were never meant to be outgrown. There are profound lessons to be learned from the amazing accounts of those who faced giants, floods, and fish!

Hundreds of years after the fact, the apostle Paul explained that the things that happened to Moses and the Israelites as they wandered through the desert "happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10:11). These stories are about us. They mirror the tensions we face daily as we too seek to apply God's will and ways to the realities of our lives. They teach us of the treachery of sin, our desperate need to trust God unflinchingly, and the importance of staying faithful and true to Him regardless of what happens.

Don't ignore the old stories. You might be surprised what God wants to teach you through them.

We learn the blessed Word of God
To fix it firmly in our heart,
And when we act upon that Word
Its truth from us will not depart. —D. De Haan

Stories from the past can give us pointers for the present.

Jonah 2:4

F B Meyer

Our Daily Homily

Jonah 2:4 I am cast out from before thine eyes; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. (r.v.)

That is well, O truant soul. Look again from where thou art! Thou art in the heart of the seas; the flood of sorrow enwraps thee; storms of trouble are sweeping over thee—but look again toward his holy temple. All that sorrow has been sent to bring thee back from thy wanderings, and cause thee to look again. Thou couldest not look so long as thy back was towards the will of God, and thy face towards Tarshish; but now thou art turned again, and art on thy way back, thou mayest look again in the direction of the altar and its sacrifice, the High Priest and his mediation. Look again. Look off unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of Faith. Do not wait till thou hast come into a better vantage-point for vision, but look again from thy position in the lowest depths.

Look again! God invites thee, too. Though thou hast turned thy back on Him these many years, He waits to be gracious; his face is wreathed in tenderest, yearning love. One look the least, the most abashed, from the greatest distance, will be eagerly noticed and instantly reciprocated. "They looked unto Him and were lightened" — so wilt thou be. And He will bring up thy life from the pit. Does thy soul faint within thee? — then remember the Lord. Let there be but one yearning desire for Him, and it will come in unto Him as a prayer to his holy temple.

Look again! in spite of as remonstrances of thine heart. "I said." The heart is always saying: I am too vile; I have sinned too deeply; I have gone too far; I have so often fallen and returned, I am ashamed to come again: besides, are there not texts about never forgiveness, and impossible to renew to repentance? I said: Yet, look again!

Jonah 2:9. A strange college! by Spurgeon

"Salvation is of the Lord." - Jonah 2:9.

JONAH learned this sentence of good theology in a strange college.

He learned it in the whale's belly, at the bottom of the mountains,
with the weeds wrapped about his head, when he supposed
that the earth with her bars was about him forever.

Most of the grand truths of God have to be learned by trouble;
they must be burned into us with the hot iron of affliction,
otherwise we shall not truly receive them.

Jonah 2:8

Morning and Evening

C H Spurgeon

“Salvation is of the Lord.” — Jonah 2:9

Salvation is the work of God. It is he alone who quickens the soul “dead in trespasses and sins,” and it is he also who maintains the soul in its spiritual life. He is both “Alpha and Omega.” “Salvation is of the Lord.” If I am prayerful, God makes me prayerful; if I have graces, they are God’s gifts to me; if I hold on in a consistent life, it is because he upholds me with his hand. I do nothing whatever towards my own preservation, except what God himself first does in me. Whatever I have, all my goodness is of the Lord alone. Wherein I sin, that is my own; but wherein I act rightly, that is of God, wholly and completely. If I have repulsed a spiritual enemy, the Lord’s strength nerved my arm. Do I live before men a consecrated life? It is not I, but Christ who liveth in me. Am I sanctified? I did not cleanse myself: God’s Holy Spirit sanctifies me. Am I weaned from the world? I am weaned by God’s chastisements sanctified to my good. Do I grow in knowledge? The great Instructor teaches me. All my jewels were fashioned by heavenly art. I find in God all that I want; but I find in myself nothing but sin and misery. “He only is my rock and my salvation.” Do I feed on the Word? That Word would be no food for me unless the Lord made it food for my soul, and helped me to feed upon it. Do I live on the manna which comes down from heaven? What is that manna but Jesus Christ himself incarnate, whose body and whose blood I eat and drink? Am I continually receiving fresh increase of strength? Where do I gather my might? My help cometh from heaven’s hills: without Jesus I can do nothing. As a branch cannot bring forth fruit except it abide in the vine, no more can I, except I abide in him. What Jonah learned in the great deep, let me learn this morning in my closet: “Salvation is of the Lord.”

John MacArthur - JONAH’S THANKSGIVING

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

Amazingly, the prophet Jonah gave thanks to God while he was in the great fish’s belly (Jon. 2:1). How would you respond if you were Jonah? Maybe you would cry out, “What are You doing, God? Where are You? Why is this happening?” But Jonah reacted differently: “I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, and He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard My voice” (v. 2). He then described his sinking into the sea and the severity of his dilemma (vv. 3–5)

Nevertheless, in the midst of such great trauma, Jonah prayed, “You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God. When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer went up to You, into Your holy temple” (vv. 6–7). Although he had his weaknesses, Jonah reflected great spiritual stability in his prayer. He was confident of God’s ability to deliver him if He so chose. In the same way, the peace of God will help you if you react to circumstances with thankful prayer [Truth for Today: A Daily Touch of God's Grace - Page 349](#)

Pursued by Love

I will say, “Salvation comes from the Lord.” Jonah 2:9

Today's Scripture & Insight : Jonah 2:1–9

“I fled Him, down the nights and down the days,” opens the famous poem “The Hound of Heaven” by English poet Francis Thompson. Thompson describes Jesus’ unceasing pursuit—despite his efforts to hide, or even run away, from God. The poet imagines God speaking to him and saying, “I am He whom thou seekest!”

The pursuing love of God is a central theme of the book of Jonah. The prophet received an assignment to tell the people of Nineveh (notorious enemies of Israel) about their need to turn to God, but instead “Jonah ran away from the Lord” (Jonah 1:3). He secured passage on a ship sailing in the opposite direction of Nineveh, but the vessel was soon overcome by a violent storm. To save the ship’s crew, Jonah was thrown overboard before being swallowed by a large fish (1:15–17).

In his own beautiful poem, Jonah recounted that despite his best efforts to run away from God, God pursued him. When Jonah was overcome by his situation and needed to be saved, he cried out to God in prayer and turned toward His love (2:2, 8). God answered and provided rescue not only for Jonah, but for his Assyrian enemies as well (3:10).

As described in both poems, there may be seasons of our lives when we try to run from God. Even then Jesus loves us and is at work guiding us back into restored relationship with Him (1 John 1:9). By: Lisa M. Samra (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

When have you tried to run from God? How did He provide rescue?

Jesus, thank You for lovingly pursuing me to offer rescue.

JONAH 3

Jonah 3:1, 2, 3. The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time saying, Arise, go to Nineveh.... So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh.

Come, take that task of yours which you have been hesitating before, and shirking, and walking around, and on this very day lift it up and do it. - PHILLIPS BROOKS.

Jonah 3 A Modern Day Jonah - Wrong Way Riegels

On New Year's Day, 1929, Georgia Tech played University of California in the Rose Bowl. In that game a man named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for California. Somehow, he became confused and started running 65 yards in the wrong direction. One of his teammates, Benny Lom, outdistanced him and downed him just before he scored for the opposing team. When California attempted to punt, Tech blocked the kick and scored a safety which was the ultimate margin of victory. That strange play came in the first half, and everyone who was watching the game was asking the same question: "What will Coach Nibbs Price do with Roy Riegels in the second half?" The men filed off the field and went into the dressing room. They sat down on the benches and on the floor, all but Riegels. He put his blanket around his shoulders, sat down in a corner, put his face in his hands, and cried like a baby. If you have played football, you know that a coach usually has a great deal to say to his team during half time. That day Coach Price was quiet. No doubt he was trying to decide what to do with Riegels. Then the timekeeper came in and announced that there were three minutes before playing time. Coach Price looked at the team and said simply, "Men the same team that played the first half will start the second." The players got up and started out, all but Riegels. He did not budge. the coach looked back and called to him again; still he didn't move. Coach Price went over to where Riegels sat and said, "Roy, didn't you hear me? The same team that played the first half will start the second." Then Roy Riegels looked up and his cheeks were wet with a strong man's tears. "Coach," he said, "I can't do it to save my life. I've ruined you, I've ruined the University of California, I've ruined myself. I couldn't face that crowd in the stadium to save my life." Then Coach Price reached out and put his hand on Riegel's shoulder and said to him: "Roy, get up and go on back; the game is only half over." And Roy Riegels went back, and those Tech men will tell you that they have never seen a man play football as Roy Riegels played that second half. - Haddon W. Robinson, Christian Medical Society Journal

Jonah 3:1

F B Meyer

Our Daily Homily

Jonah 3:1 The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time.

We must not presume on this, but we may take it to our hearts for their very great comfort. God's word may come to us "the second time." Jonah evaded it the first time; but he was permitted to have a second opportunity of obeying it. Thus it was with Peter; he failed to realize the Lord's ideal in the first great trial of his apostolic career, but the Lord met him on the shores of the lake, and his word came to him a second time.

God is not waiting to notice our first failure and thrust us from his service. He waits, with eager desire, to give us the joy and honor of being fellow-laborers with Himself. He waits to be gracious. Therefore, when in our madness we refuse to do his bidding, and rush off in another direction, He brings us back, amid bitter experiences, and says, "Go again to Nineveh with the message that I gave thee originally."

How many times He will do this I do not dare to say. He forgives indefinitely, unto seventy times seven; but how often He will re-entrust the sacred message and mission, it is not for me to say. But there is, without doubt, a limit beyond which He cannot go, lest our own character suffer, and the interests of other souls, who may be dissuaded from obedience by our example, should be imperiled.

How wonderful it is that God should employ us at all! Yet it is like his work in nature. He is ever calling men to co-operate with Himself. He lays the coal up in mines, but man must excavate: He puts the flowers in the wilds, but man cultivates them: He gives the water, but man irrigates the fields. So He longs over Nineveh, but summons sinful men to carry his word.

Robert Morgan - Brother Jonah BORROW [From this verse : 365 inspiring stories](#)

We remember Jonah mainly as whale bait, forgetting he became one of the greatest itinerant preachers in history, converting a huge city with an eight-word sermon.

Today his example inspires another Jonah, a man in China, who risks life and liberty traveling around with a knapsack of Bibles. As Jonah preaches, he often takes his text from Jonah 3:4, telling audiences they are like the Ninevites: "You live in defiance of the true God who will judge you if you don't repent."

On a recent weekend, Jonah found himself wedged in a crowded third-class railway carriage. By and by, a soldier leaned over and said, "Old man, tell us why you seem so happy."

Jonah replied, "What do you think? What would be the happiest thing that could ever happen to you?"

The man next to Jonah replied, "I want to be loved by a beautiful woman." A lady said, "A big house would make me the happiest person in the world." Another said, "A passport to America." The soldier said, "If I had the power to command the People's Liberation Army, I'd be happy."

"Let me see, now," said Jonah. "I have a mansion so large an emperor would envy; I am loved by the most beautiful person in the world; I have freedom to go wherever I wish; and I happen to be a close friend of the most powerful man on earth. In fact, I have received all this from one person; His name is Jesus Christ."

As the train jostled across Communist China, Jonah pulled out an old Bible and spent the next 20 hours giving his listeners an all-night seminar about the Christian faith.

Disembarking the train, he bicycled another five hours, dodging authorities who had been tipped off by an informant on the train. All in all that weekend, Jonah traveled 40 hours on trains, 9 hours on buses, 9 hours peddling a bicycle; he led 50 people to Christ—all at age 73.*

Today's Suggested Reading Jonah 3:1–10

And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Jonah 3:4

Norman Geisler - JONAH 3:3—Is Jonah's testimony to the size of Nineveh accurate? [When Critics Ask](#)

PROBLEM: When Jonah arrived at the city of Nineveh, he observed that the city was so large, that it took a three-day journey to pass through it. However, such a statement must be an exaggeration, since it is argued that the average man could walk only from 50 to 70 miles in three days. A city of 50 to 70 miles in diameter is not recorded in all of history until modern times. Is this an error?

SOLUTION: There have been several proposals to explain this observation by Jonah. Some commentators propose that Jonah is commenting on the circumference of the city. A city 50 miles in circumference would be about 16 miles in diameter. This size more nearly fits the estimated population of about 600,000 people in this major ancient city.

Other commentators propose that Jonah is not claiming that it would take three days to walk straight through the city. Rather, Jonah observed that it would take three days to go through all the various areas in the entire city. Those who hold this position point out that Jonah went to Nineveh in order to proclaim the message of judgment to the people. This would require him to go to every part of the city, not simply to walk through the middle from one side to the other. This also fits the statement of verse 4 in which Jonah enters the city and, in the first day's walk, proclaimed the message as he went along.

Norman Geisler - JONAH 3:6—Why does Jonah refer to the king of Assyria simply as the king of Nineveh? [When Critics Ask](#)

PROBLEM: Conservative scholars maintain that the Book of Jonah was written by the prophet Jonah who actually experienced the events recorded in the book. However, if the Book of Jonah was written by a Hebrew prophet who lived in the time of the Assyrian empire, why would he refer to the king of the Assyrian empire simply as the king of Nineveh?

SOLUTION: All of the ancient records regarding the history of Assyria testify to the fact that it was common knowledge that Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria. Simply because Jonah identifies this king as the king of Nineveh does not mean that Jonah did not also realize that this man was the king of the Assyrian empire of which Nineveh was the capital. The king of Assyria would certainly be the king of its capital city. To identify the king of a nation as the king of its capital city was not uncommon. In 1 Kings 21:1 Ahab, king of Israel, is referred to as the king of Samaria. So, Jonah's use of this title is not anachronistic, and does not provide evidence for a late date.

Jonah 3 - AN ILLUSTRATION

It had been a dull year in the church where Moffat was converted. The deacons finally said to the old pastor: "We love you, pastor, but don't you think you had better resign? There hasn't been a convert this year." "Yes," he replied, "it has been a dull year sadly dull to me. Yet I mind me that one did come, wee Bobby Moffat. But he is so wee a bairn that I suppose it is not right to count him." A few years later Bobby came to the pastor and said, "Pastor, do you think that I could ever learn to preach? I feel within here something that tells me that I ought to. If I could just lead souls to Christ, that would be happiness to me." The pastor answered, "Well, Bobby, you might; who knows? At least you can try!" He did try, and years later when Robert Moffat came back from his wonderful work in Africa, the king of England rose and uncovered in his presence, and the British Parliament stood as a mark of respect. The humble old preacher, who had but one convert, and who was so discouraged, is dead and forgotten, and yet that was the greatest year's work he ever did and few have equaled it. Publisher Unknown. ([Robert Neighbour](#))

Jonah 3:1-10

Go to the great city of Nineveh, and preach against it... Should I not be concerned about that great city? - Jonah 1:2; 4:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 430, Patrick, a young Roman Briton, was carried off by Irish raiders to be a slave. At the time he was a nominal Christian, but he turned to God in earnest in the midst of his suffering. "I would pray constantly during the daylight hours," he later said. "The love of God and the fear of Him surrounded me more and more." After six years, he escaped.

Years later, Patrick had a dream in which he received a call to evangelize Ireland, the country in which he'd been enslaved. At that time, Ireland was pagan and idolatrous, a difficult place to serve. Patrick faced fierce opposition from druids and wrote, "Daily I expect murder, fraud, or captivity, but I fear none of these things because of the promises of heaven."

Called to witness to his enemies, Patrick obeyed. But when Jonah was called to do the same, he ran.

Where was [Nineveh \(see notes\)](#)? This ancient city, with a population of 120,000 (Jonah 4:11) and an area of about sixty square miles, was the capital of Assyria, a world power and chief enemy of Israel. Jonah ran away not because he was afraid to take a message of judgment there, but because he was afraid the people would repent and God would relent and forgive them (Jonah 4:1, 2, 3). He understood God's character well (Jonah 4:10; cf. Jer 18:7, 8, 9, 10)!

The Ninevites did indeed respond to Jonah's preaching. They fasted and wore sackcloth to demonstrate humility and repentance before God (v. 5). The essence of repentance is a changed heart and life, as the king's proclamation recognizes: "Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence" (v. 8).

God gave both the Ninevites and Jonah a second chance; His love is infinite, reaching out even to those who oppose Him (Matt. 5:44-45; Rom. 5:10). Later, in an example which must have galled the Pharisees, Jesus used the Ninevites as an example of repentance in response to God's love (Matt. 12:41).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY - Here's a question for reflection: Would you share the gospel with your enemies? You may not think that you have actual "enemies." To identify the people in your life who may be your "Ninevites," think of people whom you dislike or at least those you tend to avoid. Are you willing to share God's love with them? Do you desire to spend eternity with them? Can you think of specific ways, in word or in action, to communicate the love of Christ to them? What you do with your answers to these questions is between you and God. ([Today in the Word. Moody Bible Institute. Used by Permission. All rights reserved](#))

Jonah 3:1-4:11

Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? ... Am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? - Ezekiel 18:23

At the height of the Soviet Union's power, it controlled territory from the Baltics to the Balkans, and controlled a circle of Central Asian republics. Soviet troops often used brutal tactics to suppress challenges to Soviet domination. For residents who lived in Soviet satellite countries, the Soviets were feared and hated. Yet believers from countries such as Romania and Poland risked their lives to bring the gospel into the heart of the Soviet Union.

Although most people only think about Jonah and his encounters with a big fish, this book is a compelling example of God's love for even the most hated of nations. Assyria at that time was known for its gruesome cruelty. Assyrians were so proud of their ability to terrorize that they left numerous monuments boasting of their sadistic practices. To the average Israelite, the most logical object of God's wrath would be Nineveh. It's no wonder, then, that Jonah felt that he had to run from God's call. If he went to Nineveh, he was

sure to be killed; and even if he were successful in his mission, no one would rejoice at home that anything good had happened to these hated people.

After much resistance, Jonah went to Nineveh, and the results of his preaching were nothing short of miraculous (Jonah 3:5, 10). The Lord's concern for Nineveh shows that His love was not confined to a particular nation or place. This is the most likely reason why Jonah tried to run away. It was unthinkable to him that God could love even the Assyrians. In Jonah's mind, these people deserved God's wrath because of all they had done. But, apart from God's intervention, all people are deserving of His wrath. God's heart is that all people might repent and turn toward Him.

