

I want us to turn to a book that though everyone has heard of it some people consider hard to swallow, other's think it seems a bit fishy but not unlike the rest of the scriptures there's nothing fiction about it, it's a factual account. It's a book in which the man who has the supporting role could say w/the psalmist, "*I shall not die, but live, And declare the works of the Lord. The Lord has chastened me severely, But He has not given me over to death.*" Ps 118:17-18

## Jonah 1:1-17

The reason that I say that Jonah has the part of the supporting role is because contrary to popular opinion he is not the main character in this book. Nor is the great fish, not even the city of Nineveh plays the primary part in this drama; the great fish is only mentioned 4xs in this book. The city of Nineveh is mentioned 9xs, and Jonah, whom many believe to be the main character is mentioned 18xs, however *God* is mentioned 38xs throughout these 4 brief Ch's that comprise the book of Jonah. This becomes a book for us that emphasizes God's sovereignty, God's mercy, God's patience and God's power.

As for who Jonah was and when this all took place historically it seems to be that his place in history (as far as this particular account is concerned) was set around 760 B.C. The scriptures site Jonah as being a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel under the reign of Jeroboam the son (not of Nebat who caused Israel to sin) of Joash. However he wasn't a good king either, the bible declares that he did evil in the sight of the Lord. But it was during his reign that Jonah prophesied and evidently he was a popular prophet because he prophesied the restoration of some territory for Israel so that even though it was a time of spiritual declension under Jeroboam's rule it was a time of economic/military prosperity. We read in 2 Kings 14:25, "*He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hepher.*" Gath Hepher was in the region of Galilee in or around the territory of Zebulun, so when the religious leaders in Jesus' day scoffed Him declaring that no prophet had ever arisen out of Galilee they didn't really know what they were talking about because Jonah (who would become the premier picture in the OT of the resurrection of Christ) *was* from Galilee. He had as his contemporaries the prophets Amos, Hosea and he may've overlapped just a bit with Isaiah (Isaiah would've come after him) when Hezekiah was on the throne in Judah.

As I mentioned the book of Jonah has several things that it serves to emphasize one of which is that God is not willing that *any* should perish but that *all* should come to repentance. God was *not* concerned exclusively for the Jews (as the nation of Israel had come to believe) but for the Gentiles as well. Israel was to be a beacon of light to the lost world, showing *to* them and sharing *with them* the love of God, the word of God and the ways of God.

For a brief period in their history they did just that, under Solomon's reign people from all over the world came to Israel to learn of God as the Lord had intended. But soon after Solomon's reign all that crumbled, Israel quit concerning themselves with other nations, began to despise the Gentiles and really began to "horde" God for themselves. The book of Jonah was a reminder to Israel of their missionary purpose, that God is merciful and wants all men everywhere to know Him.

We see the sovereignty of God on display throughout the book of Jonah. Israel might be *unfaithful* in her missionary task but God would *remain* faithful in causing His willingness to be merciful to humanity through man's humble repentance to be proclaimed.

We'll see God's sovereignty over His creation as the wind the waves, the sea and the creatures therein obey Him, the plant life, even something as simple as a worm obeys Him. Where God meets the most resistance isn't in the animal kingdom, or in the sea, the wind or the waves but in man, however man will not supersede the sovereignty of God, God's will, will be done.

Jonah in many respects would serve as a "type" of Israel in his stubbornness, his refusal to share the hope of repentance with the Gentiles, and yet God's patience with Him, His tender love and the fact that we don't read that God was *angry* with Him would serve to show that God would chasten and discipline Israel but not because He was *finished* with them but because He's *not* finished with them and still has a plan to use them in the propulsion of His purposes. Reluctant though Jonah may've been he would be ready to obey God after the proper motivation.

The message of Jonah would also serve to rebuke Israel as Nineveh would readily repent at the message of God's displeasure from a foreign prophet as to where Israel would remain stubborn, resist God and refuse to repent though He raised up prophet after prophet *from* them *for* them that they might turn back *to* Him.

