

A STUDY OF JONAH

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JONAH

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The Book called by the Modernists of today a fairy tale:

As to the whale swallowing Jonah, nowhere in the scriptures does it say anything about a whale — it does speak about a “great fish,” but the idea that some have proposed falls by the wayside, for there are many whales which can swallow a man.

We know this is a true account for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ confirmed it.

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SUGGESTION: CONTRAST ISRAEL WITH JONAH!

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Chapter 1

Jonah Running Away From God

The name Jonah means “dove” — the bird which means “peace” in all languages. But Jonah had no peace, and he was being commissioned to speak to an uncircumcised monarchy — a people who were to be the object of Elohim’s (God’s) wrath.

The people to whom Jonah was to witness were the Assyrians; their capitol being Nineveh. They were known for their cruelty, especially when they captured a city or a nation. It was nothing to plunge their swords into a captive's heart while he lived and take it out to show the man and others.

It was nothing to skin a prisoner alive. Tongues were also pulled out of the living bodies of their enemies, and the torture by roasting their captives on a spit was enjoyable to all the Assyrians. These people are the ones Jonah was commanded to preach to.

No wonder he hesitated in complying with the command of Jehovah (the LORD) to go to them. Even today the descendants of the Assyrians are the people of Iraq of today. They were people who showed no mercy to anyone who opposed them. (See Isaiah 19:23-25 and note the mercy of God and the faith of the Iraqians in the last days.)

“In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.” (Isaiah 19:23-25)

Verses 1 - 2

Jehovah spoke unto Jonah to speak to the people of Nineveh, Assyria. And tell them, “I know of their wickedness.”

Verse 3

Instead of sailing for Nineveh, Jonah, with the fluttering heart of a coward, found a ship bound to sail in the opposite direction to Tarshish.

Tarshish's location has been a problem of history for many students have suggested many locations, but the most popular acceptance of today (1994) is that it was located in what is now the nation of Spain. But that suggestion brings in many confusing difficulties. Turning to 1 Kings 9:26-28; 10:22 we read:

“And king Solomon made a navy of ships in Eziongeber, which is beside Eloth, on the shore of the Red sea, in the land of Edom. And Hiram sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought it to king Solomon.... For the king had at sea a navy of Tarshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tarshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks.”

We see that Solomon and Hiram of Tyre united their navies to search for the gold of Tarshish. Their ships were not built near Tyre, in the Mediterranean Sea, for if Tarshish was Spain, they wouldn't have far to sail. But Hiram and the navy of Tarshish and Solomon's navy was built south of the Mediterranean Sea all around the south of Africa, into the waters of the Red Sea. There, after completing the ships were built, the combined navies sailed west around Africa then north to Tarshish. We are told that the sailing to Tarshish took three years!

Where did they sail? West of Africa and north to Tarshish. Then where was Tarshish? It had to be a long distance to take three years to go and return with their treasure.

In 1980, a report was made that they believe that ancient Tarshish was located on the banks of the Amazon River in South America. Some will say that that was before America was discovered and found. But America wasn't lost. Many civilized people populated North, Central, and South America at the time of Solomon.

These ships sailed out of their ports of the Red Sea, then turned west and sailed around Africa to the Westerlies Benguela Current to the South Equatorial Current, which guided them on to the Caribbean Current to the mouth of the Amazon River, up the Amazon River to Tarshish. After loading their ships with gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks. 1 Kings 10:11 lets us know that this gold was the gold of Ophir.

“And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir great plenty of almug trees, and precious stones.” (1 Kings 10:11)

Thus with all these treasures they bought back also almug trees and precious stones.

Thus Jonah could not only escape the command of Jehovah, but it could be possible that after he reached Tarshish, he could find gold enough to pay for his passage.

Out of the will of God! All was a failure. Without God, he was hopeless. Are there readers of this commentary who, like Jonah, are fleeing from the will of God? Don't you know, God knows where you are!

Verse 3

Look how everything is falling into place. He turns from God, and finds a ship ready to sail to Tarshish, and he has enough money to pay his passage — it must be the will of God to excuse him from this “call.” Are you thinking that way, dear reader?

You know you wrong; deadly wrong!

Verse 4

Jehovah knew where His servant was, and sent a mighty tempest until it seemed that the ship could be broken.