Jonah was a very human prophet. God's ways were difficult for him to understand—and he was not afraid to let God know that. But God's response to Jonah cut to the core: Jonah cared more about his comfort than the fate of a 120,000 people.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY - The book of Jonah forces us to ask some hard questions. Are we like Jonah and become angry if God extends mercy to those who we feel deserve judgment? Perhaps this is how we feel about outreach to hardened criminals or prayer for terrorists. Or are we going to take God's perspective, which asks, "Should I not be concerned about that great city?" Jonah pushes us to see how great God's love is for all nations and peoples, even those whom we consider enemies deserving His wrath. ([Today in the Word. Moody Bible Institute. Used by Permission. All rights reserved](#))

Jonah 3:10-4:11 Anger Or Applause? - [see below](#)

Jonah 3:10-4:11

But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" - Jonah 4:9

In recent years, educational studies have discovered that different people have different styles of learning. Some learn best through verbal interaction--in lectures or books. Others learn visually--seeing images or symbols helps them to remember or communicate information. Still others learn experientially, interacting with physical materials or environments in order to understand them.

Jonah, it would seem, is an experiential learner. This reluctant prophet only learns when God places him in live-action parables. In growing and withering the vine, for example, God leads Jonah in an experience of grace in order to explain His mercy for the Ninevites.

Jonah knows God is gracious. Indeed, it angers Him (Jonah 4:2). He doesn't want God to show grace to the Gentile Ninevites, but only to Israel. God's question to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry?" suggests that Jonah doesn't understand the nature of grace. His response to the gift of the vine confirms this; God graciously shelters Jonah from the desert sun, but when the vine withers, Jonah is angry again.

This time he justifies his anger (Jonah 4:9). He asserts his right to shade in the desert; he asserts his "right" to grace. But God tells Jonah the vine was a gift, just as much as His mercy on the Ninevites is a gift. Neither the sheltering vine (a means of grace in the desert) nor the forgiveness of God can be earned, only received.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY - Jonah tried to limit God's mercy to others, but demanded it as a right for himself. His attitude is worth pondering. Are we sometimes the "reluctant prophets"? Do we hoard God's kindness to ourselves? Or are we willing to testify to His mercy to whomever He sends us? Today, like Samuel, say to the Lord, "Here I am, send me." Ask for an opportunity this week to speak of God's kindness to someone you may have previously been reluctant to talk to. Then wait and see whom God will bring your way and follow God's leading.

Jonah 3:10; 4:1–2 A God Who Relents? Walter Kaiser 1:4–5, 7 -[Hard Sayings of the Bible](#)

So sharp is the contrast between what God had said would happen to Nineveh and what actually took place that we are left to wonder whether divine words are always fulfilled or whether God is presented in the Old Testament as a rather fickle person. Even though from the start Jonah had suspected, because of God's gracious character, that he would not carry out his threats against Nineveh, we are still left in doubt over God's ability to predict the future or his constancy of character.

Some have attempted to rescue the situation by distinguishing between God's secret will and his declared will. The former, so this line of argumentation goes, is his real intention, which remains fixed and unchangeable, while the latter varies depending on conditions. But this representation of God's will does not accord with Scripture elsewhere, for it still conveys the appearance of insincerity on the part of God—as if God were deceptive, representing his thoughts differently from what they really were, and representing future events differently from what he knew would eventually happen!

The language of this verse, which represents our Lord as "relent[ing]" or "repent[ing]," is undoubtedly an anthropomorphism—a

depiction of God in human terms. Certainly the infinite, eternal God can be known to us only through human imagery, and thus he is represented as thinking and acting in a human manner. Without anthropomorphisms, we could never speak positively of God; to try would be to entangle ourselves in deism, which makes God so transcendent that he is never identified with us in our world. When we rush to get rid of the human forms in our talk about God, we sink into meaningless blandness.

Nevertheless, when it comes to the eternal principles of righteousness, Scripture is just as insistent about the impossibility of change in God. Consider, for example, the declaration made to Balaam: "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind" (Num 23:19). Similarly in 1 Samuel 15:29 Samuel informs Saul, "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind."

The descriptions of God that have to do with his inherent and immutable righteousness allow no room for change in the character of deity or in his external administrations. His righteousness calls for consistency and unchangeableness.

But such representations argue nothing against the possibility, or even the moral necessity, of a change in God's carrying out of his declarations in cases where the people against whom the judgment was issued have changed, so that the grounds for the threatened judgment have disappeared. For God not to change in such cases would go against his essential quality of justice and his responsiveness to any change that he had planned to bring about.

If this is the case, some wonder why the announcement made by Jonah took such an absolute form: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned" (Jon 3:4). Why not plainly include "if the people do not repent"?

This objection assumes that the form given to the message was not the best suited to elicit the desired result. Actually, as the record shows, this message indeed awakened the proper response, and so the people were spared. As delivered, it was a proper account of how God felt and the danger to which Nineveh was exposed.

Of course God's warnings always carried with them the reverse side of the coin, the promises. This element of alternatives within one prophecy can be seen best in Jeremiah 18:9–11 and Ezekiel 18:24 (see, too, Rom 11:22). The good things promised in these prophecies cannot be attributed to any works righteousness or to any merited favor, but are always found in connection with the principles of holiness and obedience to God's Word.

Does this imply that all the predictions from the prophets' lips were operating under this same rule, that nothing was absolute or certain in the revealed predictive realm? Far from it! There are portions that may be regarded in the strictest sense as absolute, because their fulfillment depended on nothing but the faithfulness and power of God. Such were the declarations of Daniel about the four successive world empires. All the statements about the appearance of Christ, in his first and second advents, are included here, along with predictions about the progress of the kingdom of God and promises connected with our salvation.

But when the prophecy depicts judgment or promises good things to come, the prophetic word is not the first and determining element; it is secondary and dependent on the spiritual response of those to whom the words are delivered.

God changed, but his character and nature as the altogether true and righteous One has never changed. As a living person, he changed only in response to a required change in the Ninevites to whom Jonah's word was delivered. Thus he exhibits no fickleness or instability. He remains the unchanging God who will withdraw his threatened judgment as soon as the human responses justify his doing so.

See also comment on GENESIS 6:6; 1 SAMUEL 13:13–14; 15:29; ACTS 1:26.

John Kitto - Nineveh—Jonah 3:3

The command to Jonah to proceed to Nineveh and proclaim its doom, was soon renewed, and he no longer sought to shun the duty thus imposed.

He reached Nineveh, which, we are told, was "an exceeding great city of three days' journey." This may be reckoned at about sixty miles. And that it must be understood of the circumference and not of the length, is clear, not only from the coincidences of the statements of ancient writers with modern discoveries, but from the necessities of the case, and from the inferences deducible from the assigned population. Those who, from this text, talk of the city as sixty miles long, cannot really have formed a practical idea of such a city. London, whose vast extent astonishes the world, and which contains a population twice or thrice that of Nineveh, cannot be reckoned as more than eight miles in length. If a population of not more than one third or one half that of London, or even equal thereto, were expanded over a surface equal to eight times that of London, it would cease to be a city for any of the purposes of a concentrated community, but would be a country sparsely dotted with human habitations. Even to give it a circumference of sixty miles, with an area twice the extent of London, for certainly not more, and probably much less, than half the population, needs an explanation as to the loose mode in which ancient oriental cities were constructed. But it will be urged that Jonah went "a day's journey into the city" delivering the message entrusted to him. This is, indeed, the principal argument for understanding the previous

passage to refer to the diameter. But it seems to us to prove just the reverse. If the city were in length three days' journey, why should he go only one day's journey into it delivering the denunciations entrusted to him, leaving two thirds of the city unvisited? The meaning clearly is, that he began to give his declaration as he entered the city, and continued to deliver it through the entire day's journey, which it took him to traverse its whole extent. In fact, the two statements coincide with and support each other—for a city three days' journey in circumference, will be about one day's journey in diameter. Diodorus, the principal ancient authority, moreover, gives to the circumference a measurement which, reduced from stadia (480), makes just sixty miles; and Dr. Layard and Mr. Bonomi, though they differ in drawing the boundary line, bring the result to the same circumference.

The population, which forms an element in this calculation, is stated in the book before us to comprise "six score thousand persons, who cannot discern between their right hand and their left." Some think that this latter phrase denotes a condition of spiritual ignorance, and expresses the entire population. But as a population not exceeding 120,000 persons would be inordinately out of proportion to the most limited extent that can be assigned to the city, we take the phrase to indicate young children, as is, indeed, commonly understood. These are usually one fifth of the entire population of any place, so that this would make the population of Nineveh about 600,000, not more than one third that of London—so that the area of Nineveh being, twice as great, the population of the British metropolis is six times more dense than was that of the Assyrian capital. This needs some explanation. A learned German writer¹⁰¹² affords some valuable ideas with regard to the origination of such cities as those of Nineveh and Babylon. He shows that the great cities of Asia were constituted in a manner quite different from those of Europe. They generally grew out of the settlements of nomad conquerors, who fixed their abode in a subjugated country, and changed their old mode of life for one more settled and peaceful. The encampment of a chieftain, near the walls of some already existing capital, was speedily converted into a new city which eclipsed the splendor of the old one. The vanquished people were employed in its erection; the plan of the camp, which it followed in every particular, ensured its symmetry, and enables us to account for its square form, and the straight lines in which its streets extended and intersected each other at right angles, as well as for their great extent and loose construction. The extent of these cities forms but little guide to the European in estimating their population. The compact close streets of Europe, and especially of the walled towns on the Continent, form a striking contrast to the scattered mansions of the East surrounded with their extensive courts and gardens, occupying a very large proportion of the whole area. An equal space, therefore, was far from containing the same number of men as in the cities of Europe.

How far this applies to Nineveh we can judge from the statements already made with regard to its extent as compared with its population, and still more, from what we know historically respecting Babylon, which was of about the same extent as Nineveh, and was, without doubt, laid out on the same general plan. Of this city Quintus Curtius states, that the buildings do not reach to the walls, but are at the distance of an acre (jugerum) from them. Neither is the whole city covered with houses, but only ninety furlongs (stadia); nor do the houses stand in rows by each other, but the intervals which separate them are sown and cultivated that they may furnish subsistence in case of siege." This was the more important, as in the absence, in these regions, of any other defenses than such as the great cities supplied, it was usual for the inhabitants of the open country, for a considerable distance round, to abandon their several towns and villages, and flock into the metropolis on the approach of an enemy; and this was a contingency that needed a special provision, from the frequency of its occurrence in these ancient states, with whom war was the great business of life, and peace the rare exception.

There were also pasture grounds in such cities for the subsistence of cattle in case of siege. In prospect of a long siege, we should probably slay our cattle and salt them down, from the inability to provide pasture for them, and to save the consumption which their keep involves. This is a resource not thought of by the Orientals formerly or now, as they do not use salted meats. Their only resource was to keep the animals alive till they were wanted for food, and this was effected by providing pasture for them within the walls, necessitating a large appropriation of space unoccupied by buildings.

The probability also is, that the majority of the houses of Nineveh, like those of many eastern cities of the present day; consisted but of one story, spread therefore over a large extent of ground. We have always observed the Orientals to be exceedingly averse to ascending stairs; and where ground is no object, as it seldom is, they consider it absurd to build habitations in which they must be continually going up stairs and down, when they are at liberty to spread out their dwellings over the ground as widely as they like. Hence the accommodation which we secure by piling story upon story, they think that they realize with much more advantage by placing these stories separately upon the ground, connecting them together by doors, galleries, courts, and passages. This is their idea of comfort; and we must confess to being considerably of their opinion. The result is, however, that the houses of an eastern gentleman in a town will generally occupy four or five times as much ground, as that of an English gentleman in the corresponding condition of life.

Saturday. Jonah in Nineveh—Jonah 3

It is now with the firm step and steady aspect of one who knows that the burden of the Lord is upon him, that Jonah enters the gates of Nineveh the Great. He may still have doubts and fears as to the result; but he now fears God more, and wavers not in his purpose to discharge faithfully the mission committed to him. He believed that the Lord who sent him could give strength and power to His

own words; and he had cause to know that His arm was strong to deliver him from all evil that might befall. "Still he must have been the subject of strange and conflicting emotions, when he entered the gates of that proud capital. The stern soldiers upon the battlements, armed with swords and shields, helmets and spears—the colossal images of winged compound animals that guarded the gates—the gorgeous chariots and horsemen that rattled and bounded through the streets—the pomp and state of the royal palaces—the signs of trade and commerce, of wealth and luxury, of pleasure and wickedness on every hand—must have amazed and perplexed the prophet, conscious of his utter loneliness amidst a mighty population, of his despicable poverty amidst abounding riches, of his rough and foreign aspect amidst a proud and polished community—there was enough to shake his faith, and to cowardize his bold, haughty, and scornful spirit. Yet he dared not a second time abandon his mission. He, therefore, passed along the broad ways and great places of concourse, crying in solemn tones, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.'"1013

Who and what is he? the people ask. Is it a madman who thus speaks, or a mocker, who delights to "scatter firebrands, arrows, and death?" His intelligent and sober aspect forbids the supposition: he bears himself as a man deeply in earnest, and alive to the awful importance of the work he has in hand and the very oneness of the message he delivers—that he has just this solitary message to proclaim—seems to betoken all the more an assured conviction of the truth and certainty of it. The busy crowd is by-and-by arrested: a solemn awe steals over the minds of the people: they press around the preacher to know who and whence he is, and why he utters such an ominous cry in their streets; and hearing, as they now do, that, so far from lightly denouncing this doom against them, he had already, at the hazard of his life, shrunk from executing the charge committed to him—that he had been cast out for his willful reluctance, into the mighty deep, and miraculously restored, only that he might be sent forth anew to utter the cry they now heard of approaching destruction—learning all this concerning Jonah and his burden, how solemn and perilous must their situation have appeared in their eyes! Though personally a stranger to them, this man's fortunes, it seems, had yet been most intimately bound up with theirs: he has undergone wonderful and unheard-of things on their account.1014

What other concurrent circumstances there may have been to impress their minds with the conviction that they stood on the verge of ruin, or whether the word of God simply, in its own Divine energy, as delivered by the prophet, wrought upon their souls, certain it is that they evinced no disposition to treat the message with scorn, or the messenger with insult, but were deeply moved to alarm and grief.

This commotion in the city soon reached the ears of the king; and it cannot be doubted that he forthwith sent to have the strange prophet brought before him.

It is plain, from the sculptures, that the king of Assyria was approached, like all Oriental princes, with such tokens of profound reverence as, in fact, amounted to something like religious adoration. "Seated on his throne of state, his eunuchs, ministers, and other great officers stood around him, while those who were brought before him, forgetting the erect dignity of human nature, prostrated themselves in the most abject manner, at his feet. Imagine Jonah introduced into the royal palace, and you will see that the scene and circumstances must have sorely tried his faith and steadfastness. As he passed along the lengthened corridors towards the hall of audience, he must have been struck with the air of uncommon splendor that surrounded him. On the walls he beheld the sculptured figures of priests and eunuchs, of kings, heroes, and ministers of state, of genii and idol gods, of battles and hunting scenes, all elaborately and gorgeously colored; while there stood at the angles of the passages colossal statues of strange winged, compound creatures, like the guardian spirits of the place."1015

A sight so strange to him—such abounding evidence of the wealth, the power, and the idolatry of the monarch into whose presence he was about to enter—might well have moved even the stern spirit of the prophet. But he now stood there invested with a greatness not his own, and far exceeding all the grandeur around him; and he flinched not to declare unto the greatest king then upon earth, the whole counsel of God against this proud Nineveh. As he heard the word of doom, God smote his heart with alarm and repentance. The common feeling became his; and he sanctioned and ordained its solemn public expression, by acts of general mourning and humiliation. He came down from the throne before which a score of kings bent their knees; he laid all his glorious imperial robes aside, and, investing his person with sackcloth, sat down among the ashes. Nor he alone; for a decree went forth, ordaining fasting and sackcloth for man and beast, and urging every one to turn from his evil way and from the violence of his hands. The prophet had not called them to repentance, but had warned them of impending doom; but this they still trusted might not be irrevocable, and they ventured to seize hold of a hope which the prophet had not extended to them: "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" Blessed was that thought of theirs. The Lord, abundant in mercy, had inspired them, at that time, with a conception of Him which his prophet had not taught. It was not yet too late. All was not yet lost. God beheld their acts; he saw that they turned from their evil ways; and then "God repented of the evil that He said He would do unto them, and He did it not."

It seems a remarkable circumstance, that the Ninevites should have extended the acts of fasting and humiliation to their cattle. We find nothing of this among the Hebrews; but it was a custom among the ancient heathen nations to withhold food from their cattle, as well as from themselves, in times of mourning and humiliation, and that, in some instances, they cut off the hair of their beasts as well as their own. The animals which were, in this instance, covered with sackcloth, were doubtless, horses, mules, asses, and

camels, which were divested of their usual caparisons and ornaments, and invested with sackcloth for the occasion—a custom having some analogy to that of our clothing with black the horses employed in funereal solemnities.

Jonah 4

QUESTION - [What does Jonah 4:11 mean by people who cannot tell their right hand from their left?](#)- GOTQUESTIONS.ORG

ANSWER - In Jonah 4:11 God speaks of “more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left.” Who are these 120,000 people?

First, it is obvious from the context that these people were residents of Nineveh. Jonah was angry at God’s compassion toward the Ninevites who repented after hearing Jonah’s preaching. Chapter 4 specifically focuses on God’s love toward those in Nineveh and His mercy in response to their repentance.

However, the precise identity of these 120,000 Ninevites is problematic. The clause “who do not know their right hand from their left” is not found in any other biblical passage or comparative Hebrew literature. The expression is interpreted to mean either young children who have yet to learn right from left or adults who do not understand right from wrong.

Those who conclude the 120,000 are young children appeal to a straightforward reading of the words used in modern translations. The idea of not knowing “right” from “left” naturally evokes thoughts of young children—usually five years old and younger—who do not understand this difference. However, if Nineveh contained 120,000 young children, the population of the city must have been at least 600,000. The problem with this is that the area within the city walls would not have contained more than 175,000 people, according to figures based on archaeological remains. (See <http://www.studylight.org>.)