Vs1-2

Now exactly how the word of the Lord came to Jonah we don't know. But as for what God wanted him to do we find it right there in Vs 2 and it boils down to 2 things doesn't it? #1 Arise and go to Nineveh, #2 Cry out against it...why? "For their wickedness has come up before Me." God wanted Jonah to leave the nation of Israel travel approximately 500 miles to the northeast to the east side of the Tigris river and let Nineveh know that if they didn't repent judgment was coming. When He tells him to "Cry out against it" that's tantamount to saying, "Rebuke them for their sin and call them to repentance."

Of course what's interesting about this is the fact that Nineveh isn't of the nation of Israel at all, they're a pagan nation, a Gentile city who (as far as we know) knows nothing about the True and Living God of Israel. I mentioned to you that God had called Israel to missionary work, but it wasn't the kind of work that we're accustomed to because as I said the intent with Israel under the old covenant was to be that beacon of light that drew others to it. They were to shine in the darkness in such a way as to "light the way" that led people to God, people would be attracted to God through the work He was doing in Israel and seek Him out. But here God actually calls Jonah to *leave* Israel and take the message of repentance to a foreign nation. As far as we know Jonah received the 1<sup>st</sup> call to be a missionary in the way we might think of a modern missionary today, leaving his home and actually going out to a people who don't know God that he might give them message of salvation by grace through faith, forgiveness through the repentance of their sins.

Nineveh was one of the largest cities of the ancient world, it was in the region of Assyria (the people who would actually take the northern kingdom into captivity not too many years beyond this point). It wasn't the capital city yet but it would be in a # years under Sennacherib who came against Hezekiah. Of the few nations that were vying for the position of the world's super power in that day Assyria was beginning to emerge on top. The city walls of Nineveh are said to have been 100' high and wide enough that 3 chariots could ride side by side across the top of them; numerous towers adding to its defensive measures. And God said to Jonah "Go and cry out against it because their wickedness has come up before Me." Of all of the cruel and to be feared empires of the ancient world, Assyria is known to be the most fierce.

One particular Assyrian king "Ashurnasirpal" (whose name I can't pronounce) recorded this after putting down one particular rebellion. "I built a pillar over against his city gate, and I flayed all the chief men who had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skins; some I walled up within the pillar, some I impaled upon the pillar on stakes, and others I bound to stakes round the about the pillar; many within the border of my own land I flayed, and I spread their skins upon the walls; and I cut off the limbs of the officers, of the royal officers who had rebelled." They would build pyramids out of the skulls of people they had killed, they would impale their victims on stakes or sometimes bury them alive, I read somewhere that they'd been known to make their captives march into pits full of fire, when they would prepare to siege a city they would often times take the heads of previous victims and put them on stakes around the city as a testimony of what would happen to them if they didn't simply surrender. Quite frankly they struck terror into the hearts of people, history records that there were cases when after a city had been surrounded by the Assyrian army, rather than be taken captive the entire city would commit suicide. It's no wonder that when they surrounded the fortified cities of Judah that King Hezekiah freaked out.

They'd look over their walls and see 185,000 plus Assyrian soldiers with the general of their army shouting out that Hezekiah is only deceiving you if you think he can somehow save you and if you think you'll trust the Lord... that's what all the other nations thought, but none of their gods delivered them and neither will yours; and he would taunt them and strike fear into their hearts. "Look at what's become of the other nations who resisted us!" Hezekiah cried out to God, spread out his letters, his threats before God and of course God delivered them, in a single night God sent an angel to destroy 185,000 soldiers and the rest fled. Here's the point, they were a wicked people.