Verse 5

The whole ship was in distress. Yes, afraid, with every man crying unto his god; and immediately the men began to unload the ship, until all the wares were cast into the sea, to lighten it. But Jonah had gone down into the bottom of the ship and fell asleep. Why do men sleep?

1. Because they are sleepy.
2. Because they are sick.
3. Because they are tired.
4. Because they are running away from a problem.

Just face reality! “So I'll sleep and the trouble may go away before I awake.”

But troubles are not settled by sleep. They must be faced, answered, and worked out, and if any sin has been committed, confessed.

Verse 6

The captain of the ship came to Jonah and said unto him, “What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that the true God will think upon us, that we perish not.”

“Therefore the whole registry began making one suggestion after another until the captain, the shipmaster, suggested that they cast lots (the dice) that we may know who has caused this punishment by God. They did cast lots and the lot fell upon Jonah.”

You mean to say that God guiding Israel in making decisions for Him depending upon how the lots fell. Yes, He did. We know that the Promised Land was divided between the tribes of Israel, except the tribe of Levi, by the casting of lots.

Within the High Priest breastplate was a pocket in which the Urim and the Thummim were kept. These two articles are not described by the Holy Scriptures as to size or materials. Yet the choosing of one determined God’s “yes” or “no.”

This was carried on for many years until Pentecost. Under the years of the dispensation of the Law, men found the will of God by the casting of lots (or choosing either the Urim or Thummim). But now under the dispensation of Grace, believers do not need to cast lots, for all of us who are saved can know by the Holy Spirit the will of God, “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:17).

But did not Peter and the rest of the Apostles use the casting of lots to find the man to fill Judas’ place. They certainly did, but they didn’t have to, for Christ called His own Apostles. The eleven were not led by the Holy Spirit. Then whom do we believe took Judas’ place? None other than the Apostle Paul, for He said of his apostleship, “Paul an apostle, not of men, neither by man” (the eleven did not cast lots upon me, neither did the Apostle Peter vote for me) “but by Jesus Christ” (the resurrection Savior and Lord) “and God the Father,” (I was made an apostle by the Son of God and God the father — double calling) “who raised Him from the dead” (Ephesians 1:1).

Why we all have sometimes flipped a coin to try to find the will of God. But no more flipping a coin or shooting the dice do we need to know the will of God.

There was at one time an honor in which I could be used of the Lord, yet at the same time, I was called to another church. Which one to take? I took the church which called me — the other choice would be serving the Lord all right in the Army of the United States as a Chaplain.

I weighed the situation and reasoned that the church must have been the most important. Years passed and in about two years, I just asked the Lord “Why didn’t you want me to be a chaplain? (1) It was Scriptural, (2) There was a need, and (3) I would be happy in it?” The Lord said in my heart, “You never asked Me!” I tried to settle the will of God by reasoning. Get off that reasoning stuff and do what the Holy Spirit is leading you to do! Amen. Hallelujah.

Verse 7

The calling upon their gods did not still the storm so these unbelievers did what even Israel did under Law — they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

Whew!

Did God work this way? He surely did. Even the Eleven thought God had chosen Matthias, and he was to fill Judas' place.

God did not say to fill Judas' place.

God did not tell them to use the choice by lot.

All of the above was done before Pentecost. Since Pentecost all believers in Jesus Christ are given the Holy Spirit. Thus we can understand what the will of God is.

Look through the Scriptures, and you will see that none of the Christians, nor even the apostles sought the will of God by casting lots. We have the Holy Ghost (Holy Spirit), and He lets us know what is the will of God.

Verse 8

The rest of the passengers asked Jonah who had caused the storm, and the fear of losing the ship — “what is your occupation, when comest thou, what is thy country, and of what people art thou?”

Verse 9

“I am a Hebrew” was Jonah's reply, and I fear Jehovah, the God of heaven, which hath made this sea (upon which we are sailing) and the dry land.

Verse 10

They were terribly afraid, and said unto Jonah, Why has thou done this? For the men knew that he fled the presence of Jehovah because he had told them.

Verse 11

Then these men asked him what shall we do unto you, that the sea may be calm, for the sea was still tempestuous.

Verse 12

He told them as a prophet of God, “cast me into the sea, and the sea shall become calm. For I, a prophet, know that because of my disobedience this storm is upon you.”

Verse 13

Yet the men were civil about the whole matter and wanted to save Jonah.