Those who conclude the 120,000 people comprise all of the Ninevites provide an array of convincing evidence. First, the Hebrew word translated “people” in Jonah 4:11 is the general word for “people,” not the Hebrew word for “children.” Linguistically, the evidence favors a broader interpretation that includes all the people of Nineveh.

In addition, the closest biblical parallels refer to the difference between those who know the Law of the Lord and those who do not. For example, Ecclesiastes 10:2 says, “A wise man’s heart inclines him to the right, but a fool’s heart to the left.” The Bible often speaks of the wicked as those who do not know God (Proverbs 28:5; Galatians 4:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:5; 1 John 4:8). On the cross Jesus prayed for the Father to forgive His murderers, “for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34; see also Acts 17:23, 30 and 1 Timothy 1:13). In Hosea 4:6 we read, “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.”

Further, a parallel is made in Jonah 4:11 between the people and the livestock of Nineveh. It is much more likely the parallel refers to all people/all livestock versus only young children and livestock.

Finally, it makes sense for the 120,000 to include all Ninevites because God showed compassion on the entire city, not just on its young children and animals.

Jonah 4:11 most likely refers to those who, spiritually speaking, cannot tell right from left. The verse shows that God takes pity on the spiritual blindness of the pagan. God’s desire is to extend His salvation to all who repent and turn to Him.

QUESTION - [Why was Jonah angry that the Ninevites repented \(Jonah 4:1-2\)?](#)

ANSWER - It seems strange that a preacher would be angry that his listeners repented of their sin, but that is exactly Jonah’s reaction to the Ninevites’ repentance. Jonah 4:2 tells us why: “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.” Jonah knew from the start that God was gracious and merciful. He realized that if the people of Nineveh repented, God would spare them. The prophet was angry at their repentance because he would rather see them destroyed.

There are several possible reasons for Jonah’s desire to see Nineveh destroyed. First, Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, a ruthless and warlike people who were enemies of Israel. Nineveh’s destruction would have been seen as a victory for Israel. Second, Jonah probably wanted to see Nineveh’s downfall to satisfy his own sense of justice. After all, Nineveh deserved God’s judgment. Third, God’s withholding of judgment from Nineveh could have made Jonah’s words appear illegitimate, since he had

predicted the city's destruction.

We can learn from Jonah's negative example that we should praise God for His goodness. First, our God is a merciful God, willing to forgive all those who repent (see 2 Peter 3:9). The Ninevites were Gentiles, yet God still extended His salvation to them. In His goodness, God warned the Assyrians before sending judgment, giving them a chance to repent.

Second, God cares for people of every nation. He is, by nature, a Savior. As Luke 15 reveals in the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son, God's heart is for the redemption of all who will come to Him. Further, the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 emphasizes God's call to take God's message of "good news" to all the nations. Romans 1:16 also emphasizes the importance of sharing the gospel with both Jews and non-Jews.

Third, God is concerned for those who have never heard the message of His salvation. The mention of "more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left" (Jonah 4:11) most likely refers to those who know nothing of spiritual truth. Concerning the things of God, they cannot tell up from down or right from left. God takes pity on the spiritual blindness of the pagan. God desires to extend His salvation to all who would repent and turn to Him.

Jonah 3:10-4:11 Anger Or Applause?

How do we react when God shows mercy to people we think deserve punishment? If we are resentful, it may indicate that we have forgotten how much the Lord has forgiven us.

After Jonah followed God's second call to preach His coming judgment on Nineveh (Jonah 3:1, 2, 3, 4), the people of the city turned from their evil lifestyle, so the Lord did not destroy them (Jonah 3:10). God's mercy made Jonah angry. He told God he had been afraid this would happen, and that's why he fled to Tarshish in the first place. "I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, ... One who relents from doing harm" (Jonah 4:2).

But the Lord said to Jonah, "Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons?" (Jonah 4:11).

God's marvelous grace is greater than all our sin. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8). Because of His grace to us, we should "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave [us]" (Eph 4:32).

Instead of being angry when God is merciful, we should applaud. — David C. McCasland [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

What love the Father has bestowed on me!
For this I cannot help but thankful be;
I read His Word, His promises embrace,
And daily praise Him for His matchless grace. —Hess

**We can stop showing mercy to others
when Christ stops showing mercy to us.**

Praying and Growing

Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God.
Colossians 3:17

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE Jonah 4

Jonah's reluctance to forgive his enemies is a reminder that the heart of God is bigger than our own.

For more about the story of Jonah, read The Failure of Success at discoveryseries.org/q0720.

Today's Devotional

When my friend David's wife developed Alzheimer's disease, the changes it brought to his life made him bitter. He needed to retire early to care for her; and as the disease progressed, she required increasingly more care.

"I was so angry at God," he told me. "But the more I prayed about it, the more He showed me my heart and how I had been selfish

for most of our marriage.” Tears welled in his eyes as he confessed, “She’s been sick ten years, but God has helped me see things differently. Now, everything I do out of love for her, I also do for Jesus. Caring for her has become the greatest privilege of my life.”

Sometimes God answers our prayers not by giving us what we want but by challenging us to change. When the prophet Jonah was angry because God spared the wicked city of Nineveh from destruction, God caused a plant to shade him from the hot sun (Jonah 4:6). Then He made it wither. When Jonah complained, God answered, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” (vv. 7–9). Jonah, focused only on himself, insisted it was. But God challenged him to think about others and have compassion.

God sometimes uses our prayers in unexpected ways to help us learn and grow. It’s a change we can welcome with open hearts because He wants to transform us with His love.

Reflect & Pray

Lord Jesus, thank You for helping me grow when I pray. Help me to be sensitive to what You want for my life today.

God grows us as we spend time with Him. James Banks (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Jonah 4:1-10 Elephants Down

When rainy-season storms caused flooding in a nature preserve in Thailand, seven elephant calves became unlikely victims. As they tried to ford a river at their usual crossing point, dangerous currents swept them over a 250-foot waterfall. Wildlife advocates said the loss could have been prevented. A spokesperson for the Thailand Wildlife Fund complained that the protective barriers, which had been built at the crossing where four other young elephants had died earlier, were useless.

Long before animal rights became a global issue, the story of Jonah shows the attention our Creator gives to all His creatures. As the story ends, the Lord expresses concern not only for the citizens of Nineveh but also for their livestock (Jonah 4:11). And earlier, God gave Moses laws that extended certain protections even to animals (Ex. 23:4, 5,12).

Though humans alone are made in the image of God, the story of Jonah and other Bible texts show a link between caring for people and animals. The Creator gives us reason to provide appropriate, though different, attention to both.

The conclusion seems clear. If God cares even for livestock, how can we ignore the needs of any person for whom His Son died? — Mart De Haan

In trees and flowers of the field,
In creatures large and small,
We trace the watchful care of Him
Who planned and made them all. —King

**God cares for us and
calls us to care for His creation.**

Jonah 4:1-10 The Trouble With Me

Selfishness comes in many forms, and we are all prone to it. I was reminded of this while driving on a toll road. My wife Ginny and I were hoping to get home early that evening, but a traffic jam held us up for almost 2 hours.

Although Ginny mentioned that there may have been a serious accident up ahead, I gave this little thought and kept grumbling about the delay. But when the traffic began to flow again, we saw six mangled cars next to the highway. A wave of conviction swept over me. “Forgive me, Lord,” I prayed, “and please help the victims and their families.”

The Bible gives many examples of selfish attitudes. Jonah was upset because a worm had destroyed a vine that shaded him from the scorching sun (Jonah 4:9). Yet he didn’t care that many men, women, and children in Nineveh might be destroyed.

In Mark 10:37, we read that two disciples selfishly asked for positions of power in Christ’s coming kingdom. And in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church, we see many examples of selfish behavior (Jonah 1:10; 3:3; 5:1; 6:6, 7, 8; 11:21).

God calls us to put the good of others ahead of our selfish desires (1Cor 10:24). Forgive us, Lord, and help us to do just that! — Herbert Vander Lugt ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

O Lord, how often selfishness

Will raise its ugly head,
So help us, Lord, to conquer it
And show Your love instead. —D. De Haan

The heart of our problem is selfishness in our heart.

Jonah 4:1

February 28, 2002

Grieved By Grace

READ: Jonah 3:10-4:11

It displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. --Jonah 4:1

In his book *The Divine Intruder*, James Edwards portrays the prophet Jonah as a man who was grieved by the grace of God. Jonah had been told by God to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh, but he believed that the wicked city deserved to be destroyed for its brutality and cruelty, not pardoned.

After a futile attempt to run away from God, Jonah finally obeyed and proclaimed judgment on Nineveh. Then the unthinkable happened—the people repented.

Greatly angered, Jonah poured out his frustration to the Lord: "I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm" (Jonah 4:2).

Like Jonah, we may feel that certain people deserve God's judgment, not His forgiveness. Because of what they've done to us or those we love, we can't hope anything but the worst for them. James Edwards reminds us, however, that the story of Jonah ultimately points a finger at us. He asks, "Will we bind God by our judgments, or will we free God to transform our enemies—even ourselves—by grace?"

God calls us to reach out to the people in our lives to whom He longs to show His love and mercy. —David C. McCasland [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)

To pray that God will save our foes
Is difficult to do
Until we recognize that we
Deserve God's judgment too. —Sper

You can stop showing mercy to others
when God stops showing mercy to you.
(cp Mt 6:12-note, Mt 6:14, 15-note)

Saints of the Gourd Vine - Thou hast had pity on the gourd... and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city? Jonah 4:10, 11. Jonah was worried about a gourd but not concerned about Nineveh. Too many of us are more occupied with the gourd vines of our own comfort than burdened over the need of a world. Then, too, Nineveh's repentance made Jonah appear mistaken in his prophecy of doom. It may be that some prophets today may almost seem disappointed if men repent when they expected ruin instead. A turning to God among sinners today would make some Jonahs peevish, for their programs did not anticipate an upset. Beware of getting wrought up over a gourd, more interested in sitting in the shade than in rejoicing over the salvation of souls. And how a complacent fundamentalism needs to get out from under its arbors and trellises, losing its life to find it in evangelizing a lost world! - Vance Havner

Other quotes by Havner related to Jonah -

Second best - Are you living spiritually on crackers and cheese when you have a standing invitation daily to the banquets of His grace? The devil will lead you to get along with the good when you might have the best.

Second chance - "And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time." Jonah missed his first chance, failed the Lord miserably, and suffered aplenty. But God did not disown him, he started him off again with new orders, all the wiser for a sad experience.

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Straying - We take a detour as motorists because we have to. As Christians we take it because we want to. But, thank God, Abraham and Jacob and Jonah and Peter did not die on the detour. And if you are a "detourist" the Lord is looking for you.

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SAINTS IN THE SHADE Consider him... lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Hebrews 12:3.

Elijah under the juniper, the Disobedient Prophet in 1 Kings 13, Jonah under the gourd vine—God's weary prophets did not fare so well in the shade (Jonah 4:1-11). Shady rest is no place for tired preachers! The next day after a great day can be a dangerous day. Satan does some of his worst work on exhausted Christians when nerves are frayed and the mind is faint. We may, like Elijah, fancy we are the survivors among the saints. Like the prophet of Jeroboam's day, we may fall prey to subtle temptation. Like Jonah, we may be irritable and out of sorts. It is better to be a Nathaniel under a fig tree or Zacchaeus up a sycamore. Jesus knows when we pray and when we are "up a tree." Keep your eyes on Him lest ye faint and be weary and collapse in the shade!

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Another Chance

AND the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time." Jonah missed his first chance, failed the Lord miserably, and suffered aplenty. But God did not disown him, He started him off again with new orders, all the wiser for a sad experience.

A little girl carrying a bottle of milk across the street fell down and broke the bottle. A neighbor shouted, "Now your mother will spank you!" "Oh, no," replied the little girl, "my mother gives me another chance."

Sometimes the Lord does spank us. He chastised Jonah. But He does give us another chance, not a chance to be saved after death, but a chance to serve Him afresh after we have failed.

It is a dreadful thing to be a castaway, a vessel the Master cannot use. In a Bible conference in Minnesota some years ago we had a piano that wouldn't stay tuned. We could not use it and finally had to push it over in a corner, where it stood in the dust, disapproved. Then we brought in another piano, which looked no better and sounded no better, except that it would stay in tune and, therefore, was approved.

I have seen ministers, Christian workers, set aside like the piano. They looked all right and were gifted, but they were out of tune. And I have seen others put in their places not half so gifted, by no means as impressive in appearance, but in tune.

And yet there is no reason why any of us should stand in the corner disapproved. We can be tuned again!

"Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
Touched by His loving hand, wakened by kindness,
Chords that were broken will vibrate once more."

If you have failed God and He has put you in a corner, He does not expect you to stay there and whimper the rest of your life away. He gets no pleasure out of chastising you. He is ready to offer you another chance when you learn your lesson.

I think of Simon Peter after that fishing trip, which he described by saying, "We have toiled all the night and have taken nothing." Any expedition that starts with a human "we" ends with a humiliating "nothing." Then came the draught of fishes, and Peter fell at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." But did the Lord depart and give up Peter as a failure? Rather, He said, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." He offered him a greater chance!

And after a far more dismal failure than this, when Peter denied his Lord, there was another chance awaiting his repentance. Peter preaching with power at Pentecost is a preacher on his second chancel. Some of the greatest stories in the annals of preaching are those of Jonahs to whom the word of the Lord came a second time.

You never please the devil more than when you sit around lugubriously because you have failed. Repent and confess you must, but mere regret and remorse never honor God. God wants a broken heart, but a broken heart is more than a miserable heart. Esau repented after a fashion and so did Judas, but it was not the repentance of a second chance. A broken heart is not simply miserable; it is a heart broken to the will of God. There are miserable hearts aplenty still stubbornly set on their own way.

Repent as Jonah did, as Peter did, and the word of the Lord will come to you a second time. There will be another chance

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DON'T MISS YOUR MIRACLE - We often hear it said that the day of miracles is past. But every true Christian is a miracle, born again by the Holy Spirit. Of course I mean real Christians, not just church members. If you are what you have always been you are not a Christian. The Christian life is a miracle, Jesus living within the true believer. He is not just our Saviour and Lord but also our Life.

God has many miraculous things for His people, but so many miss them.

1. I do not know what Jesus had for the rich young ruler, but he missed it.
2. The blind man would have missed receiving his sight if he had not washed in Siloam.
3. Demas missed his miracle when he deserted Paul.

4. Jonah almost missed his life mission.

I have met many who were called to preach or to be missionaries who never answered. My father was called to preach but never did and lived to regret it the rest of his life.... We live doing what comes naturally and miss what comes supernaturally. The church is a miracle. Today too many of its members are not miraculous but make-believe. Gideon asked, "Where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of?" (Judg. 6:13). Have you missed yours?

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The prophet of God may sometimes be discouraged because his preaching seems to do little good, but that is not the test of his work anyway. God told Isaiah that his message would go unheeded. He told Ezekiel that people would hear him but do nothing about it. His one responsibility was to preach so that whatever they did about it, they would know that a prophet had been among them. Jonah was the sorriest preacher in the Old Testament, but his results made Isaiah look like a failure.

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Ministers - A minister should go to every service as though it were the first, as though it could be the best, and as though it might be the last.

A minister may have his study walls lined with diplomas, his ordination papers signed by illustrious men, a sheaf of recommendations from the mighty of the land, but if the stamp of heaven on his commission is faint and fading, he had better close up shop and take time out until he can return to his pulpit with a brand-new autograph from God. When he is thus re-signed, he will be reassigned, like Elijah, **like Jonah**, like Peter. He may be given the same task, for **some churches need not a new preacher, but the same preacher renewed.**

I would venture a word to young Timothys: Do not make cronies of any of your flock for your buddy may turn out to be your biggest problem. Do not talk your views, preach them. Dr. Jowett expressed himself from the pulpit but had little to say in general conversation.

Some old ministers think it is their duty to sit in a corner and let youth have its day. They offer no counsel, utter no warning, and remain silent on burning issues; they consider that a mark of Christian graciousness, but they miss the opportunity to render a great service.

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Jonah, the weakest of Old Testament prophets, had the biggest results statistics-wise, while Isaiah, prince of prophets, had no converts that anybody knows about. This is not to disparage results or justify no results but heaven has not yet installed our computer system for tabulating prophetic success and failure. Almighty God does not choose His prophets according to recommendations from divinity schools. The God who passed up all the other sons of Jesse to choose the only one who was not even named among the prospects is not dependent on talent scouts. He knows who and where the true prophet is and will find him and a place for him. Whether his listeners will hear or forbear is incidental but they shall know that a prophet hath been among them.

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You know, the prophets never fared very well in the shade. Elijah had trouble under the juniper and Jonah under the gourd vine.

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There is not much information available on why some preachers quit. One could stock a library with reports of miracles that happened "since I came." They sound like Jonah reporting his campaign in Nineveh. But I have never read much on "why I left." Some leave because they are "Cape Kennedy pastors," using their present pulpits as platforms from which to blast satellites into bigger orbits. Others are simply discouraged, like Matthew Henry who thought his ministry was a failure—and yet he lives on in book shelves and in our hearts today. Some sink into self-pity and lament that they are not appreciated. Blessed is the man who learns quite early that the ministry is the poorest business in the world if one is looking merely for appreciation! After all, a preacher is not to be measured by how many bouquets have been given to him. His ministry may be gauged better by how many brickbats have been pitched at him. Prophets of God have usually been on the receiving end of more mud than medals. The most miserable men I have known are ministers who have turned in their commissions. Anybody can quit. The church is plagued with quitters, who say, "I go, sir," and go not; who received the Word with joy but have no root and are soon offended. Many sing in the choir for a few weeks and then their feelings are hurt and the nightingale becomes a raven croaking, "Nevermore!" Others come to church for months, and then golf becomes more important than God. Others are church officers until they find out that they cannot run the place, and then they resign because they would rather be Diotrephes loving the preeminence than Demetrius loving the truth. But saddest of all is the preacher who quits preaching. No reward on earth can compensate for that. To be a faithful preacher is no bed of roses, but for a

God-called man to become anything else is to try to rest his soul on a bed of thorns. No, the way out is not by resigning.