God says to Jonah, "Go tell them that if they don't repent, judgment is coming." It would be like telling a Jew in 1942 to go to Nazi Germany and share the message of repentance with them that God might save them instead of judge them. How many of us would like to be sent to Afghanistan to declare to the Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden that God wants to save them? You might be killed, or chastised by your own country to actually seek to extend goodwill to our avowed enemies, you might not really want them to be saved after what they'd done, you might rather they just go ahead and be judged. That's where Jonah was at. Notice.

Vs3

Here's the point Jonah went in just the opposite direction of Nineveh. Nineveh was 500 miles to the northeast, Jonah headed southwest to Joppa got on a boat and headed about another 2,000 miles or so west toward the Phoenician settlement in southern Spain called Tarshish (at least that's where tradition places it). Jonah was going to what was considered to be the edge of the known world, as far west as he could go before things were simply uncertain. Was he running from God? That I don't know; he surely knew what the psalmist said, "*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me.*" Ps 139:7-10 So I'm not convinced he thought he could escape the presence of God (per say) but I do believe that he was more or less turning in his resignation at this point and just getting as far removed from the situation as he possibly could.

Now we don't read where he just flat out told God, "No" however his actions displayed his intent didn't they? Our words hold little weight if our works don't back them up. Jesus said, "*But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?'" Matt 21:28-31*

You might not tell God "no" but if you don't do what He desires/requires of you, you're disobedient nonetheless. Jonah didn't tell God, "No" he just resigned from office and headed the other direction.

There are a # of things that we see here aren't there? #1 Did you catch the "downward" progression? There's only one way you can go when you're seeking to get away from the Lord and that is *down*. He went *down* to Joppa, got on board the ship and went *down* into it. And he'll continue to go down deeper and deeper until he repents and returns to the Lord. He has no choice when you want to flee from the Lord that's the only direction there is...

#2 This is the danger of acting on impulse. Jonah arose alright, but not out of obedience to the Lord, he headed west. He reacted on impulse and in so doing he did something *brave*, something seemingly self denying (it cost him greatly to purchase that ticket), yet for all that it was still sin. So many times we act on impulse with out really measuring our actions up against the word of God and in so doing we find ourselves in opposition to the word of God and the will of God for our lives. While we're on the thought I would say that with regard to impulse it's also very dangerous to take those inner impulses that we have and always be attributing them to things that we believe the Lord is telling us. The impulse, or the desire of your heart is not the law *for* you nor is it to be direction necessarily *to* you. As Charles Spurgeon said, "To the Law and to the testimony should be your cry and may you not appeal to inward movements and impulses." I have had an individual tell me that even if they read something in the word of God that directly contradicted what they believed to be the inward unction of God that they would follow their impulse over the word of God because they were certain they had a line on God's voice. Dangerous ground to walk on. Be careful issuing things that the Lord tells you apart from His word. "Are you saying the Spirit can't lead you Jeff?" No that's not what I'm saying; what I am saying is that God won't lead you in ways contrary to His word. Jonah went the opposite direction and what was the result?

#3 "He paid the fare." You better believe he did, we'll always pay the fare when we seek to forsake God's will, or God's word for our lives. It cost him dearly.

I don't know why we resist the Lord, when we do our thing it always costs us, we always pay, it always takes us down, and we never get where we're going. When we simply obey Him He lifts us up, we get where we're going and He pays the bill, God takes care of the tab when we're doing what He's commissioned us to do.

But it's possible that Jonah saw some providence in this, there just happened to be a boat headed for Tarshish, he had enough money to buy the ticket, what were the odds? Again, providence or not don't think that God is opening doors for you that go contrary to His word. Because when you're running from God Satan is more than happy to open the door for you, provide the transportation that takes you the opposite way of where God wants you to be... Be it some sort of substance, a guy or a gal who will help you out, whatever it takes. You want to flee from God, he'll help you out in that. The ship will be waiting but trust me, you'll pay the fare.

