

# Jonah

## Introduction

We are first introduced to Jonah as a contemporary of king Jeroboam. He was used by God to inform the king of the successes he would have in battle.

*23 Jeroboam reigned 41 years ... 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 Hopher. ... 28 Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam ... 29 So Jeroboam rested with his fathers, 2Kings 14:23-29*

Though the account is vague, we know that sometime during the reign of Jeroboam, Jonah was already a prophet. He came to Jeroboam and give him that welcome prophesy that he would restore the territory of Israel. After that prophecy, the next words record his death. So it could have been at the beginning, middle or end.

Why is this important? Two important questions can now be raised. First, did the events recorded in the book that bears his name occur before or after these prophecies? Second, at what point in his reign did these events occur? The importance relates to why Jonah rebelled against God's command to preach to Nineveh.

Here are the facts: After the death of Jeroboam, in the space of 12 years five kings reigned.

*his son Zechariah reigned for **6 months**. 2Kings 15:8-9  
Shallum Jabesh killed him and reigned in his place for **1 month**. 15:10, 13-14  
Menahem and struck Shallum and he reigned in his place for **10 years** 15:13-14, 17-19  
Menahem rested with his fathers. Pekahiah his son reigned in his place for **2 years** 15:22-24  
Then Pekah, an officer of his, killed him and reigned in his place for **20 years**. 15:25-27*

Sometime during those 12 years Assyria came and was only stopped due to a bribe:

***Pul king of Assyria came against the land; and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to strengthen the kingdom under his control. 20 So the king of Assyria turned back, and did not stay there in the land. 2Kings 15:19-20***

Then in the midst of the 20 year reign of Pekah, Assyria came again and began the conquest that would soon remove Israel from its' land.

*27 Pekah became king over Israel and reigned twenty years. ... 29 **In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and took Ijon, Abel Beth Maachah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria. 2 Kings 15:27-30***

It was also during that 20 year reign that Ahaz began to reign and during the reign of Ahaz Isaiah foretold the complete destruction of Israel to Assyria.

***In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, began to reign. 2 Kings 16:1-2***

*Now it came to pass **in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham**, ... 3 **Then the Lord said to Isaiah, "Go out now to meet Ahaz,** ... 8 **For the head of Syria is Damascus, And the head of Damascus is Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, So that it will not be a people.** ... 17 **The Lord will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father's house — days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah."** ... 20 **In the same day the Lord will shave with a hired razor, With those from beyond the River, with the king of Assyria,** ... 8:7 **Now therefore, behold, the Lord brings up over them The waters of the River, strong and mighty — The king of Assyria and all his glory; He will go up over all his channels And go over all his banks. Isa 7:1, 3, 8, 17, 20; 8:7***

So within 40 years of the death of Jeroboam, the truth that Assyria would destroy Israel had been clearly proclaimed and known.

What does this have to do with Jonah? Look now at what we learn from Jonah. First, when God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria Jonah refused and fled.

*Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.” 3 But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord Jonah 1:1-3*

After God brought him back and he succeeded in getting Nineveh to repent, Jonah revealed why he had fled.

*But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the Lord, and said, “Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore 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 4:1-3*

Jonah fled and refused to go to Nineveh because he knew God was gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abundant in lovingkindness and One who relents from doing harm. He did not want God to relent and be gracious and merciful to Nineveh. He wanted Nineveh to be destroyed.

Why would Jonah have such strong and hateful feelings? Why did he want God to destroy an entire nation? If we place his preaching at this time in history then it is clear that he did not want to preach to them because he knew God was going to use them to destroy Israel and he wanted to see them destroyed. Of all the answers this one seems to be the most plausible and likely.

Jonah is a complicated man. He has some very conflicted feelings about Nineveh. To give him the benefit of the doubt is easy if we can accept the above.

## **Jonah Commanded to go to Nineveh**

*Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.” Jonah 1:1-2*

The phrase “word of the Lord” was first used when God revealed things to Abraham in a vision. It was later clarified in the times of Samuel.