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What ails man is that he is away from home. His real home is God, and he is restless until he rests in Him. But he has gotten away from home and, sick with sin, he hides from the only One who can hide him. He is a fugitive and has been since Adam hid in the garden. **Like Jonah, he rises to flee from God's presence and knows not that he can hide from God only in God.** He hides not only himself but what he has. Achan hid the wedge of gold; the one-talent man hid his talent. One hid the bad, the other the good, but both came to judgment. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper." All through the Bible man is hiding, until at last he calls for rocks and mountains to hide him from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. But he hides in vain. "My sins are not hid from thee," said the Psalmist, and God said, "Mine eyes are upon all their ways, they are not hid from my face: neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes" (Jer. 16:17). "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." Men make lies their refuge and under falsehood hide themselves but the hail and waters of judgment shall sweep them away (Isa. 28:15-17). The tragedy of it all is, the very One from whom he hides is the only hiding place. "I flee unto thee to hide me"; "Thou art my hiding place"; "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man; thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues."

Rock of Ages, cleft for me;
Let me hide myself in Thee.

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If you are a rebel, you might as well give up fighting the stars. They belong to Him for whom they sing together. You are bucking the universe and its God, and your chariot will never return. **Jonah tried it and bought a ticket but missed his destination.** Only the schedule that God maps out will He allow us to fill. He who hath begun a good work in you will complete it. When He begins He will also make an end. Get into His program and you will arrive.

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No Second Best "What wilt Thou have me to do?" Acts 9:6 God has a place and purpose for you, somewhere for you to be and something for you to do. You never will be happy elsewhere, nor can you please God anywhere but there. You may do lovely things, reach earthly success, but always there will be the haunting sense of having missed the main thing, of having been satisfied with life's second best which isn't best or even good. Woodrow Wilson once spoke of being "defeated by one's secondary successes." How many are defeated by their own success so that they never know God's success!

Lot chose his own success and missed God's better thing. Saul did it from Gilgal to Gilboa. Demas did it. David "served his generation by the will of God" (Acts 13:36). That is success. Our Lord said, "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). That is success, though it looked like failure. If God has shown you his purpose—he will if you yield to him—don't dodge. **Jonah tried to get away from God's presence and purpose and you know what happened. The only place to hide from his presence is in his presence.** Don't tell God you won't do what he orders and try to compromise on something else just as good. There is nothing else just as good because there are no second bests in the will of God.

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The Lord Jesus Christ is compassionate on us when we are faint (Matt. 9:36). What are we to do when we faint? Like Jonah: "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord" (Jonah 2:7). Like the Israelites: "Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses" (Psa. 107:5, 6). Like the Psalmist: "My soul fainteth for Thy salvation: but I hope in Thy Word" (Psa. 119:81).

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Forty Days - Throughout the Bible some very important things happened within periods of forty days. The Flood began with forty days and nights of rain (Genesis 7:12). Moses was on Mount Sinai forty days and nights (Exodus 24:18). When Israel rebelled, Moses fell down before the Lord forty days and nights (Deuteronomy 9:25). Elijah went in the strength of angel food forty days and nights. (1 Kings 19:8). Ezekiel bore in symbolism the iniquity of Israel forty days (Ezekiel 4:6). Jonah declared that Nineveh would be overthrown in forty days (Jonah 3:4). Jesus fasted forty days and nights before His temptation (Matthew 4:2) and was in the wilderness forty days (Mark 1:13).

But most important of all was the forty-day period between His resurrection and His ascension when our Lord was seen by His disciples in His new body with infallible proofs that He had conquered death. We have heard it so long that familiarity with the account has dulled our senses, and what ought to make us shout for joy in church aisles, puts us to sleep in the pews.

Think of it, the Son of God fresh from the grave appearing here and there to a few followers for forty days! And here is a mystery of all mysteries that boggles the minds of us sophisticates nowadays. Why did He not appear before His enemies? What a dramatic

scene, if He had stood again before Herod and Pilate! Why did He stay in an obscure Roman province with a whole world dying for salvation? Why not a showing in Rome, Athens, Alexandria? What sort of program is this, just letting the secret out to a few ordinary run-of-the-mill people? It is enough to give the news media a nervous breakdown! Wouldn't it have proven in days what we have tried for centuries to get across? The facts were all firsthand and visible. Those who crucified Him and those who witnessed Calvary were living, and He could easily have been identified. Today a preacher back from the grave would run every other news item off the front pages. And why not? Millions are dying, and we must get the word around. Think of what television could do with that! But had He chosen to show the whole world, our Lord would not have needed all our gadgets. Here were the most amazing forty days of all the centuries, on which all Christianity hangs and the Gospel depends. And when these witnesses started out to tell it, this was the heart of their message. He came back from the grave!

Somehow we have buried the story in all the pagan trappings of Easter, and we have had no small assist from the world, the flesh, and the devil. We have tried to capture it in art, music, and literature. You will search in vain our history books for much about it. Pages record trifling happenings that made no difference but, somehow, these forty days didn't make it. It is the way of the world and part of "the foolishness of God" whose ways are not our ways. God keeps a different calendar. With Him, in whose sight one day is as a thousand years and one year as a day, these forty days may have passed unnoticed in a world oblivious to what God was about. But to us who claim to know there had better be a reshuffling of our scale of values and a rediscovery of those few weeks that spelled the difference in everything for time and eternity.

But God also prepared a worm! ([John MacDuff, "The Prophet of Fire" 1877](#))

"And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, and soon it spread its broad leaves over Jonah's head, shading him from the sun. This eased some of his discomfort, and Jonah was very grateful for the gourd. But God also prepared a worm! When the morning rose the next day, it smote the gourd so that it soon died and withered away." Jonah 4:6-7

There is surely great comfort in the thought that the bounds of our life are divinely appointed . . .

Our lots in life,
our occupations,
our positions,
our dwellings,
what the fatalist calls 'our destinies',
what heathen mythology attributed to 'the Fates';
all this is marked out by Him who "sees the end from the beginning."

It is He who takes us to a place of solitude.

It is He who takes us from solitude.

It is He who takes us to our sweet shelters of prosperity, with their sparkling brooks of joy.

It is He who, when He sees fit, sends the worm.

Oh, it is our comfort to know, in this mysterious, raveled, varied life of ours, that the Great Craftsman has the threads of our existence in His own hands; weaving the complex pattern, evolving good out of evil, and order out of confusion.

Jonah 4 Tactical Distractions

July 21, 2016

Read: Jonah 4

The Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?" Jonah 4:4

It became painfully clear the first time my wife and I collaborated on a writing project that procrastination was going to be a major obstacle. Her role was to edit my work and keep me on schedule; my role seemed to be to drive her crazy. Most times, her organization and patience outlasted my resistance to deadlines and direction.

I promised to have a certain amount of writing done by the end of one day. For the first hour, I plugged away diligently. Satisfied with what I'd accomplished so far, I decided to take a break. Before I knew it, my time was up. In trouble for sure, I thought of a way out. I set about doing a couple of chores my wife despised and which always netted me praise when I did them.

Are you dodging duties God makes clear He wants you to tackle?

My plan failed.

I sometimes play the same games with God. He brings specific people into my life He wants me to serve or tasks He wants me to accomplish. Like Jonah, who went another way when God gave Him an assignment (Jonah 4:2), I need to set aside my own feelings. I often try to impress God with good deeds or spiritual activity when what He really wants is obedience to His priorities. Inevitably, my plan fails.

Are you dodging duties God makes clear He wants you to tackle? Trust me: Real contentment comes from doing it in His strength and in His way.

Loving Father, help us to recognize our busyness and distractions for what they so often are—disobedience and inattention to the work You have given us to do.

Obedience pleases God.

INSIGHT: In Exodus 34 God describes Himself as “the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love . . . forgiving wickedness . . . and sin” (vv. 6–7). It is ironic that these divine attributes angered Jonah (Jonah 4:1), who wanted Nineveh destroyed, not forgiven. This was the very reason he initially refused to go to the Ninevites to preach God’s message of repentance and forgiveness (v. 2).

By Randy Kilgore

Jonah 4:4 Angry with God! (James Smith)

"The Lord asked: Have you any right to be angry?" Jonah 4:4

Jonah quarreled with his God. And who has not? We may not speak as plainly as he did—but we have been in the same sullen temper, and manifested the same morose spirit.

Very few are well satisfied with the Lord's plans.

Fewer still are always pleased with the Lord's works.

How many quarrel with His sovereignty!
What hard things have been spoken against it!

How many complain of His providence—and think it
unwise, unkind, and almost unjust!

Beloved, we are often angry with God!
This temper shows itself . . .
in fretfulness,
in complaining,
in sullen gloom.

"Have you any right to be angry?"

Angry with your Father . . .
whose wisdom is infinite,
whose love is as constant as the day, and
who constantly showers His blessings upon you!

Angry with your God, who has . . .
pardoned all your heinous sins,
provided for your innumerable needs,
blessed you with countless spiritual blessings!

Surely it is a sin, a grievous sin, not to be pleased . . .
with all that He does,

with all that He has provided,
and with all that He requires.

"Have you any right to be angry?"

Jonah 4:4 Getting It Right On The Inside

June 4, 2012

Read: Jonah 4

Then the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" —Jonah 4:4

I love the story of Jonah! It's full of drama and important life lessons. After stubbornly refusing to do God's will, Jonah finally preached a revival service in Nineveh that would have made him one of the most successful missionaries of his time. When the people repented and turned from their wicked ways—and when God relented and turned from His anger against them—you would have expected Jonah to rejoice. Instead, he was angry that God was merciful. Why? Although he was finally obeying God by doing the right thing in the right place, he was deeply flawed on the inside.

Like Jonah, if we are not careful, we can be spiritually "looking good" on the outside, but far from God in our hearts. He is most interested in what we are like on the inside. His Word is "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit" (Heb. 4:12). With it, He performs divine surgery to remove the greed, dishonesty, hatred, pride, and selfishness that live in the deep shadows of our hearts.

So the next time the Holy Spirit convicts you and asks you about your bad attitude (see Jonah 4:4)—listen carefully. Surrender and let Him change you from the inside out.

I confess, heavenly Father, that I know what it's like
to be more concerned about my outward obedience
than my inner rebellion. I want to look good to others.
Forgive me. Change me and make me pure within.

If God controls you on the inside, you'll be genuine on the outside.

By Joe Stowell

Jonah 4:6-8

F B Meyer

Our Daily Homily

Jonah 4:6-8 The Lord prepared.

This book is full of this word prepared. We are told that the Lord prepared a great fish, a gourd, a worm, and a sultry east wind.

He prepares the fish (Jonah 1:17). — When we are at our wits' end, apparently going to destruction, He interposes and arrests our progress, and brings us back again to Himself.

He prepares the gourd, that it may come up to be a shadow to our heads, and deliver us from our evil case. The gourd of friendship, of property, of some cherished and successful achievement. Ah, how glad we are for these gourds; though not always sufficiently quick to attribute them to the loving providence of our Heavenly Father.

He prepares the worm, and the east wind. — Jonah would have regarded Nineveh's destruction with equanimity, whilst he mourned over his gourd; and there was no way of awakening him to the true state of the case than by letting worm and east wind do their work. He must be taught that what the gourd was to himself, Nineveh was to God. Yea, it was more; because God had labored for it, and made it to grow through long centuries (Jonah 4:11).

How often our gourds are allowed to perish, to teach us these deep lessons. In spite of all we can do to keep them green, their leaves turn more and more sere and yellow, until they droop and die. And when they lie prone in the dust, the east wind is let forth from the Almighty hand—the malign breath from which the gourd would have delivered us. O child of God, fainting in the east wind, do not ask to die; but get thee to the blue misty shadow of the great Rock in a weary land; to the Man who is a shadow from the

heat.

Jonah 4:6-7 - The Good And The Bad

December 9, 2013

The Lord God prepared a plant [for] shade . . . [and] a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. —Jonah 4:6-7

The story of the rebellious prophet Jonah shows us how God desires to use both blessings and trials to challenge us and change us for the better. Five times in the book of Jonah it says that the Lord prepared circumstances for him—both good and bad.

In Jonah 1:4 we read that the Lord sent a storm. It says He “sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea.” After the mariners discovered that Jonah was the reason for this storm, they threw him overboard (Jonah 1:15). Then God “prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah” to save him from drowning (Jonah 1:17).

Later in the book we read that “the Lord God prepared a plant” to shade Jonah (Jonah 4:6). Then we see that God prepared a worm to kill the vine as well as a scorching wind and sun to beat down upon him (Jonah 4:7-9). These circumstances were used to reveal Jonah’s rebellious attitude. Only after that revelation could God directly confront Jonah’s heart problem.

As we face different situations, we should remember that God is sovereign over both the blessings and the troubles that come our way. He desires to use everything to build our character (James 1:1-5). He uses both good and bad to transform us and guide us on our journey.

The Maker of the universe
Knows every need of man,
And made provision for that need
According to His plan. —Crane

The Lord gives and takes away. Blessed be the Lord.

By Dennis Fisher

GOD'S WILL PERFORMED TO PLEASE GOD - Jonah 4 - It isn't enough to simply know God's will and do it; we must also do it to please him. Jonah finally got to Nineveh and delivered God's message, but his attitude was all wrong. He hated the people to whom he was preaching and finally went outside the city and pouted, hoping God would destroy it (Jonah 4). - Warren Wiersbe

Jonah 4 - SINCE GOD HAS COMPASSION ON LOST PEOPLE, SHOULDN'T WE?

I want to apply this message in two specific ways. The first has to do with the fact that God has brought over 400 students from every continent on the globe to our doorstep. Many are from countries where missionaries are not allowed. Many are lonely and want American friends. If they come and live in our city for four or more years and we never reach out to them in friendship, if we're not burdened about their relationship with God, are we not, like Jonah, sleeping obliviously in the hold of the ship or sitting comfortably under our shade tree, while the world around us is about to perish?

According to International Students, Inc., less than 15 percent of international students in the United States today are touched by any Christian ministry. That means that fully 85 percent are never touched by the gospel in any way. In addition, 70 percent will never see inside an American home, and 80 percent will never have a Christian friend. Those are tragic figures! If you let us know, we will try to link you with an international student so that you can become their friend. I have resources available which will help you know how to befriend an international student. I know we're all busy people. But shouldn't we make time to show God's kindness to these dear people He has brought to us?

The second application has to do with our church adopting an unreached people group. This is a strategy that makes the task of world evangelization more bite-sized. As you may know, there are approximately 11,000 unreached people groups in the world today. A “people group” is defined as the largest number of people among whom the gospel can spread without encountering barriers of culture or language. They are “unreached” if they do not have a viable, indigenous, self-evangelizing church in their midst, open to everyone in that people group.

There are approximately 600 evangelical churches in the world per unreached people group. The adopt-a-people strategy tries to link churches with unreached peoples so that the church focuses on the particular group until it is reached. It involves making a commitment to pray, to give and, where possible, to send personnel to see a particular people group reached. It also involves linking our church with a mission agency that has targeted that people group or even has begun to engage them in ministry.

Flagstaff Christian Fellowship has supported a missionary couple, who came to Christ years ago as students at NAU, and who were sent out from this church. They now work with NGM Indian Tribal Outreach, with their focus on several unreached Indian tribes in Mexico. They have encouraged us to focus on and formally adopt the Durango Aztec Nahuatl people, a tribe of about 800 who live in two remote regions in central Mexico. Two NGM families, the Silks and the Elkins, who live in Durango, about 125 miles away, are seeking to reach this tribe. There is one believing family in the tribe, but no church or pastor. Wycliffe Bible Translators is just beginning the work of translating the Bible into their language. Gary Milton from our church has gone down twice to do dental work for them.

We want this to be a burden that God puts on your heart, not just another program the church comes up with. We believe this is a tangible, practical way that we, as a church, can be a part of the final task of seeing the church planted amongst every people group, the Lord willing by the year 2000. Over the next several weeks we'll be doing more to inform you about what it means to adopt a people group and how you can be involved. If you're not informed about the area of world missions, commit to educating yourself. For now, will you begin to pray regularly for the Durango Aztec Nahuatl people? Pray for your own heart toward the lost, that God will break through any apathy or selfish focus that you may have fallen into and give you His compassion for the lost. Since our God has compassion on lost people, should not we? - from a [sermon by Steven Cole](#)

Oswald Chambers - The judgments of God are for another purpose than the vindictive spirit of man would like to make out. It was this that gave Jonah the sulks with the Almighty, and the same spirit is seen in the elder brother—jealous of God's generosity to others. You never find that spirit in the prophets.

Jonah 4:9

Morning and Evening

C H Spurgeon

"God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry?" — Jonah 4:9

Anger is not always or necessarily sinful, but it has such a tendency to run wild that whenever it displays itself, we should be quick to question its character, with this enquiry, "Doest thou well to be angry?" It may be that we can answer, "YES." Very frequently anger is the madman's firebrand, but sometimes it is Elijah's fire from heaven. We do well when we are angry with sin, because of the wrong which it commits against our good and gracious God; or with ourselves because we remain so foolish after so much divine instruction; or with others when the sole cause of anger is the evil which they do. He who is not angry at transgression becomes a partaker in it. Sin is a loathsome and hateful thing, and no renewed heart can patiently endure it. God himself is angry with the wicked every day, and it is written in His Word, "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." Far more frequently it is to be feared that our anger is not commendable or even justifiable, and then we must answer, "NO." Why should we be fretful with children, passionate with servants, and wrathful with companions? Is such anger honourable to our Christian profession, or glorifying to God? Is it not the old evil heart seeking to gain dominion, and should we not resist it with all the might of our newborn nature? Many professors give way to temper as though it were useless to attempt resistance; but let the believer remember that he must be a conqueror in every point, or else he cannot be crowned. If we cannot control our tempers, what has grace done for us? Some one told Mr. Jay that grace was often grafted on a crab-stump. "Yes," said he, "but the fruit will not be crabs." We must not make natural infirmity an excuse for sin, but we must fly to the cross and pray the Lord to crucify our tempers, and renew us in gentleness and meekness after His own image.