It's true that God knows how to calm the raging seas, but He also knows how to whip up a storm when necessary. This storm was sent into Jonah's life by the Lord. Now, was it God's punishment? Perhaps, but it seems to me to be more of a sign of God's *patience*, He's *pursuing* Jonah. He could've easily commissioned another but He's not letting this sheep get lost, we spoke Sunday morning about the way God pursues us and won't let go of us.

He's pursuing Jonah here, He's not seeking to *destroy* Jonah but rather to *develop* Jonah so that he might walk in obedience to Him. It's true that this storm is the result of his rebellion but we also know that Jesus sent *His* disciples into a storm on occasion *not* because they were sinning but because they needed *strengthening*. God will use storms in our lives for different reasons, but one thing you can know is that He's not seeking to destroy you, He wants to develop you. God is seeking to get Jonah's attention here.

### Vs5-6

Have you ever known that you were so deep in sin that you just wanted to go to sleep hoping that when you woke up the next morning it would all go away? Jonah is exhausted physically from his flight, he's exhausted spiritually in his rebellion against God, he holes up in the lowest part of the ship he can find and he goes to sleep. Meanwhile a storm of supernatural proportions is breaking loose on the open sea and these seasoned sailors are freaking out. Now, Jonah is oblivious to it but the fact remains that his sin is impacting their lives isn't it? You might deny it, you might not see it, you may be oblivious to it, but your sin, my sin *will* impact people around us. They *will* pay a price for our sin, your spouse, your children, if you're the child than your parents, other people will pay for your sins, always.

But Jonah is trying to slip into oblivion here; he's isolating himself. What does the bible say? "*A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; He rages against all wise judgment.*" Prov 18:1 That's exactly what's happening with Jonah right now; when people are in sin they'll generally seek to duck away and stay out of the limelight, conceal themselves so as not to draw attention to themselves. Jonah is seeking to stay what? Out of sight, out of mind.

And as I said it's costing the people around him, they're throwing overboard precious cargo that they'd probably been paid to haul, they'll have to pay for that, they don't care they just want to live. As a matter of fact the situation is so desperate that they're all calling upon and crying out to their gods that their lives might be spared, nothing is working. The captain is searching and seeking if there's anything else they can throw out and when he goes down underneath he finds Jonah sleeping. He freaks out, "What are you doing?! Get up and call upon your God; maybe He'll consider us so as to spare us and we won't perish in this storm!" Ironic that this pagan ship captain had to call the man of God to prayer isn't it? When he said, "Arise" it's the same word that God gave to Jonah back in Vs 2; I wonder if that caught his attention.

But here's what we need to see; the need was so great that these men were despairing of their lives crying out for salvation; yet God's servant...slept. What a powerful picture; people are desperate, preparing to perish on the sea of life, and yet so many of God's people are simply sleeping. Right when they're needed the most, they could step up to the plate, stand in the gap bring the necessary news that would change everything, but where are they? Asleep, absolutely oblivious to the seriousness of the situation. Sleeping Christians aren't into serving the Lord, aren't into the prayer meetings, don't really want to call on God or be bothered with what they perceive to be someone else's problems. I wonder how Jonah felt when this captain exhorted him to call upon the Lord when the whole reason he was there was because he was trying to avoid and escape *from* the Lord and His call upon his life?

Do you think Jonah prayed? It's hard telling, if he did it was probably just a matter of the motions to pacify these guys. He knew he was in sin, he knew God wouldn't respond to his hypocritical prayer when He didn't really *want* to be in touch with God.

However it does seem that he's starting to wake up to the reality of what his sin is costing them...

Vs7-8

Now we don't know if it was just superstition or perhaps some sort of supernatural tone to what was happening but something caused these guys to believe that the trouble wasn't simply bad weather but someone had done something and that's why this was coming upon them. You can almost see it, they all draw a straw...Jonah is just kinda standing there like, "Hi guys! What's the problem...;o)" Be that as it may when the lot falls on Jonah they start the interrogation process. "Who are you, what have you done, where are you from and why are you here?" They want to know what Jonah does for a living...when they find out he's a prophet who's been disobedient then they really freak out, he's made them inadvertently guilty of aiding and abetting.