Verse 14

They had become believers in the true God for they called upon the name of Jehovah. We beg of You, “Jehovah, let us not perish for this man's deed; let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood, for Thou, O Jehovah, has done as it has pleased Thee.”

Verse 15

So they took Jonah and cast him into the sea, and the sea ceased immediately from her raging.

Verse 16

Yes, the men were converted to Jehovah and feared Jehovah exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah and made vows.

Verse 17

Now Jehovah had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the

belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Eight hundred years later Messiah Jesus was among His people the Jews who desired of Him a sign that He was truly the Messiah, to which He replied,

“Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:” (Matthew 12:38, 39).

What is meant by the words “in the heart of the earth?” The heart of the earth means in the center of the earth. This was the place where the departed spirits were carried after death, called in the Hebrew language “Sheol,” the same place but in the Greek “Hades.”

We shall be dealing with this in depth in Jonah chapter two.

Chapter 2

“Jonah Running To God”

Verse 1

Jonah was a goner! We should not be hearing from him anymore, but God— But God— “Then Jonah prayed unto Jehovah out of the fish’s belly — you know this was what the apostles thought of the Lord Jesus — He’s dead — “we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel, and besides all this, today is the third day since these things were done” (Luke 24:21). Don’t weep anymore, Cleopas, I’m not dead anymore! He’s alive! And Jonah, he had a resurrection! For the Lord Jesus spake these words concerning Jonah, “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man (Jesus, of course) be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Therefore, Jonah’s body was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale. Christ Jesus’ body was in the tomb three days and three nights, and as the Spirit of Christ was in Hades (Sheol) three days, so was Jonah three days and three nights in Sheol (Hades). Jonah’s death and resurrection was a perfect type of Christ Jesus’ death and resurrection. As Jonah did, so did Christ Jesus! As Jonah by his spirit went to Sheol, so did the Lord Jesus. As Jonah was raised from the dead and then died — for we have his tomb in Nineveh — so was the Lord Jesus raised from the dead but never more to die again.

Verse 2

As Jonah was alive for some time, he prayed to Jehovah out of the belly of the great fish; and we find that out of another belly — the belly of hell (sheol, hades, not the lake of fire) he cried (that’s praying, isn’t it?) and we are told that “Jehovah heard me,” which we have learned “And this is the confidence we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desire of him” (1 John 5:14,15).

What were Jonah’s petitions? It is not hard to guess: (1) “Forgive me of turning my back to you — forgive me of this sin, and (2) Put me back into the ministry and let me preach again!”

How many ministers is this portion of the Scripture directed to right now? Let us pause for a moment:

(1) The belly of the fish, the stomach.

(2) The belly of hell (sheol, hades). The place where in the Old Testament times all dead people's spirits went to after death. Jonah must have died, for his spirit was in sheol (hades).

The words Hades (N.T. Greek), and Sheol (O.T., Hebrew) are used in the Scripture showing us their equal to each other: Old Testament usage: Psalm 16:10 speaks of the Lord Jesus going to "sheol" — "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (sheol) neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." This is the Hebrew of Psalm 16:10. At Pentecost Peter quoted this same verse as recorded in the Greek in fulfillment in the Greek: "Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (Hades), neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Showing us that the Hebrew "Sheol" is the same as the Greek "Hades" in the New Testament and are the same.

As sheol (Hebrew) and hades (Greek) are the same, we find that sheol and hades are located in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:40).

When, in Old Testament times, one died, he went to sheol. If he were saved, he went to that compartment called Paradise, or Abraham's bosom. But if he were a lost man never having been saved, thus a sinner, upon death he went to sheol but to that compartment known as the place of torment (Luke 16:19-26). A great gulf that was fixed, separating those in Paradise from those in torment. No one could go to the other side at any time. It was so ordered by God.

When Jesus died, his body was placed in a new tomb and wrapped up. His spirit went to Paradise (He answered the believing thief who was nailed on the cross to the right of Jesus who asked a favor of Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." The Lord Jesus said, "Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise" [Luke 23:43]. Jesus died first and when the believing thief died, Jesus was in Paradise waiting for him! Glory.)

Upon Christ Jesus' resurrection, He took all those who died and were saved to heaven (yes, He took all Paradise to the third heaven).

"Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)" (Ephesians 4:8-10)

Yes, all the redeemed (Old Testament saints plus those saints who are saved since Pentecost) are now in Paradise.

Today when a saved person dies, he is absent from the body and present with the Lord in Paradise (2 Cor 5:8).

Verse 3

Jonah now describes his stay in the whale's belly. In the whale, he actually experienced what men of today (2900 years later) do in the modern day submarine.

He could say as the large fish took him through the paths of the sea

“Safe am I.” “The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas” (Psalm 8:8).

Waves were over him, the depths beckoned him. No matter how deep the fish took him, he had perfect air compression.

Verse 4

This is when he came to himself and saw exactly who and what he was — a complete failure — now he was alive by the Word of God, and he knew that he would look again at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Verse 5

As the fish swam through the sea’s weeds, then the weeds wrapped around his head as the great fish swallowed.

Verse 6

Yes, the fish glided on the bottom of the sea, and Jehovah was going to magnify His power. He wasn’t going to allow His servant to see corruption — it was the third day — so it was with the Lord Jesus, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol” — that shows He went there! “Neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption” (Ps. 16:10).

Verse 7

Jonah is enjoying his revival — “When my soul fainted” — this is when Jehovah steps in — “I remembered Jehovah!” Praise God! It is Jehovah who revives the soul, who forgives the sinner’s sins by the blood of His Son Jesus Christ. “Oh,” says Jonah, “my prayers took wings and came unto Him, as He dwelt among the Cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant within the walls of the Most Holy Place in the Temple of Jehovah.” Glory.

Verse 8

Lost souls, some of them, care not that Messiah Jesus, the Son of God, has died for the sins of mankind and will save all who call upon Him in faith believing that Jesus died for their sins and rose again to save poor lost sinners like us.

Verse 9

Jonah is about ready to preach now. I will do now what I promised. Salvation is of Jehovah.

Verse 10

And Jehovah spake unto the fish — made it sick in the stomach — vomited out Jonah upon the dry land — he didn’t have to swim one stroke.

God has done His part — Jonah, now do what God has commanded you!

Chapter 3

Jonah Running With God

Verse 1

What man in the ministry hasn’t been tried beyond the endurance of man? What man in the pulpit, in America, or in the paths of the jungles has not been opposed in the work of the Lord, until the child of God has about thrown in the white towel to surrender to the enemies of God? Opposed, reproached, weakened, cast out — and there was one before

us, the Apostle Paul said, as he faced the enemy! — “Thrice I suffered shipwreck” and had another one to endure in about two years,” a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in peril of my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often!”

Some of you have had the same trials — maybe right now your souls are tired — hope seems to be gone! Wait a second, stand up, get going. God is going to do great things through you — listen to the most encouraging words in the Bible “And the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the second time” (3:1).

And Jeremiah viewed the potter as he molded the vessel again, as seemed good to the potter.

Aren’t you glad that God gives even the sinner more opportunities to accept Christ as his Saviour.

Aren’t you glad that God speaks to His servants the Second Time? He’s speaking to everyone that reads this book. Another chance? Another possibility? No, another opportunity to carry out His same directions! To the same place! To the same people! With His power upon us!

“Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.”

To the prepared preachers, teachers, missionaries: they all have the message! The time is “now”!

Oh, what a joy it is for even God’s servants who have been placed upon a shelf, who thought that their usefulness was over — He is now speaking the Second Time. Glory!

Verse 2

Go to Nineveh that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

The place to witness is now the same, and the message is going to be the same.

Oh, can you now see the folly of what you have chosen in the past to preach. Why today our message is still the same: Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever — the glorious gospel of Christ: His death, burial, and resurrection in payment for our sins.

Verse 3

So Jonah arose and went there! Just as Jehovah had commanded. Nineveh was a very large city. It would take three days walking from one end to the other. Chapter four; verse eleven, lets us know the number of citizens that lived there which was 120,000.

Verse 4

He walked into Nineveh one day’s journey and shouted “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” We notice that the number 40 (forty) in the Scriptures is the number of trial and testing, and probation such as:

Forty days and nights it rained upon the earth.

Forty days Moses was upon Mt. Sinai to receive the law of God.

Forty days the spies were sent out to the Land.
Forty days our Lord spent to be tested of Satan.
Forty days and Nineveh was to be destroyed.
Forty days the Lord spent with His apostles after His resurrection.
Forty years Israel spent in the wilderness.
Forty years after Christ, Jerusalem was destroyed.