John Kitto - The Gourd—Jonah 4

That his preaching had been instrumental in saving a great city from destruction,—that so many persons, men, women, and children, had been spared from death—this must, of course, have been highly gratifying to Jonah.

It was not. "It displeased him exceedingly."

That the Lord had laid so much honor upon him, and had allowed mercy to prevail over judgment, must have been a matter of great joy to him, and of much thankfulness to God.

No. "He was very angry."

Lord, what is man?

One cannot love this Jonah, or think well of him. We seem unable to recognize in him those signs of grace which one expects to see adorning the commissioned servants of God. The Lord, however, does not choose unfit instruments for his work; though he does

often work by instruments that seem to man most unfit. It may be recollected that we do not know all Jonah's character, but only some parts of it excited under rare and extraordinary influences. Yet it must be confessed there is such a pervading homogeneity in all the traits that appear in his history, as to suggest that we see in them his real and natural character—a character, no doubt, solidly good, and open to conviction, but habitually irascible and morose, and apt, under exciting circumstances, to view them in their worst and most gloomy aspects.

The present state of his mind is a fearful sight. There is no reason to doubt—indeed it is all but avowed—that he would much rather see this great city, with its people, perish, than that they should repent and be spared. There are two grounds for this state of feeling: first, his Jewish hatred against the Assyrians as idolaters and the oppressors of his country; and next, his fear that he should seem a false prophet, if his denunciation were not accomplished. Indeed, he declares that it was his knowledge that the Lord was “very merciful,” and would probably forgive them if they repented, that lay at the root of his original reluctance to undertake this office that had been forced upon him; and he declares that he would far prefer to yield up his own life than see his character as a prophet thus compromised. So morbid had his state of feeling become, that he would not bring himself to believe that the city could be spared, after he had, in the Lord's name, pronounced its doom. He therefore posted himself on an advantageous station in the environs—near enough for observation, but distant enough for safety,—and resolved to remain there till the time had elapsed within which he had declared the city should be destroyed.

Here the Lord, being merciful unto him, purposed to give him a lesson, salutary to him, and fitted to impress his willful but not hardened mind.

He had made a booth, and rested under its shade. “He sat in his booth for a while, enjoying as much comfort as a sullen and discontented man, who was dissatisfied with the Divine dispensations, and scarcely satisfied with himself, could be supposed to enjoy. But his comfort diminished as the foliage with which he had constructed this green booth began to wither; and in such a climate, where the fierce heat would soon extract the moisture and shrivel the leaves, it would soon become insufficient to afford him protection against the rays of the sun, and thus his external circumstances would become as uncomfortable as was his state of mind.”¹⁰¹⁶ The Lord then prepared “a gourd” to come up over Jonah, “that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief.” Of this relief the prophet was “exceedingly glad.” But God prepared a worm, which smote the gourd, so that it withered in a night. Then when the sun rose next day, the Lord prepared a vehement east wind, and the sun beat fiercely upon the prophet's head until he fainted, and wished that he were dead. Then it was the Lord's time to speak. “Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?” The vehement and shockingly unbecoming answer was, “I do well to be angry, even unto death.” Then said the Lord, in amazing condescension to the weakness of his servant, “Thou wouldst have spared the gourd, for the which thou hast not labored, nor madest it grown; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein there are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left, and also much cattle?”

Thus ends the book of Jonah. We are not told how this remonstrance wrought upon the prophet. We may hope that he profited by it. We know that we may.

“The prophet trusted in his gourd. He rejoiced in it; but he forgot the God who sent it. The gift was, therefore, taken away; and where was Jonah then? Precisely where the sons of men are now, when their refuges of lies are swept away from around them. It was only for a single day that Jonah enjoyed the gourd, but that was enough to unveil the condition of his heart, when the thing in which he trusted withered before his eyes. It is in miniature, or in compend, the history of man. By nature we have all some gourd under which we sit—we all have something which we put in the place of God. His gifts are preferred to himself; for we all think it better to have a creature for a portion than God over all, blessed forever.

“But is it not a blessing when these gourds wither? Is it not mercy in God to sweep them utterly away, even though the heart should be half broken by the loss? There is one reposing, for example, on his goods laid up for many days, and regarding them just as Jonah did the goodly foliage of the sheltering plant. Is it not a mercy, in the high reckoning of eternity at least, to have these gifts of God withdrawn, that God himself may be our trust? Another is reposing under the shadow of some protecting friend. To him, and not to God, the eye of hope, or the heart of expectation turns. Now, is it not a mercy, according to the standard of the sanctuary at least, that that earthly friend should be withdrawn, that we may learn to lean upon the Lord alone? A third may be seeking all the heaven which he knows, in something which perishes in the using. Is it not well that the delusion should be swept away, that God may be sought, and eternity provided for? Many will bless God forever because their gourds were withered—just as the saints in glory praise the King of saints, ‘because they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword, they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, and tormented.’ Had the gourd not withered, the soul would not have been saved; and the withering of the gourd, therefore, makes the anthem of the saved the louder.”¹⁰¹⁷

Another point entitled to remark, is the assertion of the Lord's providence in the frequent intimation that the Lord prepared all the material and circumstantial agencies that wrought in the history of Jonah. In his first adventure, the Lord prepared the storm the Lord prepared the great fish; and, in the second, the Lord prepared the gourd, the Lord prepared the worm, the Lord prepared the east wind—all is of the Lord's preparing. This also accounts for everything; and we are not bound, in the case of the gourd, for instance,

to find a plant which, without the special ordinance of the Lord's providence, should attain such growth in a night as to afford adequate shelter to the prophet's head. The Lord, however, is in all his dispensations economical of prodigies; and we are to suppose that in this instance He did not create a new plant for the occasion, or choose one of naturally slow growth. It is more in the ordinary course of even his miraculous providence to suppose that a plant naturally of rapid growth was chosen, and that this natural quickness of growth was preternaturally stimulated and quickened for the occasion. The word employed in the original Hebrew is generally supposed to denote the castor-oil plant. It is of exceedingly rapid growth, and its broad palmatic leaves extend a grateful shade over the parched traveller. It is not unknown to our gardens; but it does not in them, though still a plant of most rapid growth, attain the size or grow with the quickness that it does in the region of the Tigris.

Jonah 1:2

JONAH: THE UNWILLING MISSIONARY

A T ROBERTSON

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

It was in the eighth century B.C. during the reign of Jeroboam II that Jonah lived and prophesied (2 Ki 14:25). Little is told about his life apart from the book that bears his name. No specific claim is made in the story that Jonah himself wrote it. The prayer in chapter 2 is in the first person. We are not concerned with that point, but only with the life of Jonah as there portrayed. The prophets were used of God to stir the people and to warn them of the impending punishment for their sins. Jonah was one of these messengers of God and a very human one at that.

Jonah's Great Mission

"The word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the son of Amittai" (Jonah 1:1). That is an event in the life of any man, even though a prophet of God. It was an event when "the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness" (Lk 3:2). It demands attention whenever God puts a task upon one's shoulders. The call to you and me may not come by direct inspiration as it did to Jonah and to John, but the path of duty may lie plainly before us, whether the call comes by ordinary or extraordinary means. In Jonah's case, the demand was that he go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it. The wickedness of Nineveh, the greatest city on earth at that time, was rising before the Lord like the smoke belching forth from our modern cities today. There is not a city now that escapes the notice of God, nor a single community for that matter. It is not a pleasant task to cry against a great city to its face. It is much easier to stand off and rail against the vices of the modern Babylons and Ninevehs. Jonah knew that it was a dangerous and an unpopular thing to do that in Nineveh. Nathan did have courage to stand before David and say, "Thou art the man" (2 Sa 12:7). Elijah was bold before Ahab on Mount Carmel, but he ran like a deer from Jezebel and sat under the juniper tree in despair. There were false prophets in plenty with soft voices and smooth sayings to please princes. Jonah did not relish the call that came to him.

Jonah Shirking His Duty

His heart sank within him at the prospect of facing the great city and exposing its sins. Many a preacher since Jonah's day has had a like experience. It is naïvely said that Jonah got into a ship at Joppa to go with the sailors "unto Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah" (Jonah 1:3). It was as if God did not dwell in Spain. Many a man has gone to the West from his crimes and his loved ones and friends as if God and duty were not to be found out West. But they found out their mistake sooner or later. The eye of God is always upon us even in the dark and even in the haunts of sins. Hugh Redwood has found God in the underworld of London as his wonderful book, *God in the Slums*, shows. Jonah paid his fare like a man because he was doing what he wanted to do. People, even in emergencies and in time of depression, have money for what they want to do—for chewing gum, for cosmetics, for tobacco, for drink—when they have none for God and His kingdom of grace. Besides, it was a long, expensive, and terrible trip to Nineveh along the edge of the desert with many perils. But it was a lovely sea voyage to Tarshish.

But God saw Jonah all the same and all the time and knew of his willful disobedience. God sent a great wind that raised a tempest and soon the boat was tossed like a ball, and the mariners were afraid. That is always a bad sign when the sailors become frightened. They cast overboard many things. Each sailor called upon his god for help. Plenty of people have no use for God until serious trouble comes, and then they cry to him in terror, a poor sort of praying certainly. But Jonah lay fast asleep down in the depths of the ship. He had gone down there trying to smother his conscience for what he was doing. The shipmaster roused him roughly: "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not" (v. 6). Perhaps they had heard of Jehovah as God of the Jews. The other gods had all failed them. Jonah had not gotten away from the presence of God. They cast lots to see who was the cause of the peril in which they were. The lot fell on Jonah, and finally he

confessed that he was guilty of trying to flee from God and His command to go to Nineveh. They did not know what to do until Jonah himself proposed that they throw him overboard lest they all perish. The men did it with much pleading that Jehovah would not punish them for Jonah's death if he were really innocent.

But God had prepared a great fish, not here called a whale (the word in Mt 12:40 means sea monster), that swallowed Jonah. This miracle has created a deal of speculation through the ages. Fish have been found with the bodies of men in them, but the men were dead. Jonah could survive in such a place only by the power of God. We have precisely the same problem in the case of Daniel in the lions' den and the men in the fiery furnace. God can do what He wishes to do. Some take it as pure legend. Others regard it as a parable and not meant to be taken as literal history. Jesus spoke of the sign of Jonah as illustrating His own resurrection from the dead (Mt 12:40.). Jonah now found out to his sorrow what it meant to disobey God's command.

Jonah Brought Back to God

He was down in the deep waters in the belly of the fish three days and then Jonah prayed to God, a thing he refused to do in the ship. "Out of the belly of Sheol cried I" (Jonah 2:2). He seemed to be in hell itself down "in the heart of the seas . . . all thy waves and thy billows passed over me. . . . The waters compassed me about, even to the soul; the deep was round about me; the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains" (Jonah 2:3-6). It took all this to bring Jonah to a realization of his sins. It takes more than this to bring some men and women back to God. They go so far and sink so low that they defy God. They feel at home in the dens and sinks of shame and have renounced home with all its hallowed ties and defame the very name of God. But Jonah now had enough of his willful rebellion. "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered Jehovah; and my prayer came in unto thee into thy holy temple" (Jonah 2:7). At last Jonah is ready to say, "I will pay that which I have vowed" (Jonah 2:9). He is willing to go to Nineveh now. He is humbled at last and had plenty of time to meditate. What did it take to bring you back to God when you wandered away? Many a soul has tried to flee from God. Preachers have sometimes fought a call to preach until middle life. God saw that Jonah's heart was now changed and made the fish give up Jonah on dry land.

Jonah Responding to the Call of God

"And the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the second time" (Jonah 3:1). That does not always happen. It would not have happened now but for the change in Jonah's attitude toward God. "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee" (Jonah 3:2). The slight change in the language is a direct reference to the first command that Jonah had disregarded and a sharp reminder that he must obey this time. Jonah is willing now and goes "according to the word of Jehovah" (Jonah 3:3). He went a day's journey into Nineveh. This street preacher had a short and strange message that must have jarred upon the ears of the people coming from this man of another race: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overturned" (Jonah 3:4). He kept repeating his weird words until "the people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them" (Jonah 3:5).

This was a new experience for Jonah. Many of the prophets proclaimed God's will to Israel, and the people neglected all of them. Jeremiah, for instance, delivered his long messages through the years to the same people who turned deaf ears to it all. But here the people of a whole city, a heathen city at that, believed the terrible words of judgment and were prostrate before God. The message of Jonah even reached the king who was likewise deeply moved by it. He proclaimed a fast for man and beast in view of the impending calamity: "And let them cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knoweth whether God will not turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" (Jonah 3:8-9).

The conduct of this king is remarkable from every point of view. He knows better than anyone the violence and evil in his own city, but he refuses to cover it up. Here is a case where the ruler of the city refuses to condone evildoers and calls upon all to turn away from their evil ways. The curse of American cities has been precisely this, that the officers of the law are so often in league with the lawbreakers and for bribes refuse to punish them. The helpless people find themselves preyed upon by the very men whom they have chosen to protect them from the underworld.

Surely no missionary in all the ages was ever so successful in bringing a wicked city to its knees before God. And this missionary had been unwilling to go to Nineveh! And now his message of doom was believed by all, including the king! And yet some men wonder if it pays to send missionaries to the heathen. Does it pay to have preachers at home? "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way" (Jonah 3:10). Here was "reform" with a vengeance. There was never such a cleaning of Augean stables as this. "God repented of the evil that he said he would do unto them; and he did it not." And no wonder. Did ever a city before or since turn round like this? Surely Jonah would feel repaid for coming now when he had saved a whole city.

Jonah's Disappointment at God's Mercy

"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry" (Jonah 4:1). Instead of rejoicing at this glorious result, he got angry and flew into a rage with God himself. He dared even to justify his former disobedience: "I pray thee, O Jehovah, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I hasted to flee unto Tarshish!" (Jonah 4:2 a). So quickly in his anger has he forgotten the experience in the big fish. "For I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness, and repentest thee of the evil" (Jonah 4:2 b). That was the language of impertinence and rebellion against the very character of God. "Therefore now, O Jehovah, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live" (Jonah 4:3). That is the climax of bitter resentment against the love and mercy of God who had sent him to Nineveh.

God patiently said to Jonah, "Doest thou well to be angry?" (Jonah 4:4). Jonah refused to answer. What was the matter with him? He cared more for the vindication of his own proclamation of the ruin of the city than for the lives of the people. He sensitively and foolishly imagined that these very people, whose lives had been spared, would call him a false prophet. He had said that yet forty days and Nineveh would be destroyed and now that was not going to happen. Jonah felt himself put in a bad light with the people. He had rather have his way than save souls. He had rather have his way than God's way. He actually felt himself superior to God. If he could not have his own way, he preferred death to life. He thought he knew better how to run the kingdom of God than God Himself. So soon has Jonah forgotten the storm and the fish.

So in a huff he "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 shade, till he might see what would become of the city" (Jonah 4:5). What a picture for us all! There was still a chance that God might destroy the city and vindicate Jonah's preaching. At any rate, he would give God a chance before he finally condemned Him!

God was kind to Jonah as He is to us all. He treated Jonah as a spoiled child as many a preacher has been. He gave him an object lesson. He caused a gourd to grow quickly over the booth to be a shade over his head against the hot rays of the sun. Jonah was exceedingly glad of the gourd vine over his head. Then a worm in the morning cut the gourd and it withered and "the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and requested for himself that he might die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live" (Jonah 4:8). Here he is again upset, this time over a mere trifle and ready to fling his life away for a whim. Then God speaks to Jonah: "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?" Imagine the reply of Jonah to the Lord: "I do well to be angry, even unto death" (Jonah 4:9).

Some people, like Jonah, become sulky when they cannot have their way in every detail of life. Jonah now, for this second offense, deserved to die, but God was merciful to him as He was to the people of Nineveh. God plainly applies the kindergarten lesson from the gourd to Jonah, who grieved over the loss of the gourd vine. "Should not I have regard for Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:11). There was no answer from Jonah to this telling and overwhelming question. He was silenced, if not convinced. Please note God's pity for the cattle also as well as for the ignorant people of Nineveh, and for the stubborn and willful prophet. Surely we are all wandering sheep, preachers and all. What a call is the story of Jonah and Nineveh to sinners today to turn to God while His mercy still holds out toward us all.

Jonah 1:1-3; 3:2-5

THE MISSIONARY CALL OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

JOHN DANIEL JONES

Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah . . . Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it. . . . But Jonah rose up to flee . . . from the presence of the Lord (Jonah 1:1-3).

Arise, go unto Nineveh . . . and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh. . . . So the people of Nineveh believed God (Jonah 3:2-5).

I do not think I can commence my sermon in a better way than by quoting the sentence that Sir George Adam Smith prefixes as a kind of motto to his commentary on the prophet Jonah. Here it is: "This is the tragedy of the book of Jonah, that a book which is made the means of one of the most sublime revelations of truth in the Old Testament should be known to most only for its connection with a whale." Yes, that is the tragedy. Many a passage, many a book in the Bible, has suffered sorely at the hands of good Christian people. They have been treated as armories of proof-texts without any reference to the main lines of the writers' thought. Books like the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation are persistently abused by a whole school of Christian people. They scan them only to discover in them what they imagine to be "signs of the times" without troubling themselves in the slightest about the meaning of Jewish apocalyptic, and without worrying about the historic situation out of which, and to which, the authors wrote. Judging from the way in which some people handle these books you might imagine that the authors were not writing for their

own age at all, but that all the while they had the twentieth century in mind.

But, while many books in the Bible have been mishandled and abused, no book has suffered such outrage as this book of the prophet Jonah. All the attention has been concentrated on the story of the whale, as if that were the central thing in the book. Nine out of ten Christian people know it only for that, and would be hard put to it to give any account of the book except that it contains that story. It might be a sort of Old Testament Jules Verne story—a Jewish anticipation of the Tarzan series. We don't trouble our heads about the accuracy or veracity of these modern books. They are confessedly books of the imagination, and we accept them as such. But this book that contains the whale story is in the Bible, and that makes a world of difference.