*After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, ... 4 And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” Gen. 15:1, 4*

*Now the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation. 1 Sam 3:1-2*

Hence Jonah was given a direct revelation from God and he knew it. It is clear from Jonah’s words in chapter four that there was some type of discussion between God and Jonah about this command before Jonah fled. “So he prayed to the Lord, and said, “Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country?”

## **Fleeing the Presence of the Lord**

*3 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. Jonah 1:3*

While Adam and Eve sought to hide themselves from the presence of the Lord, and Cain sought to go out from the presence of the Lord, it can’t be done.

*And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from **the presence of the Lord** God among the trees of the garden. Gen 3:8*

*Then Cain **went out from the presence of the Lord** and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. Gen 4:16-17*

*O Lord, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. 3 You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. ... 7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or **where can I flee from Your presence?** 8*

*If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. 9 If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, 10 Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. Ps 139:1-3,4-7*

God knows everything about us whether we seek to be in his presence or out of it. We can be like an ostrich and think no one can see us if our head is in the sand of our own wisdom and folly, but God can still see everything. Yet Jonah had not yet learned this lesson which the book clearly and forcefully teaches.

## **God's Sending and Preparing**

Not only was it impossible for Jonah to flee the presence of Jehovah, but God was always one step ahead of Jonah, sending and preparing both for judgment, salvation, and for the teaching of His wayward and foolish prophet that He loved.

*But **the Lord sent out a great wind** on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. Jonah 1:4*

*Now **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*

*And **the Lord God prepared a plant** and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. 7 But as morning dawned the next day **God prepared a worm**, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. 8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that **God prepared a vehement east wind**; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." Jonah 4:6-8*

Thus commands, providence and longsuffering met Jonah every step of his journey. It began when God first told Jonah to go to Nineveh and continued as his rebellion manifested itself the moment Jonah set foot on that ship going to Tarshish which is somewhere in what is today called Spain.

That wind was not sent out as punishment or destruction for rebelling at His word. This might have been our first thought and perhaps what many of us would have believed God would have done in dealing with such rebellion. But instead of wrath, this wind was sent out in mercy to bring Jonah to repentance.

But that repentance was slow in coming and this book is itself a very comprehensive example of Peter's wonderful revelation about God's character of longsuffering.

*But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. 2Pet. 3:8-9*

It is amazing that Jonah was not brought to repentance as soon as the storm began. This was not a common storm, but a great wind and mighty tempest. Yet while all the others in the boat were doing all they could to save themselves, first by lightening the ship and then by crying out to their gods seeking mercy and deliverance, Jonah was sleeping.

*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. 1:5*

How could Jonah sleep? Jonah was a prophet and had a clear understanding that he was in rebellion against God. Did his conscience not trouble him? There are several Scriptures that deal with this situation. It could have been a hard heart, a heart so angry and filled with lusts that it can not think clearly, it can be stubborn, or it can be convinced that there is no hope for atonement and therefore no reason to care any longer. Whatever his reason, he was doing what the others were not, showing no concern for the fate of the ship and the lives of all who were on it.

When the shipmaster learned that Jonah was sleeping, he became angry that Jonah was not doing his part to save the ship. It is a sad situation when the ungodly have a better concept of duty than

a servant of God.

They then seek to cast lots to try and find out who was responsible for this storm. This is a very terrible and evil practice. Who knows how many innocent people have been killed because the lot fell to them and the sailors used it to remove them? It is a clear case of tempting the Lord. It is always a 50-50 chance that the lot will come out one way or the other, so if God does not intervene and we cast a lot (or flip a coin), and then say whatever the outcome it is from God, it is an evil and presumptuous practice. Yet in this case, the lot fell as God's providence desired and things moved not due to the sailors, but God.

*So the captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish." 7 And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 1:6-7*

When the lot fell to Jonah, they sought for an explanation. There were some things they already knew that would have created these circumstances. Jonah had already told them he was fleeing from his God. But they didn't know the things they now ask.