Verse 5

Oh, how Jonah's message was received and believed.

Yes, they believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth; from the greatest of them even to the least.

As we continue to study God's word, we cannot help but notice God's care and concern of the gentiles. Oh, yes, Jehovah is the God of the Gentile as well as He is the God of Israel.

We who are Gentiles, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise — we, Gentiles, had no hope and without God in the world, but right now, we Gentiles are being shown the mercy of God in Christ Jesus (get that: only in God's Son, Christ Jesus). Yes, His grace is poured out upon us who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Jesus!

“Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.” Not only receive that person, but after He receives that person, He will not cast out.

Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan.

Oh, the grace that brought it down to man.

Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span

At Calvary. (Praise His precious, glorious name forever)

Of all the twelve apostles only one, Paul, a Jew, did Christ choose to go to the Gentiles: yet Peter was the first apostle who went to the Gentiles with the Gospel (Acts 15:7-9). Paul considered his calling to go to the Gentiles, as it was, the calling of God: “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet (fit for) to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain: but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:9-10).

But oh, when God does go to the Gentiles, look at the results: the Great Revivals among the Gentiles, and the Churches organized for the past nineteen hundred years — the missionary boards that have sent out thousands of missionaries to the foreign fields, and the results in precious Gentiles being saved and called into the ministry.

God does love the Gentiles, and saves all who come unto him in faith.

Verse 6

Then the Gentile King of Nineveh heard the Word of God, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

Verses 7 - 8

Thus the king caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by his and the noble decree “that no beast, herd nor flock eat and drink water, and man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry unto God mightily. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hand.”

Oh, for a Jonah today! One to be commissioned to go to the world with the same mission. The world today is covered by rebellion, evil forces, as never before — oh, that it would believe and repent.

Verse 9

Oh, they had heard of the mercifulness of God. Maybe He would take notice of our humbling ourselves before Him, and thus forgive us, that we perish not.

Verse 10

They must have known in some way the kindness of Jehovah as we have. God did see their works — thus repented — and did not eradicate them off the earth.

God repented? Changes His mind? There are places in the Word which says, “He is not man that He should repent.” That is, repent of some evil act. Because every act of God is righteous.

But because of His grace He allows Jew and Gentile believers in Jesus the Messiah to be saved, and not go to hell.

He does not repent of evil acts, remember, it’s impossible for God to sin.

Chapter 4

Jonah Running Ahead of God

Verses 1 - 3

Have you ever wished to die such as to escape an embarrassing situation? Jonah certainly did. He asked Jehovah to take his life. What for? For a great revival had broken out in Nineveh!

Jonah tells Jehovah that he knew God would show mercy to these people, for it was His nature to save. But I appear as a fool, saying that in forty days Nineveh would be destroyed and here You, Jehovah, are not going to overthrow them, as I said you would.

But we ask Jonah, “What is the purpose of preaching, anyway?” Yes, we preach, in order that sinners will repent, and believe, and be saved!

He should have rejoiced that there was no ending to God’s love, mercy, and grace.

Jehovah asked Jonah “Doest thou well to be angry?” Of course not. Oh, the thought of it — a deceitful preacher accusing God as to the way He treats repentant sinners.

1. God had prepared a fish to save the life of Jonah (1:17). So Jonah goes out the city and sat on the east side, and made a booth and sat under its shadow until he might see what might become of the city.

2. God then prepares a gourd to cover the booth, for a shadow and to pacify Jonah from his grief.

3. Then God prepares a worm to kill the gourd, and as it withered.

4. God prepares a vehement east wind that beat upon Jonah causing him to faint and

wish again to die.

Verse 9

Jehovah asked him, “Do you have a good reason to be angry with the plant?” And he said, “I do have a reason to be angry even to death!”

Verse 10 - 11

Then Jehovah said, “You have had pity on the gourd, which you haven’t labored neither made it to grow; it came at night and left at night.

And should not I spare Nineveh, who is populated with 120,000 people, that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand and spare the many animals?”

God shows that He is kind to the creatures he has created. Oh, what a Saviour, what a God! When God made the animals upon the earth, He saw that they were good.

But the idea of a man becoming angry with His Creator! This is a sin in itself.

What is our attitude towards our God as He runs His universe?