People have debated and discussed, they have wrangled and quarreled, as to the interpretation to be put upon the story. Literalists have contended that it is just sober matter of fact and have devoted much ingenuity to the task of proving its possibility. Frank Bullen wrote a whole chapter in one of his whaling narratives to prove that a whale could really swallow a man. Belief in the story became a test of orthodoxy, a test even of genuine Christianity. And in the dust raised about the story, the real meaning and purpose of the book were entirely overlooked. And the result of all this again has been that to the average man the book has become a joke and a jest.

And this is sheer tragedy. For this book of Jonah is one of the noblest in the whole of the Old Testament. Of all Old Testament books it is the one that comes nearest in spirit to the New Testament. In its wide outlook, in its insight into God's heart, the only things in the Old Testament to be put in the same class with this book are the concluding chapters of Isaiah and the eighty-seventh Psalm. For in this book God appears not simply as the God of the Jews, but as the God of the whole world. Here His universal love is suggested. Here we can see religion bursting through the swaddling clothes of Jewish narrowness and exclusiveness, and claiming the world for its province. Here we get the truth asserted that the Gentiles were susceptible to, and would accept, the word of God. It took the vision of the great sheet and his subsequent experience of the actual descent of the Spirit upon Cornelius and his household to convince Peter that God had granted to the Gentiles also repentance to life.

That great conviction had, however, been born in the heart of the writer of this book at least three centuries before. To him had been given the vision of a whole world sharing in the love and compassion of God and responsive to His call. It would do us all good to read the book over again from this point of view. And if the whale episode troubles you—I don't think it need trouble anyone who is acquainted with Eastern habits of thought and composition—then leave that episode out altogether and read direct from the fifteenth verse of the first chapter to the opening verse of chapter 3, so that the central purpose of the book may be clear.

For the central lesson of the book is not that it is impossible to flee from the presence of the Lord or that disobedience inevitably meets with punishment, though these lessons are contained in it. The purpose of the book, as Sir George Adam Smith says, is to illustrate "God's care for the Gentiles and their susceptibility to His word." In short, Jonah is the great missionary book of the Old Testament, and it is about some of the great and simple truths it emphasizes—true now as then—that I want to speak.

There are three points illustrated in this prophecy upon which I wish to dwell for a few minutes. They are familiar enough to us Christian people, for they are simple and elementary, and yet they stand in need of constant reinforcement. Those three truths are these:

(1) God's love and compassion reach out to all men;

(2) All men are capable of receiving that love and responding to it;

(3) Men who themselves enjoy the knowledge of God are often strangely and amazingly unwilling to share it with others.

God's Universal Love

The first truth emphasized in this book is that God's love and compassion reach out to all men. That is the great revelation of the book. The Jew had been brought up to believe that he had exclusive rights in God. He had been brought up to believe that he was heaven's prime favorite and that his people were God's peculiar people. The people outside the limits of Judaism—the people of Egypt and Assyria and Babylon, people who had often oppressed the people of Israel—were not only the enemies of the Jews. They were also the enemies of God, and their end was destruction and perdition. The discovery the prophet made under the guidance of God's Spirit was that these heathen nations were the objects of God's love, and that the knowledge of God had been committed to Israel, not as a selfish possession, but that Israel might proclaim this truth to an ignorant and perishing world.

All this is implied in the opening sentences of this prophecy: "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me" (Jonah 1:2). Nineveh was the center of that brutal kingdom of Assyria that had broken Jewish independence and deported and outraged its people. Its wickedness was great. There was no doubt about that; it had come up before God. But God had pity and compassion on Nineveh. The Ninevites were dear to Him, and He would rather save them from their impending doom. "Go to Nineveh," God said, "that great city, and cry against it." All the yearning compassions of the Lord are in

that verse. I sometimes think that Nineveh is taken as the scene of the prophet's ministry just because it is an extreme illustration. Its wickedness was great. If ever a people deserved punishment, the Ninevites did. But God has pity and compassion even for them. The pity that yearns over Nineveh is a pity from which none are excluded. The love that pours itself on Nineveh is a love that extends to the lost and the last and the very least.

That is the first fact we must start with: God's love is a universal love; His redemption is a universal redemption. He sent His Son to die for all, and His mercy and compassion run out to all. This is so easily said and yet so hard to realize. It is one of those great commonplaces of religion that, just because it is a commonplace, is desperately difficult really to get into our consciousness. If something could only "stab our spirits wide awake" to a realization of this truth, the missionary problem would be solved. Let me say it quite simply and boldly: God loves everybody. He gave His Son to die for everybody. He wants to save everybody. The people of India and China, the half-developed savage folk of Africa, the child races of New Guinea and the islands, they are all God's children. They are all in His heart and His compassions run out to them.

This is the supreme motive for the great missionary enterprise. There are other subsidiary motives, no doubt. I once heard a man appeal for support for missions on the ground that missionary work was good for trade. Trade followed the flag; the flag followed the missionary. There was truth in the argument, but it was a poor, base, and ignoble plea. A great spiritual enterprise cannot in the long run be carried on for materialistic reasons.

The necessity of missionary work has been urged on humanitarian grounds. It is a nobler appeal, and it tells with curious force upon a present-day congregation, more sensitive as people are to physical distress than to spiritual need. And, let it be said, there is ample ground for this appeal. The dark places of the earth are full of cruelty, and the coming of Christianity emancipates people from the bondage of superstition and fear, from ignorance and disease and death. Life, for instance, has become another thing for the natives of the New Hebrides since J. G. Paton first went there, and for the natives of Calabar since Mary Slessor settled in their midst. Missionary work appeals to anyone and everyone who wishes to heal the open sores of humankind.

The necessity of missionary work in these days is being urged in the interests of world peace. The condition of the world is a call to more intense missionary effort. There are great Eastern nations like China and Japan that are going to count, and count for much, in the future development of the world. Unless these nations are Christianized, the "yellow peril" may become a deadly menace. The walls of Leeds a little time since were placard with these words: "Christ or Chaos." Is there any other alternative? Chaos will be the inevitable issue unless the world gets our Christ. The world situation is a call to a new missionary crusade. These are all motives to missions. But they are not the supreme motive. It is back to the supreme motive we must get if missionary work is ever to become a passion with us. The other motives are prudential, humanitarian, but the real religious motive is this—that God loves these heathen people, these ignorant and sunken people. God loves them. God gave His Son to die for them. He will not be happy until He gets these lost children back to His heart and His home.

"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee:"

There you get the Father's love for His lost children, and His yearning desire to save His perishing children! And India is our Nineveh, and China is our Nineveh, and Africa is our Nineveh. God bids us, too, go to Nineveh and preach the preaching He has committed to us. He bids us go and proclaim this message: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn 3:16).

The Father wants His children. He will not be happy in His heaven until He gathers them in! That is the great compelling motive for missionary work. "The love of Christ constraineth me," said the greatest missionary of them all—not the challenge of the world, not the miseries of men (though he was not indifferent to them), but the love of Christ. That is the supreme motive. For I can conceive of no man really loving the Father without at the same time loving His children, and I can conceive of no man really loving Christ without desiring to help Him to gather in those for whom He gave His life.

The Capacity for Repentance

The second great truth this book illustrates and emphasizes is this, that all men are capable of receiving God's love and responding to it. "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it," said God to the prophet. But Jonah did not want to go. Not because he thought his message beyond the comprehension of the Ninevites, not because he thought they would reject it, but because he had an uneasy feeling that on hearing it they might repent. And Jonah, hard and bitter Jew as he was, did not want them to repent. He would have preferred to see them the objects of God's wrath rather than the recipients of His grace. And what he feared came to pass. When, for the second time, the imperious summons came to him, "Arise, go unto Nineveh . . . and preach" (Jonah 3:2), and he went, however unwillingly, and preached to the dim multitudes of the city, "the people of Nineveh believed God" (Jonah 3:5) They repented, and God forgave them their sin. Nineveh, wicked Nineveh, repented!

Nineveh responded to God's call! And the great and blessed truth all this symbolizes and teaches is this, that none are to be shut

out of the range of the gospel message. There are no unreachables or impossibles. The Word, when preached and wherever preached, meets with its response. As Sir George Adam Smith expresses it, "Under every form and character of human life, beneath all needs and habits, deeper than despair and more native to man than sin itself, lies the power of the heart to turn. It was this, and not Hope, that remained at the bottom of Pandora's box when every other gift had fled. For this is the indispensable secret of Hope. It lies in every heart, waiting for some dream of divine mercy to rouse it; but, when roused, neither ignorance of God, nor pride, nor long obduracy of evil, may withstand it."

"The power of the heart to turn"—that is what this book asserts. The power of every human heart to turn and respond to the appeal of the divine mercy—that is the truth it proclaims. It was a noble and splendid bit of theorizing when the author wrote this book. He was arguing from the nature of God and the nature of man. But it is a fact of experience for us. For men have traveled to every Nineveh beneath the sun since the days of Jonah and have preached the preaching committed to them—the preaching of the grace of God in Christ, the preaching of the redeeming passion of God revealed in the Cross. Everywhere the miracle of Nineveh has been repeated, everywhere men have believed in God, everywhere there has been demonstrated the capacity of the heart to turn!

I do not know that Christian folk have ever been reluctant to carry the gospel into any particular land for fear the people should repent. From that harsh and narrow exclusiveness, which found satisfaction in the thought that other people were shut out from the mercies of God, we have been delivered. But I am not at all sure that Christian people have not been slow in sending the gospel to this land and that because they felt the people could not repent. Either they said the people were so devoted to their ancestral religions that it seemed hopeless to attempt to change them, or they were so sunk in savagery and sin as to be insensible to any and every high appeal. But the experience of the century and half of the modern missionary enterprise has banished that doubt. Nothing has been more moving and subduing than the response the human heart everywhere makes to the preaching of the gospel. Every Nineveh can repent! They have come from the north and the south and the east and the west and sat down in the kingdom of God. The people who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb are of every nation, tribe, tongue, and condition. Everywhere, under the preaching of the gospel, there has been revealed the power of the heart to turn!

"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city."

The call came to the ears of William Carey. Nineveh to him was India, that land with an ancient religion and a hoary civilization. To many it seemed a hopeless enterprise, so terrific was the hold their ancient religion had upon the people, so intimately had it intertwined itself with the fabric of their lives. But Indian hearts responded to the preaching of William Carey and his successors. From the devotees of Hinduism Christ gathered His converts. In that unchanging East there has been demonstrated the heart's power to turn.

"Go to Nineveh, that great city."

The cry came into the ears of Robert Morrison, and, as interpreted by him, Nineveh was China. It seemed a foolish adventure, for China had a civilization older than the Christian. But Chinese hearts in turn responded to the preaching of the gospel. In China, Christ gathered His confessors and martyrs. In China there has been demonstrated the heart's power to turn.

Go to Nineveh, that great city."

The call came to Robert Moffat, and, as interpreted by him, Nineveh was Africa—dark, benighted, degraded Africa. It seemed a desperate undertaking to go out and seek to evangelize Africa, not so much because there the missionary would find himself confronted by an old civilization, but because there the people were so sunken and degraded and vile. But Moffat went. He went and preached in Nineveh, and the heart of the African responded. Nineveh repented; in Africa Christ gathered His church.

Do you remember the story of Africaner? It was a story so with which Moffat used to thrill his audiences. It was a great story in the days of my youth. Africaner was a sort of robber chief in South Africa. He was the plague and peril of the white settlers in that land. He was the type of the untamable and brutal savage. Scoffers used to tell Moffat to convert Africaner, and then they would begin to believe in missions! Moffat went and preached his gospel to the robber chief. His coarse and brutal heart was touched. He laid aside his savagery, and before long he was accompanying Moffat to the Cape clothed and in his right mind. Nineveh had repented! Nineveh believed God! In that brutal savage converted into a meek follower of Jesus there was demonstrated the power of the heart—the vilest and most degraded and brutalized heart to turn!

And that is why we omit no class, no tribe, from our missionary enterprise. There are no impossibles and unreachables. "The people of Nineveh believed God!" We undertake the enterprise because the love of Christ sustains us. But we undertake it with this faith to sustain us: That there is something in every soul that cries out for Christ and responds to Him when He calls. There are no people so obdurate and sunken that this faculty is destroyed in them. Nineveh—every Nineveh—can repent and believe. In every human heart there lies the power to turn.

The Reluctant Preacher

The third truth I find in the book is that men who know the truth are often amazingly slow to impart it and to share it. Jonah was a reluctant preacher. When the call first came to him he rose up to flee to Tarshish. He did not want to preach in Nineveh. He did not want to give it the chance of repenting. He would rather see Nineveh—the capital of that brutal state that had so ruthlessly oppressed his people—destroyed than saved. So he tried to put all the leagues of land and sea that he could between himself and the great city in which God bade him preach. The religion Jonah believed in was an exclusive, not a universal one. He rebelled against the very thought of Israel's enemies being treated as sons.

Is this without its parallel in the life and experience of the church today? Are we not reluctant preachers still? Is it not a fact that many among us still turn a deaf ear to God's command, "Arise, go unto Nineveh . . . and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee?" We neither go ourselves, nor help to send others instead of us. Nineveh, that great city, may perish for all we do to help the saving of it.

Our modern heedlessness does not arise from unwillingness, as did Jonah's—though there are those among us who affect to believe that the Christian religion is a religion for the West and not for the East. Our heedlessness at bottom springs from indifference. We have no concern at all for the condition of Nineveh. We are not troubled that vast sections of our world's populations live without any knowledge of Christ. We are interested in the political situation in India. We are concerned about the maintenance of the "open door" for trade in China. We can get quite excited in the discussion of the pros and cons of an alliance with Japan. But the fact that the people of India, China, and Japan are ignorant of God's grace to us and all humankind in Christ has never cost us a night's sleep or given us an hour's concern. And this indifference again springs from a lack of religious experience—a failure to realize what the Christian redemption means for ourselves. We are not filled, as the apostle Paul was, with a sense of adoring wonder and gratitude at the grace of God in saving us. We scarcely know what it is to say in a kind of rapture of adoring awe, "The Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20-[note](#)). A church that has lost its sense of wonder at God's amazing love in Christ is bound to be a cold, lethargic, indifferent church.

And that is our deepest want today—to catch again the wonder of God's redeeming love, to realize afresh what it was God did for us when He gave His Son to die on Calvary's hill. The Christian faith is not a morality, it is a redemption. It is not a philosophy, it is a salvation. It is the man who knows what redemption and salvation mean—who knows himself to be redeemed and saved by the grace of God and who will be eager to spread the gospel. It is a deepened and enriched redemptive experience that is our bitter need. That is the secret of the warmed heart and the loosened tongue. And when the church gets the warmed heart and the loosened tongue there will soon be no rebellious and wicked Nineveh left. Every Nineveh will repent and believe, and Christ shall see of the travail of His soul and be abundantly satisfied.

Lord, There's A Little Bit Of Jonah In Me

Robert Morgan

It is an honor to be invited to speak at the Wednesday night service of the National Association of Free Will Baptists; and I want to begin by telling you something I've never shared before with an audience; and I'm not even sure I've every told this to my family or friends.

But it was on just such a Wednesday night as this, at a National Associational service many years ago, that the Lord began dealing with my heart about Christian service. I wasn't very committed to Christ at the time -- just a confused teenager -- and I recall sitting in the high galleries as far away as possible, with Jon Wilson, son of Foreign Missions Director J. Reford Wilson. It was a long, hot service, and I was glad when the preacher finally rambled to an end.

But to my surprise, there was response to the invitation. The Holy Spirit seemed to descend upon the crowd, and from my perch looking down on the hall, I saw scores of people leave their seats and clog the aisles. Without saying a word to me, my companion slipped from his seat and went forward. Suddenly I felt the Lord knocking at my door that night, saying, "Shouldn't you be up there, too? What are you waiting for? Why not give yourself fully to Christ tonight?"

But there was a little bit of Jonah in me, and I just stood there; and it wasn't until later that the Lord got hold of me. But it was that service that first pricked my conscience about surrendering my life to Christ for fulltime Christian service.

And perhaps tonight you're in the same boat.

It's no accident we've gathered together here on this summer's evening at the end of the 20th century. It is a poignant time in history, and we are here by divine appointment. You are present by divine providence. You may be a young person, but perhaps you

are like I was -- you haven't yet fully committed your life to Christ and to his kingdom.

Maybe there's a little bit of Jonah in you, too. Tonight I'd like to speak on the subject, "Lord, there's a little bit of Jonah in me!" and I'd like to ask you to turn to that book of the Bible, Jonah -- chapter one, verse one:

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Ninevah, that great city, and cry...."

A Story of Weeping

I'd like to say three things tonight about this book in the Bible, and the first thing is this: The story of Jonah is a story of weeping, for Jonah was told to go to Ninevah and to cry... to cry out... to proclaim a message that reflected the weeping heart of God. It is the story of the heart of God weeping for a lost city and for a confused world. We, too, are living in times that make us cry.

We live among people who are hurting very badly. I know of a family who was raising a teenage daughter, and one night there was an argument in the home. The teenager stormed up to her room and locked the door, and the anxious parents went to bed disheartened. The next morning when the girl didn't get up for school, they knocked on the door. There was no answer. Breaking down the door, they saw the trap door into the attic opened, and going up there they found her hanging by her neck. In an instant, the lives of every member of that family were ravaged forever. We are living in times that make us cry.

I've been following news from Zambia. 90,000 children live on the streets of Zambia, most of them orphaned by the AIDS epidemic. More than half the 600,000 children of Zambia have lost at least one parent. Death is so common that coffins are sold out of brightly colored vans parked alongside the roads. The younger children living on the street find abandoned petrol or aerosol cans to sniff, trying to remain numb. Teenagers live in a state of constant drunkenness from a homemade beer and from smoking something called jekem, which is fermented human feces scraped from sewer pipes. They are an abandoned, lost generation, living dazed on the streets and dying in the sewers. We are living in times that make us cry.

The other night on the television news, there was a story about a man on the New York subway -- 37 years old, 5 foot 6, 170 pounds. He had on jeans, a gold polo shirt, and black boots. He was sitting there on the subway as people got on and got off, coming and going, bustling movement all around him. But he was dead. He had sat down and died and nobody had noticed.

