

## **Jonah** **“Dove”**

- I. Author – God  
Penman – Unknown

Jonah is first identified as a prophet to the northern Kingdom in II Kings 14:23-25. We are certain that this is the same Jonah as the prophet in the book because both are said to be the son of Amittai. The home of Jonah is said to be Gath-hepher – a city near the city of Nazareth in Galilee.

Jonah is shown to be a man that is narrow minded and a fiercely zealous patriot. He is zealous for Jehovah and wants to see the enemies of His people destroyed. Jonah's dislike for the heathen nation is contrasted with the spirit of Jehovah to spare it. We understand that Jonah had a reason (albeit not a good one) for being hostile to the heathen nation. Nineveh was the capitol city of the Assyrian empire. The Assyrians had brought a great amount of suffering upon God's people. We can surmise that Jonah also felt this would be a perfect time for the enemy of God's people to be destroyed.

- II. Date  
II Kings 14:23 ties Jonah to the period between 790 and 750 BC. Jonah was a prophet during the 40-year reign of Jeroboam II who reigned from 788 to 748. There can be no doubt that Jonah played an important role of Jeroboam restoring the borders of Israel and bringing about the great prosperity of the nation. Due to the northern kingdoms wickedness this prosperity would not last. Therefore the date can be fixed at some point in the general period around 780 B.C.

- III. Setting  
Shortly after 800 B.C. and on down to 745 B.C. Assyria was torn with internal strife and by wars with revolting provinces. No doubt this depressed the state of Assyria and contributed much to the readiness of the people to hear Jonah as he began to preach God's message.

The city of Nineveh is first mentioned in Genesis 10:11. It is a large city of Gentiles in the capitol city of Assyria. It is well noted for both its enormous size and for being totally given over to the ways of the devil. King Adadnirari reigned over Nineveh from 808 to 783 and was possibly the king to whom Jonah preached. Historical records indicate that many reforms were made during his reign and there were similar continuing reforms during the reign of the three kings that followed. During this time, there was also a let up in Assyrian conquests.

Nineveh was the perfect subject for Jonah and Israel to view. It's notoriety for licentiousness was so well known at the time that it became a byword itself for heathenism. Whatever God achieved here, through His prophet, would not be something that was “done in a corner” but out in the open for all to see. Whatever

Jonah accomplished here would be reported throughout the world. The repentance of this heathen nation would be a great lesson for all nations, especially Israel. If Nineveh repented and the chosen people of God would not repent, there would be nothing left for God to do but to cast them out as a nation that was no longer worthy to be called the people of God.

Jesus told the Jews of His own time that the people of Nineveh would rise up in judgment to condemn them because they had repented at Jonah's preaching while He, one greater than Jonah, spoke to the cold, unconcerned hearts of the Jews (Matthew 12:39-41 ; Luke 11:29-32).

#### IV. Outline

- I. Running away from God – Chapter 1
  - a. Jehovah's charge to go to Nineveh and Jonah's disobedience (1-3)
  - b. The storm and Jonah's confession (4-10)
  - c. Jonah sacrificed (11-16)
- II. Running to God – Chapter 2
  - a. The fish prepared by Jehovah (1:17)
  - b. Jonah's prayer from the deep (2:1-9)
  - c. Jonah's deliverance ((10)
- III. Running with God – Chapter 3
  - a. The call, response and message to Nineveh (1-4)
  - b. Repentance and Jehovah's gracious change (5-10)
- IV. Running ahead of God – Chapter 4
  - a. Jonah's anger and Nineveh's repentance (1-5)
  - b. The gourd vine and the worm (6-8)
  - c. Jehovah's rebuke and lesson on the gourd vine (9-11)