*8 Then they said to him, "Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" 1:8*

They first offer him the opportunity to clear himself or confess. They also want to know his occupation, where he came from, his country and his people. They are seeking for any extenuating circumstances that could explain the terrible storm that was even then raging among them. He doesn't answer the first two questions, but very honest in the rest his answer.

*So he said to them, "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." 10 Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, "Why have you done this?" For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. 1:9-10*

It is interesting when they find out who Jonah serves their fear grew even greater. Even then there was a great consciousness of Jehovah in the hearts of these idolaters. Their problem became even greater as they made the application of what he had said earlier. Evidently it had not troubled them that he was fleeing from the presence of his "god" until they found out it was the God of heaven. Jonah had already revealed the nature of the conflict he had created by fleeing from the presence and it all was clear that Jonah truly was the problem.

It appears that Jonah had a clear understanding of what had happened, and that God was bringing his sin into the light. Since he knew he was responsible, and that the lot had fallen to him, he was convinced that God had done it.

They then ask Jonah to help them with the decision. It is clear from these events, that these were good and honest men. They sought to find out the whole truth and even allow the "guilty man" the opportunity to redeem himself and even to set his own punishment or method to resolve the problem.

*Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?" — for the sea was growing more tempestuous. 12 And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me." 1:11-12*

Jonah's answer gives us some insight into his character. Whether by inspiration, or by his own reasoning, he is convinced that he is the cause of the problem. He knows that he has rebelled against God and that those who had done what he did have always been punished. So his inference is that God is sending this storm to destroy him.

The mariners are not happy with this solution. They do not want to take a passenger and throw him into the sea thus committing murder. They therefore seek with all their strength to bring him back to land. But they fail, and they know that they will all die anyway, so they offer a prayer to God seeking forgiveness.

*Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow*

*more tempestuous against them. 14 Therefore they cried out to the Lord and said, "We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You." 1:13-14*

Jonah is listening to all this, yet there is no revelation of his repentance or prayers at this moment. If he said any it is not recorded. After the men prayed, they took Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea immediately and in a very obvious manner stopped and calmed. These seasoned sailors were amazed and knew that they had seen something that was not normal. It was such an awe inspiring sight, that the men felt great awe, dread and reverence toward the LORD(Jehovah).

*15 So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows.*

Even to the degree that they made vows to God. Some of these vows must have had to do with giving God great glory as news of this event preceded Jonah to Nineveh.

## **The Sign of Jonah**

Here are the facts as revealed later by Jesus. First, Jonah was a sign to Nineveh just as Jesus was a sign to His own generation. Jonah himself became a sign. Just as Jonah was a sign to Nineveh, in exactly the same way Jesus was to be a sign to his own generation.

*And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He began to say, "This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. 30 For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation. Lk. 11:29-31*

What was this sign? Matthew recorded a different event where Jesus was more clear. This time He is responding to the request by the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus would give them ironclad proof that He was the Son of God. They wanted some amazing act of power of a magnitude that they could not help but accept it. Jesus anger came because he had already been giving them such signs.

*Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." 39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. Mt. 12:38-39*

Hence first Jesus condemned them as an evil and adulterous generation. He then revealed that there would in fact be a sign. It would be the sign of the prophet Jonah. This is the sign He spoke of as recorded in Luke above. Jonah himself was a "sign" to Nineveh just as Jesus would be a "sign" to them. What was this sign? "Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish." A sign is something others hear or see and then use that as proof that what they are being told is true. The sign of Jonah was the knowledge that he had been three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. This is then compared to the sign Jesus would give that generation. He would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth then return just as Jonah had.

His return(resurrection), would be the sign that they sought. Once they heard the resurrection of Jesus they would have the sign they sought.

*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. 41 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. Mt. 12:40-41*

Since they were both signs, they had to be known. It is not a sign unless others see it or are aware of it. So Nineveh had to know Jonah had been three days and three nights in the fish, or it would not have been a sign leading them to repent.