Here we are, Christians, living in a world full of dead people -- we come and go and ride around in circles, and sometimes we lose our burden. We forget that we're surrounded by people who are dead to Christ and dead to hope. We forget that we are serving a Savior who wept over the city of Jerusalem and by the tomb of Lazarus. He weeps tonight over this city of Atlanta, over this state, over this backslidden country, over the 259 nations of the world, and over the 10,000 tribes that remain unreached with the Gospel.

A Time of Sleeping

So the Lord told Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry... Care about them! Do something for them! Evangelize them. Save them." But what happened to Jonah? That's the second thing to notice -- the story of Jonah is also a story of sleeping.

But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. 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. Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.

The book of Proverbs says, He who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame.

And I wonder if it isn't likewise with us. Here we are at the end of the second millenium, in the middle of the greatest harvest season the church of Jesus Christ has ever known in its entire history, but most of us, to be honest about it, are relatively unaware and uninvolved.

A couple of years ago Don Robirds asked me to write an article for Heartbeat Magazine on whether or not our denomination could afford to substantially increase the number of missionaries we were sending out. I was shocked to discover that our entire international missions budget could be met if the average Free Will Baptist church member gave just 7.5 cents a day to the cause.

To put it differently, if each one of us gave to the 50 cents we spend on our morning newspaper, we would increase our denominational missions budget seven-fold, and instead of 100 missionaries, we could support 700.

Somebody's asleep.

And what about our prayer support. J. O. Fraser was a missionary to China in the early 1900s. He credited the conversion of

hundreds of Lisu families to the prayers of his very earnest little prayer group back in England. He said, Christians at home can do as much for foreign missions as those actually on the field. It will only be known on the Last Day how much has been accomplished in missionary work by the prayers of earnest believers at home.

But most of us don't take those prayer letters very seriously. We're more likely to scan them and toss them in the trash than we are to spread them out before the throne in earnest prayer like Hezekiah during the Assyrian crisis.

Somebody's asleep.

And what about the internationals flooding into our country? There are approximately 800,000 international students in the U. S. right now for training. Some of them will go back to be the political and military and educational leaders in their countries. We can reach some of them. But not if we're asleep.

Recently a missiologist friend of mine related to me what she called "the biggest lost opportunity in missionary history." There was a 13-year-old in Mongolia who inherited a bit of land from his father. This boy was a precocious warrior with instinctive brilliance as a military strategist; he was also ruthless, and he formed fighting bands that went from village to village until he was ruling over two million people in a Mongolian Empire that stretched from China to India, and from Siberia to edges of Western Europe. They gave this young man the title of Genghis Khan and he ruled over more of territory than any man has ever ruled.

Meanwhile at the same time in Western Europe a great revival was occurring under the preaching of men like St. Francis of Assisi, and thousands were becoming Christians.

Following Khan's death, the bulk of his empire eventually went to his grandson, Kublai Khan, who established his capital city in Beijing. He had two Italians in his court named Polo, the father and the uncle of famed explorer Marco Polo. They began to tell Kublai Khan about Christianity, and the great ruler became very interested. He sent the Polo brothers back to with a request for 100 missionaries to tell the Mongolians and the Chinese about Christianity. "When we learn about Christianity, there will be more Christians in my empire than in all Europe," he said.

The Polos returned with the message, but no one was interested in going. Finally two friars agreed to go with the Polos (and Marco Polo accompanied them) but along the way the friars got fainthearted and turned around and went home.

When they got back to Kublai Khan, he said, "Where are the missionaries?" No one came. Eventually the church did send a small handful of missionaries, but by that time the opportunity had passed.

Perhaps tonight the Lord is speaking to you about being willing to travel overseas for his cause.

Well, the story of Jonah ends better than the one about the Polo brothers. You're aware of the story of the whale, how God eventually got Jonah headed in the right direction. And thus we discover that the story of Jonah is not only one of weeping and sleeping; it is one of reaping.

A Time of Reaping

Jonah went to Nineveh, went around the city preaching a sermon of one sentence, and the entire city was converted. Jonah 3:5 says, So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.

And I want to suggest that just as the book of Jonah brings us to the greatest single ingathering of souls in the Bible, so you and I are privileged to live during the greatest single harvest season ever witnessed by the church of Jesus Christ.

According to Bob Sjogren, it took from the beginning of church history until the year 1900 for committed believers to become 2.5% of the world population. It took only 70 more years for that percentage to double. By 1970, committed believers were 5% of a much larger world population.

Then it took just 22 years to double again. In 1992, committed believers grew to become 10% of a still larger world population.

According to George Otis of the Sentinel Group, about 70% of all the church's outreach since its beginning until today has been accomplished in this century alone, and about 70% of what has been accomplished in this century has taken place since 1945. And 70% of what has happened since 1945 has happened in this decade of the 1990s.

According to missionary statistics, over 260,000 people every day are now being presented the plan of salvation, and there is a growing sense of excitement among missiologists that we could actually be within striking distance of seeing the Gospel presented to every known people group within the lifetime of some who are in his great hall tonight.

But the greatest areas of harvest are overseas. Only about 15% of the worldwide body of Christ live in North America, and we aren't doing so well. 85% of our churches are plateaued or declining. American society is entering a post-Christian era. Our culture is

becoming so secularized and cynical that only a revival of biblical proportions will save the church in the United States.

North American missionaries are, overall, becoming fewer and older while missionaries from new, emerging overseas fields are increasing and youthful.

That means this: If you and your church are not heavily invested in our overseas subsidiaries, you're going to miss out on 85% of what God is doing in this world.

- I want to know when I lay my head down on my pillow at night that someone somewhere in the world is getting up to continue the work, sent out by our church, supported by our dollars and sustained by our prayers.
- I want to have part in a ministry on which the sun never sets.
- I want to be a part of something bigger than I am, something wider than the brick walls of my church.
- I want to be involved in a global harvest of global proportions at the very twilight of history.

I'd like to close tonight by telling you of two hallmates of mine in Bible College. Bill Harding and I graduated together in 1974, but after graduation we both got married and we went our separate ways.

Bill had gone on to seminary, and had gone to Ethiopia with Sudan Interior Mission. Ethiopia at the time was under an oppressive Marxist government that did not welcome missionaries, and Bill had to find some reason to justify his stay in the country. In earlier days, Bill had worked on golf courses, installing irrigation equipment. So he told the government he knew something about water resource management, and they put him in charge of drilling wells for the populace. He learned quickly on the job, and for several years successfully oversaw the drilling of wells, helping provide Ethiopians with fresh water. All the same time, he and his wife Grace were looking for opportunities to quietly witness and share their faith. He especially poured himself into three Ethiopian Christians whom he was able to teach and train.

At length, the Marxists fell from power, and Bill suddenly found new freedom in preaching. These men asked Bill if they could invite some people over to the Harding house to hear more about the Gospel, and Bill excitedly said yes. The day came, and imagine how stunned Bill and Grace were when ten thousand people showed up. There was a large field in front of their house, and for four days, sometimes in the driving rain, the people stayed. Bill preached without microphone and amplification, but multitudes were converted. The crowds would sometimes stand in the driving rain for four hours, listening to the Word of God being shouted to them over the sound of the downpour.

Bill is now stationed in Addis Ababa, with a circuit of preaching points in which thousands show up. He told me that whenever he preaches, he can see nothing but "boom boxes" being held aloft in the first several rows, as people record his sermon. When he later returns to the same spot, he finds many people who can preach his sermon word-for-word, having listened to the tapes over and over. Thousands have come to Jesus Christ, and it is a time of harvest, a time of reaping, a time of revival.

I had another hallmate named Chet Bitterman. I'll never forget Chet. The thing that impressed me about him was his cocky self-possession, exhibited chiefly in a smile that always bordered on a smirk. He would stick his head through the door of my room, flash his devil-may-care grin, ask how things were going, then disappear as quickly as he had come. He always left too soon, and he seldom looked back.

Chet walked across that stage as we got our diplomas, and that's the last time I ever saw him. He married and had three daughters just like I did. He ended up with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Columbia, South America. On January 19, 1981, terrorists burst into his apartment, tore him away from his family, and a few weeks later his body was found stuffed in a truck, a single bullet in his chest.

When he had realized that God was calling him to be a missionary in Latin America, Chet penned something strangely prophetic in his journal: Maybe this is just some kind of self-inflicted martyr complex, but I find this recurring thought that perhaps God will call me to be martyred for Him in his service in Columbia. I am willing.

I believe there are some people here with some Jonah in them who need to say, "I am willing."

- Some young people who need to give their lives to Jesus Christ tonight without hesitation or reservation. I have decided to follow Jesus.
- Some pastors who need to get serious about leading their churches into earnest missionary involvement. I have decided to follow Jesus.
- Some here who feel God may be summoning you to fulltime Christian service, and he's just waiting for you to say "Yes." I have decided to follow Jesus.
- Perhaps tonight you feel that God would have you seriously dedicate yourself to a ministry of prayer for global outreach.
- Perhaps tonight you feel that God would have you dedicate your goods to extend the global harvest.

- Perhaps you've been resisting the Lord, like Jonah.
- Perhaps he's calling you to go, and you're ready to say, "I have decided now, to follow Jesus."

Why not say: "Where he leads me I will follow"?

What not say, "Here am I, send me"?

Why not be a reaper?

THE WIDENESS OF GOD'S MERCY

James Hastings

And the Lord said, 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 have pity on 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?—Jon. 4:10, 11.

1. JONAH was the typical representative of a proud and exclusive nation. It was expected of Israel as the chosen people of God, to whom were committed the oracles of God, that they would be zealous in the cause of true religion, and spread its light and truth among those sitting in the darkness of heathenism. Their election and preparation for this high and noble mission had, however, a totally different effect upon themselves from that designed by God. It made them proud, arrogant, and exclusive, very unwilling to spread among the heathen the Divine truth lodged with them; at all events, at the time the Book of Jonah was written they were so. They considered themselves the favoured of Heaven, and as such possessing the exclusive right of enjoying Divine truth, whilst the Gentiles might live in the darkness of heathenism, and perish in it. If compelled to preach to them, they would be much more willing to announce God's judgment upon them than His mercy and compassion. It is indeed true that the prophets have always been enthusiastic about the near or distant future, when the Gentiles would be made partakers of the same privileges and blessings as were enjoyed by the Jews, but the Jewish nation as a whole was always reluctant to entertain such liberal and humane ideas.

2. The Book of Jonah is meant to illustrate by an historical narrative, embellished no doubt to suit the taste of the time, the great and important truth that God is no respecter of persons, and that in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him. These bigoted and narrow-minded Jews had to be taught the humiliating lesson that the Gentiles were more ready and willing to accept the truth of God when preached to them than they themselves were. The repenting Gentiles saved, whilst the unmerciful Jews are reprov'd; the conversion of the Gentiles preceding the conversion of the Jews; the Gentiles rejoicing in the forgiving mercy of God, whilst the Jews are protesting, murmuring, and complaining that the promises of God have not been fulfilled in exactly the same manner as they have desired they should be—these are some of the leading principles this peculiar Book of Jonah is meant to set forth.

3. Jonah is the typical narrow and exclusive Jew; and the whole story of his narrowness and exclusiveness serves to throw into relief the wide and tender mercy of God. Than the text there is no more Christian utterance in the Old Testament. It raises the eternal protest that God is no less pitiful, but more pitiful, than we; that the pang of pity which a man feels for the withering of a flower or the autumnal fall of the leaf is felt a hundredfold in the heart of the Most High for the souls whom He has made in His image, and for whose growth in grace He has laboured and will labour.

¶ I have read the Book of Jonah at least a hundred times, and I will publicly avow, for I am not ashamed of my weakness, that I cannot even now take up this marvellous book, nay, nor even speak of it, without tears rising to my eyes, or my heart beating higher. This apparently trivial book is one of the deepest and grandest that was ever written, and I should like to say to every one who approaches it, "Take off thy shoes, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."¹

I

JONAH'S HARD EXCLUSIVENESS

1. At the court of Jeroboam the Second, Jonah prophesied success against Syria, and his prediction was fulfilled, for Jeroboam recovered Damascus and Hamath and restored the borders of Israel. The word of God now came to Jonah to go against the great city of Nineveh and pronounce its doom, unless it repented of its sins. The prophet was in an evil case. His patriotism forbade him to reach out a hand or foot to serve that great nation which would one day swallow up his own people, while his fear of God was a strong motive in his breast to obey. Before his eyes passed a vision of the time when the armies of Asshur and the fierce warriors of

Chaldaea would swoop down from the northern plains upon that little nation and carry them away captive, planting the deserted villages and lands of Samaria with the people of Arva and Cutha and Sippara. These strange people with their strange gods would hold their riots in the halls that were once blest, while the Hebrews would be placed in Halah and Habor, cities by the river Gozan, separated from all they held dear, and surrounded by a proud idolatrous race. Such a nightmare hovered over Jonah, and compelled him to fly far from his homeland. In Balaam we have the case of a prophet who wished to carry a message contrary to the will of God. Here we have the instance of a prophet who wished to avoid performing a duty the Lord had laid upon him. In the long run, conscience proved stronger than fear or patriotism. But the battle was fiercely contested and protracted within the prophet's soul. Loth to convey a message that might prove the salvation of his national foes, he took ship for Tarshish, a port in Spain, with Phœnician merchants. But his purpose was frustrated by the storm, and he was cast into the waters, and then from the depths of Sheol he cried with a bitter cry to Jehovah to save him from his peril. The Lord had mercy upon him, and, after an experience which we need not discuss now, he was cast out upon the shore. There, as he lay helpless on the beach, the word of the Lord came to him and bade him hasten to Nineveh and deliver his message.

The original opportunity indeed was now gone. The prophet had lost the honour of at once obeying the Divine commands; he had tasted the agony implied in preferring his own inclinations to the will of God. But God had brought good out of evil, had taught him the beauty of repentance and the greatness of His mercy. And, surest proof of all that he was quite forgiven, the Divine Spirit had come back, the great impulse arose, which formerly he had fought against and beaten down, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it." With a heart purified by repentance and softened by pardon, Jonah was now able to enter into the mind of God, to comprehend the feelings with which He looked down on a vast community of human beings who had forgotten His name and His nature. He himself had experienced the unfathomable pity that was in the Divine heart, God's earnest desire to show mercy, His unwillingness that any should perish. He had discovered that the heathen were not necessarily destitute of every human virtue, and that they were not completely averse to the worship of the true God. So wonderful indeed are God's ways of dealing with the hearts of men that Jonah was probably a fitter messenger to Nineveh after his attempted flight than he had been before. By our very failures, God educates us to do His will.

¶ It seems hard that we should often be left to exert ourselves for things that fail—that even with the best intentions we do things which turn to harm, and leave us to self-reproach. But let us ask ourselves how we could construct a moral world otherwise than by concealing results. And what again if successful results were always to reward sincere effort? Would not this be antedating the judgment? The failure may be a success as a part of our training, and not so great a failure in its direct object as it seems. When our aim has been pure, we may save ourselves self-reproach, while we gather wisdom in the use of means. There is always responsibility in action, but responsibility also in inaction. The one may be unsuccessful, the other must.¹

2. But the evil spirit was not yet exorcised from Jonah's heart. When the Ninevites took him at his word and repented, and God spared them, he was bitterly disappointed. In the depth of his heart there lurked all along the secret hope that either they would not repent or repentance would come too late, and that in any case he would have the pleasure of seeing the great city destroyed. Was this feeling an unnatural one? We can hardly say so when we consider the past history of religion, and the feelings which have filled the hearts of undoubtedly religious men. We know that religious zeal has often been accompanied by atrocious cruelty, and that men have burned one another for the love of God. There was nothing wonderful in the fact that a Hebrew prophet should desire that a Divine judgment should fall on a heathen city, and that Jehovah should be magnified in His mighty power. It was accordingly with very human, but by no means creditable, feelings of vexation and anger that Jonah saw that Nineveh was not to be destroyed after all. There was but little excuse for him. He had had a large experience of God's methods of working; he knew what God in His inmost nature was; and it is almost unaccountable that he should thus set himself in opposition to the Divine will, should grumble at God's goodness to his fellow-creatures, and should in effect tell Him that He had done wrong.

And yet how full and how complete was Jonah's knowledge of the character of God. "I knew that thou art a gracious God, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, and repentest thee of the evil." Surely this was a knowledge fitted rather to send a tide of joy surging through a human heart, to make a man happy all his life. Yet, strangely enough, it was this very thought that roused such bitter feelings in Jonah's mind, and made him wish rather to die than to live—a proof, if proof were needed, that when we think that we are most religious, our feelings may be by no means in accordance with the mind of God. Knowledge of God's nature is one thing, sympathy with it is another. To have such sympathy we must drink in largely of the Divine Spirit.

¶ As the end drew near, Romanes began to make notes for a work which he meant to serve as a correction of the teaching of his book, *A Candid Examination of Theism*. As the notes grew, his faith came. The process of reviewing his past, the looking back on the way by which he had come, not only gave to him a truer view of the proportion of things, but also brought to him, first, the consciousness of God, and then that momentous experience in religious life—the kindling of the soul with the realized love of God. After his death, the notes were published, with the title, *Thoughts on Religion*. Bishop Gore thus describes the main position which is set forth in the book:

"Scientific ratiocination cannot find adequate ground for belief in God. But the pure Agnostic must recognize that God may have revealed Himself by other means than that of ratiocination. As religion is for the whole man, so all human faculties may be required to seek after God and find Him—emotions and experiences of an extra 'rational' kind. The 'pure Agnostic' must be prepared to

welcome evidence of all sorts.”

Romanes takes the positive side of the evidence for faith in God as shown by “the happiness of religious, and chiefly of the highest religious—i.e. Christian—belief. It is a matter of fact that, besides being most intense, it is most enduring, growing, and never staled by custom. In short, according to the universal testimony of those who have it, it differs from all other happiness, not only in degree, but in kind. Those who have it can usually testify what they used to be without it. It has no relation to intellectual status. It is a thing by itself and supreme.”¹

3. Notice the peculiar impiety of Jonah’s words: “Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.” This is the language of petulance. A man’s worth may be measured by the reverence he has for his life. It is well for us to be aware of the real impiety that lurks under a longing for death and weariness of the life which, day by day, God is bestowing on us here. The gospel which delivers us from a coward fear of dying was never intended to foster an equally coward fear of living.

My own dim life should teach me this,
That life shall live for evermore.