Vs9-10

Jonah confesses the whole thing and they're trying not to slip into an all out panic stricken state. But check it out, even though Jonah is walking in rebellion *to* God he's still in a place where he's sharing the good news *of* God. He tells them that there's 1 God who created the heavens and the earth, He made the seas and everything in it, that he fears Him, and has been in service *to* Him. It's tragic that his practice isn't lining up with his profession right now, but this has served as an opportunity that has brought out the truth about God for these men nonetheless.

But notice that God can (and will) bring to the light those things that are done in the darkness, those things we try to conceal God will reveal. He will not allow His children to sin successfully. Here in Vs 10 these pagans rebuke him, and rightly so. But you know when a nonbeliever is rebuking a believer because of what they've done, it's a problem. "Dude I thought you were a Christian what are you doing, or why are you talking like that?" When a nonbeliever rebukes you for a legitimate reason...it's a problem.

### Vs11-13

No matter how hard we may work at it we cannot save ourselves, or anybody else, our labor apart from the Lord is in vain. They rowed hard, but there was no point they couldn't do it on their own, salvation is of the Lord.

Why did Jonah say, "Pick me up and cast me into the sea"? Some say that he was seeking to be compassionate in that there was no need for them to all die; God was seeking to deal with him therefore if he was out of the equation they could be spared. Others say that he felt like he'd rather die than preach to the Ninevites so, "just throw me overboard." Perhaps it was a combination of the 2 I don't know. He doesn't seem the type to be compassionate toward Gentiles, but I suppose it's possible.

But it should've been a rebuke to him that they were more compassionate toward *him*, and had a greater appreciation for *his* life than he did for the people of Nineveh. God had called him to preach to the lost and he wouldn't do it, yet here were these "nonbelievers" being more sacrificial, demonstrating a greater heart of service, and doing everything they could to spare Jonah's life. However there came a point when they realized there was no hope, it wasn't going to happen...

### Vs14-16

Did they denounce their gods and devote themselves to the God of Israel? It would seem to me that they did. It's interesting that even though Jonah wasn't walking in the will of God there were still people that were impacted and got saved as the result of what took place through his life. God's grace is an amazing, really incomprehensible thing...

But what we gather here is what? That just because God is *moving* doesn't mean that God is *approving* of what's going on in our lives. Don't assume that God approves of your sin just because He moves in a particular situation that you happen to be a part of. At the same time we shouldn't automatically assume that every person that God uses to move in someone else's life must be godly, or where God would have them to be in their walk with Him...We're to give glory to God, not hold His servants in awe or view them as something extraordinary, God is the One who does great things, not men.

### Vs17

We'll pick up at this point next time. It's interesting that Jonah fled to Joppa to avoid the commission to preach to the Gentiles, yet in the book of Acts it was in Joppa that Peter was given the command to take the gospel to the Gentiles. God always brings it back around doesn't He?

Are you sleeping? Not physically (though that may be appropriate), but spiritually there are people around you who need to hear from you, they would benefit greatly from what you have to say and the fact that you can pray to the 1 true living God and He will hear you. God help us to arise, and call upon Him, avail ourselves to be used *of* Him. May you not resist God's will, God's work for you, but may you walk in it and glorify Him through it.

#### Prayer Points:

God if any of us be in a spiritual slumber help us to arise, to call *upon* You that we might be used *by* You. Help us not to run *from* You, but to draw near *to* You, to trust *in* You and turn from our sin, may our life practice and life profession be one and we thank You that You love us, You're patient with us and when necessary You'll even pursue us. But God we don't want You to have to chase us, we want to follow hard after You. Give us a godly resolve to do Your will...