Also, Nineveh could only rise up and condemn those in Jesus' day if they had been offered a similar proof. Nineveh had repented when they saw the sign of Jonah. Many in Israel would not repent when they saw the sign of Jesus.

How did Nineveh know? Either the sailors must have brought the knowledge that Jonah had been told to go to Nineveh and had been cast into the sea, or Jonah was commanded to preach it to them. Either one is possible and it is even possible that both were in play. They had heard of the man who had been thrown into the sea then he showed up to preach repentance to them.

### **Jonah was Unprepared, but God was Prepared.**

God had already prepared for this moment. Jonah was fleeing and had no way to repent and return. God had already devised the means that would give Jonah the time he needed to repent and at the same allow him to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance.

As the waters closed over Jonah and the waves tossed him, Jonah had no hope. He was lost and doomed. When the fish swallowed him, it would not have appeared as deliverance. To be under the sea and then swallowed by a fish would be the final blow. As he remained in that fish, at first it was to wait to die. Yet he did not die. He continued to live. Hour after hour, and how long each hour must have felt. Slowly the doom must have lifted and wonder and anxiety must have grown. From the despair of no hope, to the anxiety of what is to happen as hours turned to days.

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

Although many have sought for an answer, we do not know what type of fish this was. It is the general word for fish used throughout the OT Scriptures:

*dagah* A feminine noun meaning fish. This word is identical in meaning to *dag*(1709), which can be found in the book of Jonah, where the fish was called a *dag*(Jon. 1:17; 2:10) but was called a *dagah* in Jonah 2:1. In all other instances, this word was used in the collective sense to refer to the fish at creation (Gen. 1:26,28); the fish who died in the plague (Ex 7:18,21; Ps 105:29); the fish eaten in Egypt (Num 11:5); and the fish in the waters (Deut 4:18; Ezek 29:4,5; 47:9,10). (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT: 1710)

There is no way to take this generic term for all fish and deduce what type of fish the Lord selected. We are not informed at what point Jonah knew he was to be spared. Whether it was by direct revelation or a gradual sense that it was to happen is not revealed. But though it was implied that it took the full three days and nights before Jonah prayed, it is possible that it was at some point during that time.

*Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly. 2 And he said: "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. 2:1-2*

Jonah is very up front and honest. He only cried out to God because of this affliction. It was the affliction of being in that fish that led to his prayer. As the affliction continued hour after hour, at some point, like the prodigal son, it appeared to him that his best hope was to return and plead for mercy.

*"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."' Luke 15:17-19*

### **The Nature of the Affliction**

Jonah gave a detailed explanation of the nature of the afflictions he had passed through that led to his repentance. It began as he hit the water in the heart of the sea. Then the waves tossed him and covered him. The terrible nature of this turmoil entered even into his soul. Then he sank, weeds wrapped about him and he felt he had gone to the very bottom of the sea. This was either what happened just before the fish swallowed him or what this fish did after he entered it. He may have gone down through the force of the waves, or the fish may have swallowed him and took him to the bottom of the ocean. Either way, Jonah concluded that the bars had closed behind him and he would never see the light again.

### **Jonah's Response**

*Then Jonah prayed from the fishes belly  
I Cried ... Because of my affliction  
and He answered me  
out of the belly of Sheol I Cried  
And You heard my voice.*

*Then I said I have been cast out of your sight  
Yet I will again look to your temple*

*Yet 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.  
"Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy.  
But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving;  
I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord."*

### **The affliction that created the response**

*For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas  
And the floods surrounded me;  
All Your billows and Your waves passed over me.*

*The waters surrounded me, even to my soul;  
The deep closed around me;  
Weeds were wrapped around my head.  
I went down to the moorings of the mountains;  
The earth with its bars closed behind me forever;*

### **The Fruit of Jonah's Repentance**

As we look at the afflictions and the changes in Jonah's heart it becomes clear that they are so mixed together that it is impossible to follow its course. Some commentators have concluded that these words were not spoken in the fishes belly, but outside of it in the form of a song. The only obvious thing is that Jonah entered the fish unrepentant and prepared to die and left the fish having repented and made vows to the Lord of what he would do when he again was free to chart his own course.