He who brought immortality to light through the gospel, brought also life to light. He claimed for God this daily being, wherein men toil and sorrow and are disappointed, and filled it with a spirit and a purpose, a presence and a power, that make it sacred as any after-life can be. To despise this high gift of God,—to set it in the balance against disappointments, or labours, or unwelcome duties, and the common daily demands; because of sadness or weariness, to stretch out hopeless hands, and long for death—this is not only the mark of a coward spirit, it is also dark impiety. Such a scorn of God’s rich blessedness is scorn of God Himself.

¶ “To live,” says Sir Thomas Browne, “to live, indeed, is to be ourselves; which being not only a hope, but an evidence, in noble believers, ’tis all one to lie in St. Innocent’s churchyard as in the sands of Egypt, ready to be anything in the ecstasy of being ever, and as content with six foot as the Moles of Adrianus.” “Ready to be anything in the ecstasy of being ever,”—they are noble words, and breathe the very spirit of the Bible. “With thee is the fountain of life,” says the Psalmist in highest adoration of God. Christ, in claiming for Himself that He is one with the Father, speaks of the life that is in Him, and which He has power to give, as the proof of this. “As the Father raiseth up the dead, and giveth life to them; even so the Son giveth life to whom he will. As the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself ... because he is the Son of man.”¹

4. No man is so angry as the man who is in the wrong. The angry prophet, leaving Nineveh still undestroyed, betakes himself to the low hills lying to the east of the city. He is half of opinion yet that God’s purpose of destruction is merely delayed, not altered. He will wait and see if the fiery shower will not still descend, and Nineveh become another Sodom. To shelter himself from the noonday sun, he makes a booth of twigs and foliage, and, sitting down, awaits the development of the Divine purposes.

Here in this bower he sits and anxiously longs for news respecting the destiny of the city and its inhabitants. He is exceedingly pleased with the comfort and protection this shady retreat affords him. May fire and brimstone destroy both the city and its inhabitants, as long as he is out of the reach of the destructive elements and can sit in his cool and shady bower undisturbed! He is prepared even to wait a little longer than he could have wished, for the rising of the smoke and flames of the burning city, and for the hearing of the cries and groans of its suffering inhabitants. He would have enjoyed nothing so much as to witness the effect of God’s wrath upon the Ninevites. But the heartless man is not allowed to remain long undisturbed in his comfortable self-complacency. Hardly has he begun to realize the luxury of his bower, when the very gourd, which has contributed so largely to his comfort, withers away, and at a time when its shelter is most needed. Then in the morning, as the sun rose and shed its scorching rays on the unprotected head of Jonah, he fainted and wished that he would die, saying, “It is better for me to die than to live.”

¶ In this impatience of life as well as in some subsequent traits, the story of Jonah reflects that of Elijah. But the difference between the two prophets was this, that while Elijah was very jealous for Jehovah, Jonah was very jealous of Him. Jonah could not bear to see the love promised to Israel alone, and cherished by her, bestowed equally upon her heathen oppressors. And he behaved after the manner of jealousy and of the heart that thinks itself insulted. He withdrew, and sulked in solitude, and would take no responsibility nor interest in his work. Such men are best treated by a caustic gentleness, a little humour, a little rallying, a leaving to nature, and a taking unawares in their own confessed prejudices. All these—I dare to think even the humour—are present in God’s treatment of Jonah. This is very natural and very beautiful. Twice the Divine Voice speaks with the soft sarcasm: Art thou very angry? Then Jonah’s affections, turned from man and God, are allowed their course with a bit of nature, the fresh and green companion of his solitude; and then when all his pity for this has been roused by its destruction, that very pity is employed to awaken his sympathy with God’s compassion for the great city, and he is shown how he has denied to God the same natural affection which he confesses to be so strong in himself.¹

¶ Whole sheets have been filled with the discussion as to what the kikayon, the Gourd, mentioned in the Old Testament only in Jonah was. The dispute is an old one, for when St. Jerome translated it Ivy, St. Augustine was so offended with the translation that he denounced it as heresy. The most popular rendering has been that which identified the kikayon with the Arabic El keroa, the Castor-oil (*Ricinus communis*). The *Ricinus* is a large shrub rather than a tree, and has large palmate leaves with serrated lobes,

and spikes of blossom which produce the seed, from whence the well-known medicinal oil is extracted in small rough husks. It is wild in all Oriental countries, but it is not a tree used for shade, being of a straggling growth, though of course any one might find shelter from the sun under its large foliage. Generally, however, it would be useless for the purpose. It reaches a considerable size—twelve or fifteen feet in height in the warmer parts of Palestine.

The etymological argument in favour of the Ricinus is, no doubt, strong, but practical reasons cause me to lean strongly to the rendering of our English version, Gourd—i.e., the Bottle-Gourd (*Cucurbita pepo*). The Gourd is very commonly employed in Palestine for the purpose of shading arbours. Its rapid growth and large leaves render it admirably adapted for training on trellis work. In the warmer parts of America also, it is the favourite plant for shading arbours; and so rapid is its growth that it will often shoot a foot in a day. In the gardens about Sidon many an arbour of gourds may be seen. But the plant withers as rapidly as it shoots, and after a storm or any injury to the stem, its fruit may be seen hanging from the leafless tendrils which so lately concealed it, a type of melancholy desolation.

Now, we are expressly told in the history that Jonah “made him a booth,” and that after it was made God prepared the “kikayon” to cover it. This is exactly the office of the Gourd. Jonah had erected his fragile lodge of boughs, whose leaves would rapidly wither, and a further shade would be required. Then the tendrils of the Gourd would seize the boughs and provide shelter for the prophet. But no one who knows the Ricinus can conceive it affording any shelter over an existing arbour, nor has it the qualities of rapid growth and sudden decay so characteristic of the Gourd.¹

Within my garden was a flower
More fair than earth could know.
My heart upon it, hour by hour,
Did tender care bestow;
It opened wide to morning's light;
It closed at evenfall.
And, every day more fair and bright,
My flower was all in all.

The flower within my garden grew,
Than all my flowers more fair,
And, when my love it sweetly drew,
Became my only care;
While garden ways with weeds were wild,
And flowers neglected died,
Above my cherished bloom I smiled
And all the rest denied.

A morning came with bitter blight,
A morn with tears made wild—
My flower had perished in the night,
My heart had lost its child.
But when my eyes were washed by tears
And looked upon the light,
I gazed across the blinded years
And set my garden right.²

II

GOD'S WIDE MERCY

1. The question of the text is an argument which is often used in the Bible. It is an argument from man to God, from pity in man to pity in God, from the best in man to an unimaginably better in God. “Thou hast had pity: and should not I have pity?” Will religious men with their narrowness and selfishness keep God from being pitiful as He sees best? Our Lord makes use of this argument in the Gospels: “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.” Erring men can be trusted to give what is good; how much more can God be trusted to give us what is best—even His Spirit in our hearts? The best in man is only a faint image of the best in God. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts.

¶ “Thou hast pity on the gourd.” At first sight the argument does not seem quite in order. For Jonah was not angry for the gourd's sake, but for his own, and indeed his feelings were not those of compassion, but of wrath. The word “pity” is applied by the author to

Jonah and the gourd, because it is the true and appropriate word for God and the Ninevites. The parallelism is a little forced, but it is quite possible, as Professor Driver has had the great kindness to suggest to me in a private letter, that a sort of a fortiori argument was intended by the author. Jonah is allowed by God to have felt some pity for the gourd, although that pity was born of selfishness. He regretted its loss for its own sake as well as for himself. Now not only were the Ninevites incomparably more worthy to be spared than the gourd, but God was incomparably more ready to feel pity than Jonah; for not only was He their Creator and Sustainer, but pity in His case is an ever-present attitude of His nature, neither evoked by selfish considerations of personal advantage, nor assumed as the fair-seeming counterfeit of personal annoyance. God, the shepherd of man, is, as Plato would say, a true shepherd. His end or aim is the well-being of His flock, and only that. Nor does it matter to Him whether the sheep are light or dark, Aryan or Semitic.¹

2. But the text has a further contrast. It is an argument, not merely from man to God, but from the gourd to men, or rather to the young children and the cattle. "Thou hast had pity on the gourd; and should not I have pity on 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?" Here again the argument is repeated in the Gospels. Our Lord was found fault with by narrow bigots for healing a man on the Sabbath. He reminded them that they would rescue a sheep from a pit on the Sabbath because it was their property. "How much, then," He asked, "is a man of more value than a sheep?" The text makes the noble claim that God cares for the dumb, driven cattle. But its main argument is, "How much is a child of more value than a gourd?" Men and women are more to God than the short-lived shrub to the sun-beaten and sulky prophet. As we sometimes sing in Ebenezer Elliott's Hymn of the People—

Flowers of Thy heart, O God, are they,
Let them not pass, like weeds, away.

¶ In poor cottages, looking so destitute one hardly likes to enter them, women nurse flowers calling them "pets" and "beauties," and cherishing them as gently as though the flowers could smile on them, and repay them for their care. These women know what it is to love the plants; and many a one is bound by this tenderness to a world of men and women which else she might regard with selfish, bitter scorn. The "little ewe lamb," says Nathan, the prophet, that the poor man had, "lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter." Over the wretched, gloomy Jonah, sprung up the wondrous plant, and its leaves and tendrils drew off his thoughts from himself; and as he watched it grow, a new interest was awakened in him. His heart softened to the plant; and the man who, a little before, despised his own life and scorned all Nineveh, becomes strangely tender and reverential over a gourd. There is something wonderful in life, even though it be the life of a common weed. Such things speak to us, however faintly we may understand them, of an awful power that forms, and an ever watchful care that tends them: they are "fearfully and wonderfully made." Around us are manifold influences to wean us from perverse melancholy, and draw us out of ourselves. Jonah loves his gourd, and "has pity" on it when it is smitten.¹

3. Notice the exceeding gentleness with which God reproves and seeks to restore the angry prophet. He does not follow him again with terrors, as when He pursued him with shipwreck, and caused the depths to close around him, and wrapped his head about with weeds, and barred the earth about him, and made his soul to faint within him. The disobedient are constrained by a force too strong for them; but even the ungracious doing of duty brings the spirit into fitness for gentler discipline. The Lord cares for Jonah in his self-will: He "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 evil case. So Jonah was exceeding glad because of the gourd." And when He smites the gourd, and sends the vehement east wind and burning sun to beat on Jonah's head, it is that He may speak in words gentler than the gourd-shade, and reveal Himself to the stricken spirit as "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." How different is this from man! We should have said, "Let Jonah experience to the full the barrenness and bitterness he has brought upon himself; let the life he scorns be taken from him." So we speak, repaying scorn with scorn, glad that the self-absorbed man is his own tormentor. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

¶ What is the Divine gospel which, through this Book of Jonah, is revealed to us? In a word it is this: that God cares for the sinners of Nineveh as well as for the saints of Jerusalem; that little children and even dumb cattle are dear to Him; that His tender mercies are over all His works. Where in all the Old Testament is there so moving a parable of the love of God? Is not this the very tone and temper of Jesus Himself? "Out there, beyond the Covenant, in the great world lying in darkness"—this was the truth our author told into the prejudiced faces of his people—"there live, not beings created for ignorance and hostility to God, elect for destruction, but men with consciences and hearts, able to turn at His Word, and to hope in His Mercy—that to the farthest ends of the world, and even in the high places of unrighteousness, Word and Mercy work just as they do within the Covenant." And so this little book, which to some of us, perhaps, has seemed little more than a strange fairy-tale, or a riddle of which we had lost the key, "opens out," in the words of Mr. R. C. Gillie, "like an exquisite rose till we find in the heart of it the glowing crimson of the love of God."¹

4. But there is an implied argument, which takes us deeper into the heart of God. The prophet pitied the gourd because it had been useful to him, giving him shelter from the fierce Eastern sun. But the gourd was not of his making; he had not spent labour of heart and brain upon its growth. God has a far closer relation to men than the prophet had to the gourd, "for the which thou hast not

laboured, neither madest it grow." God has done all that for men; He has laboured for them and made them grow. God is our Maker. That is an elementary thought of God, but the author of the Book of Jonah discovers a gospel in it. There are other names for God, richer, perhaps, more endearing—Shepherd, Father, Saviour. But here is the ground-fact of religion—God our Maker. The Hundredth Psalm says joyously, "It is he that hath made us, and we are his." These words are the ground of God's claim on us, and we may reverently add that they are the ground of our claim on God. It is part of Job's pathetic appeal out of his agony of loss and pain, "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me." Every man loves, to some extent, the thing he has made, which has taken something of himself into it, which he has watched with keen interest as it slowly arose to the fulness of its being. How much more must God love the souls whom He has made in His image, capable of unravelling and following His thoughts in the courses of the stars, and all the vast interplay of Nature's forces, capable of reaching out to Him in love and aspiration after the highest. How beautifully and truly is it said in the Wisdom of Solomon, "Thou lovest all things that are, and abhorrest none of the things which thou didst make; for never wouldest thou have formed anything it thou didst hate it"! The fact that God has made us is a proof that He loves us. Creation is full of the loving joy of the Creator in His works.

The perennial miracle of love is this, that it increases in the ratio of the expenditure of our pains, and thrives on sacrifice. The more we bestow—the more we are prepared to spend. God had put out and expended long-suffering and patience and grief and holy striving on His Nineveh. And is He to have no return? No interest from this invested devotion? It is just the Old Testament version of the missing sheep, the lost coin, the wayward son. If we be straitened we are not straitened to God, but in ourselves.

For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of man's mind;
And the Heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

¶ Robert Browning, in his poem *Saul*, represents the youthful David mourning over the sad decay that has fallen upon the powers of the first King of Israel, and rising as he communes with his own heart to this high faith, that his own pity for human sin and sorrow is but a spark from the glowing fire of pity in the heart of God.

Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift,
That I doubt His own love can compete with it? Here, the parts shift?
Here, the creature surpass the Creator,—the end, what Began?
Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man,
And dare doubt He alone shall not help him, who yet alone can?1

5. The text sends a shaft of tender light into God's dealings with mankind; it reminds us that as He looks down upon the millions of heathen, upon hordes of uncivilized men, among whom, after all, there is much innocent child life, full of just such enjoyment as abounds throughout the domain of nature, He sees much in which His fatherly heart can take pleasure. The world below the level of its perverted moral life is very dear to God. He delights in the works of His hands. The flowers of the field are beautiful, the birds of the air are blithe and full of song, the cattle upon the hills browse in contentment, because God loves them and cares tenderly for them.

(1) God has compassion on the children of godless parents. There is a magnificent limit to the omnipotence of God—the limit imposed by His love. His power cannot pass the boundaries of His heart. All the voices of the universe called for the death of Nineveh—all but one. Law called for it; prudence called for it; morality called for it; political economy called for it; the survival of the fittest called for it. But there was one thing which cried against it—God's compassion for the infants. It was a solitary voice—a voice crying in the wilderness. It was unsupported by the voice of policy, the voice of worldly prudence, the voice of public opinion. It gave no cause for its cry. It did not say, "These infants may be good some day, great some day, believers some day." It was the wilderness that made the cry; it was sheer pity for the helpless that opened the arms of God.

¶ Mr. Sully, a great authority on Psychology, who has written most learnedly on the subject of children, has recently published a book containing some very striking and beautiful incidents in child life. But not one struck me more than this—a little boy in a moment of frankness and confidence, in speaking to his mother, said that if he could ask God for what he liked, he would ask God to love him when he was naughty. Truly as Christ said, we are taught the perfection of wisdom out of the mouths of babes.1

(2) God's tender pity reaches to the cattle. If we love all things both great and small, we are in good company. We remember Columba of Iona, and how the old white horse was so knit with him in fellowship that it discerned the approach of his death before Diarmaid and Baithene understood their impending grief; we remember Francis of Assisi, and how he tamed the wolf and preached to the twittering swallows; and John Woolman out on the Atlantic, and how he "observed the dull appearance of the fowls at sea, and the pining sickness of some of them, and often recalled the Fountain of Goodness who gave being to them all." We think of Robert Herrick, lamenting the loss of his spaniel Tracie with "one teare" though the lowly friend "deserved a million"; of Matthew Arnold, singing the elegy of the dachshund Geist, with his "temper of heroic mould," his "liquid melancholy eye," and all his life and all his love crowded into four short years; of Dr. John Brown, celebrating the loyalty and affection of Rab. A man should wish to

surround himself with the wisest and gentlest associates; and it will dignify one to move in so gracious a society.

¶ William Blake has a sweet little poem to a lamb. He says—

Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee,
Gave thee life, and bade thee feed
By the stream and o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice?
Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?

Then he tells the lamb who made it—God. God made the little lamb.

In another poem he asks the tiger the same question—

Tiger, Tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,

Did He smile His work to see?
Did He who made the lamb make thee?

Yes, God made the tiger too. He made heaven and earth and all that in them is—all the angels in heaven, all the animals on earth. The same God made them all; and He loves all that He makes, and is sorry when an animal is hurt on earth, as He would be sorry if an angel were hurt in heaven.

For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.¹

¶ In the popular traditions of East and West, Jonah's name alone has survived the Lesser Prophets of the Jewish Church. It still lives not only in many a Mussulman tomb along the coasts and hills of Syria, but in the thoughts and devotions of Christendom. The marvellous escape from the deep, through a single passing allusion in the Gospel history, was made an emblem of the deliverance of Christ Himself from the jaws of death and the grave. The great Christian doctrine of the boundless power of human repentance received its chief illustration from the repentance of the Ninevites at the preaching of Jonah. There is hardly any figure from the Old Testament which the early Christians in the Catacombs so often took as their consolation in persecution as the deliverance of Jonah on the seashore, and his naked form stretched out in the burning sun beneath the sheltering gourd. But these all conspire with the story itself in proclaiming that still wider lesson of the goodness of God. It is the rare protest of theology against the excess of theology—it is the faithful delineation through all its various states, of the dark, sinister, selfish side of even great religious teachers. It is the grand Biblical appeal to the common instincts of humanity, and to the universal love of God, against the narrow dogmatism of sectarian polemics. There has never been a "generation" which has not needed the majestic revelation of sternness and charity, each bestowed where most deserved and where least expected, in the "sign of the Prophet Jonah."¹

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