One thing is clear, as soon as Jonah was back on shore, the command he had refused to fulfill the first time was given to him a second time.

*Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you." 3:1-2*

This time, there is no murmuring and no rebellion. He has learned his lesson and will not rebel against God's command again. The message is one of doom.

*So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. 4 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!" 3:3-4*

So the general command "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me," and "preach to it the message that I tell you," has now become very specific.

The city is so large it takes three days to walk. But is it circumference or walking from one end to the other. Historians tell us that Nineveh was about 60 miles in circumference so the three day extent is it's circumference. As Jonah begins his journey he preaches the message God had decreed for him to preach.

### **Jonah's Message Leads to Nineveh's Repentance**

Of all the prophets that God has sent to preach, there are very few times the people actually responded with repentance. Hosea, Amos, Isaiah and Micah were sent to Israel and Judah and failed to get repentance. Their mission was a failure. Jonah was successful to the fullest extent.

*So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. 6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused it to be proclaimed*

*and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?*

It is difficult to imagine what would have led an entire city to repent only at the preaching of Jonah. It appears to be the sign of Jonah that Jesus spoke of that truly brought about this repentance. It is interesting that the very act of rebellion that Jonah had done to keep this from happening became the reason why it was so effective.

### **God Relented**

Just as God had relented at Jonah's repentance, so now he relented of the evil he had proclaimed against Nineveh.

*Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.*

This is exactly what God later revealed to Jeremiah.

*The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: 2 "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words." 3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. 4 And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. 5 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the Lord. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! 7 The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, 8 if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. 9 And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, 10 if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it. Jer 18:1-10*

Everything was as it should be. Jonah has done exactly what God had commanded him to do and Nineveh had responded positively to the message and after repentance, God has relented of the punishment he had determined to bring upon Nineveh.

### **Jonah was Displeased**

Jonah's response to this great success is astounding. Not only is he greatly displeased but he is also angry with God. The paradox here is that what God had offered Jonah in the fish is now the reason for his anger.

*But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.*

The rest of this chapter is a snapshot of the vastness of God's mercy and patience. God's responses to his weakness help us better understand how *"the LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness."* Jonah gives color and texture to how God *"has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities."* Finally, it is the perfect story to show us how *"as a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him."* Ps. 103:8-13

Like Cain before him, Jonah is throwing a tantrum. He is overcome with the emotions of anger and bitterness and is no longer thinking clearly. In both cases God seeks to reason with them just as we would our own children. Instead of responding the anger and wrath, God responds with love, compassion and patience.

### **Jonah's Prayer**

Jonah's second prayer is far different than this one. After the fear and dread of death in the belly of the fish, his humble and penitent prayer was answered and revealed God's mercy and grace for which Jonah praised and thanked God. But this prayer is a form of murmuring. Jonah is very angry



about what God has done and he now bitterly complains to God about it.

In this prayer we learn a lot about Jonah's character and we also have a commentary on the events of the first chapter.

*So he prayed to the Lord, and said, "Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore 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. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!" 4:1-3*

Jonah has already spoken of this before. This prayer has gone up to God while he was still in Israel. This prayer was the reason why Jonah had fled to Tarshish. Although Jonah had repented of fleeing to Tarshish and the rebellion against God's command, his repentance could not reach deep enough to overcome his real problem.

Jonah has no compassion for his enemies. Knowing God's mercy and compassion, he believed his mission might be successful and he did not want Nineveh to be forgiven.

What Jonah "knew" about God's character is nearly exactly what God had revealed about Himself to Moses as quoted in the 103<sup>rd</sup> Psalm.

*And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, 7 keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." Ex 34:6-7*

*He **made known His ways to Moses**, His acts to the children of Israel. 8 The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. 9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. Ps 103:7-9*

It is sad to see Jonah so twisted in his thinking. He is so angry that he now seeks for what he had so feared in the belly of the fish. He quotes Moses and Elijah in their discouragement.

*Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the Lord was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased. 11 So Moses said to the Lord, "Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me? ... 15 If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now — if I have found favor in Your sight — and do not let me see my wretchedness!" Num. 11:10-11, 15*

*But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" 1 Kings 19:4*

But while Moses and Elijah are in anguish because they cannot help the people and gain repentance, Jonah is in anger because God has been merciful. Sadly, like unmerciful servant (Mt. 18:15-35), he could not see his own hypocrisy. He did not want to be the instrument that brought salvation to Nineveh. Yet God continued to patiently teach him. We see in God the patient and loving father of the parable of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:20-32).

Though Jonah's prayer is unworthy of an answer, God's mercy continues as He seeks to reason with his immature prophet.

*Then the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"*

Isn't this far enough? Hasn't Jonah now exhausted the mercy and pity of God? Isn't it time for God to give up and leave him to his fate or even strike him dead for his terrible attitude? But instead of responding in anger, God's love and mercy shine through again in the question: "Are you right to be angry?" This is the same compassion Jesus gave to Peter even before his denial. God wanted to help Jonah, but Jonah doesn't respond.

### **Jonah still "hopes for the worst"**

Although he knows God has relented, Jonah still hopes that God will destroy the city. While he waits for the outcome,

*So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.*

Whatever this shelter consisted of, it was not enough to shade him from the heat of the sun. God decided to give him Jonah a powerful lesson.

As Jonah waited to see if the city would be destroyed with emotions of bitterness anger and vengeance in his heart, God prepared a plant, a worm and a vehement east wind to lead His prophet to repentance and spiritual growth.

*And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. 7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. 8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." 4:6-8*

God knew the heart of his prophet and sought to place Jonah into His own position so Jonah can see why God has done what he did. First, he prepares a gourd to grow up over the shelter Jonah had made to give him welcome shade. In the short time Jonah had it, he grew to love and appreciate that plant. Then in the morning, God brought a worm to destroy the plant, so Jonah could appreciate the emotions that are felt when something precious and important has been harmed and destroyed.

The east wind was prepared to show Jonah just how important that plant had been to him and how terrible it was to have lost it. In this God revealed how he had felt. He had created the heavens and the earth and placed Adam and Eve on it to love and cherish. Like the worm, the serpent in the garden had brought God's plans to an end. Through the centuries, God had sought to rebuild what had been lost and had known the joy of rebuilding and the bitterness of its loss. This had happened over and over again with Israel. It was now happening to Nineveh. Jonah's loss of the plant and discomfort at its loss was a minor thing in comparison to what God was dealing with.

### **God teaches Jonah a Lesson**

Although these events created a new ugly outburst of anger and a terrible wish for death from His prophet, God still doesn't grant Jonah the wish he would regret for all eternity. Instead God used these events as an opportunity to teach Jonah (and us) something very important. Jonah was angry because: "*You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow*" (4:10). Jonah's interest in the vine had nothing to do with the labor and effort he had put into it, but only in the pleasure it had given him for one night.

*Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!" 10 But the Lord said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. 4:9-10*

In contrast, the pity God felt toward Nineveh was much deeper. God had raised up Nineveh in hopes of producing a great harvest of souls. The sins of Nineveh had threatened her existence in the same way that the worm had to Jonah's plant.

*And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left — and much livestock?" 3:11*

While Jonah only had a plant, God had 120,000 innocent children and all the animals. Because of Jonah's efforts all these had been spared. God had pitied them and as well as the livestock who were also innocent but who would suffer greatly in Nineveh's judgment. This is God's attitude toward children who die as a result of his judgment upon the wicked. They form a portion of that ten righteous Abraham pleaded for in Sodom (Gen 18:32). They are the undeserving victims of the wickedness of their parents.

How Jonah responded to all this is something we will not know until the day of Judgement for the book closes without recording the outcome.