#### V. Commentary

##### **Chapter 1 Running from God**

- 1) Jehovah's word comes to Jonah
- 2) Jonah is told to go to Nineveh. He is to preach against it because their wickedness is great. We have already discussed the state of the city of Nineveh and it's people in the preceding part of this study
- 3) Jonah decides that he will NOT do as God has commanded him. Instead of going to Nineveh, where God had commanded, he chooses to go to Tarshish. This city could be what is later called Tarsus in the NT or it is also thought to be a city near present day Spain. Either location means that Jonah chose to go in the opposite direction of where God had sent him. Jonah is trying to flee from "the presence of the Lord". As is clear from later in the chapter, this is simply not possible. Not only is Jonah attempting to physically run away from God, he is choosing to withdraw from the service of Jehovah. The term "presence of the Lord" is often used to denote some official capacity. Jonah was trying to rid himself of

the responsibilities of his official status in this one instance of being sent to Nineveh. Jonah may have been thinking “I have been bringing the word of the Lord to Israel (God’s people) for many years with very few positive results. How can I possibly go to Nineveh and have any success with that heathen nation.

- 4) God has other plans. Jonah will do as he was commanded. God sends a mighty wind and sea storm to force Jonah to return to his duty. A storm with enough rage and fury to wreck a ship.
- 5) The seamen were afraid. They prayed to their gods and had no success in quelling the storm. They tried to lighten the ship to hopefully keep it afloat. But not Jonah. He was sleeping through this terrible storm.
- 6) The captain of the ship finds Jonah asleep and wants to know why he is not calling upon HIS God as well. These men believed that some god would deliver them from this storm. These polytheists had tried everything else but they did not want to miss any other person’s god.
- 7) They cast lots to decide who was responsible for this situation they were in and the lot fell upon Jonah.
- 8) They quiz Jonah to find out all they can to decide what he has done to bring about this terrible storm and threat to their lives.
- 9) Jonah promptly admits to them that his God is Jehovah and that he fears God who made everything.
- 10) Now the seamen want to know why Jonah has brought this all upon them. Not only had Jonah put himself in trouble with God, he had brought these men and their ship into the problem as well. Their belief in what Jonah had indicated as his God, Jehovah, was no doubt bolstered by their knowledge of the Hebrews and THEIR God and what He could do. Jonah is also honest with these men as to the cause of this storm. He could have lied and made a scapegoat of another on the ship but he does not. He accepts full responsibility for his actions.
- 11) Now that they know the truth they want to know what they must do to save themselves. Despite the fact that Jonah had brought all of this upon them, they still recognized him as the prophet of God. They did not want to pronounce hasty judgment on Jonah.
- 12) Jonah tells them that the remedy of the situation is to toss him over board. This is the only way for them and their ship to survive. Jonah assures them that this action will calm the sea. Jonah states that he KNOWS this to be true. He could know it through divine revelation or by the fact that he is an Israelite who has seen the power and works of God.
- 13) These men did not want to throw Jonah over board to his death. These men could have only cared for themselves and thrown Jonah overboard immediately. However, their fear for the true God who had brought this fierce storm led them to try and get to shore and save themselves and Jonah. Surely Jonah’s God would be pleased with them for returning this man of God to land as opposed to sending him to his certain death.
- 14) When they realize that their efforts are futile and that their only option is to follow Jonah’s instruction and throw him over board they pray to God

to not let them perish for Jonah's wrongs and to not let Jonah's blood be on their hands. They knew that the life of a man was precious. They also realized that God wanted this and His will would be done. **IF JONAH HAD ONLY MADE THIS SAME CONCLUSION BEFORE RUNNING FROM GOD.**

- 15) They throw Jonah into the sea and just as he had told them, the storm ceased. Jonah did not resist. He knew what needed to be done. Repentance and acceptance have now started to affect Jonah. He has surrendered to God's will and God's way.
- 16) Undoubtedly, this impacted the seamen tremendously. They immediately made a sacrifice to God, the one true God, the God of Jonah.
- 17) The fact that there is / was a fish large enough to swallow Jonah whole is not the question. History and science prove that this is possible. The fact that this fish was in this certain place at this certain time to swallow Jonah is a miracle. We are told plainly that God had prepared the fish. Just as Christ spent part of three days in the tomb we can assume that Jonah spent part of three days in the belly of the fish.

## **Chapter 2    Running to God**

- 1) Jonah completes his turn back to God by going to him in prayer. Jonah knew that all of what has occurred was brought about by God. Jonah told the seamen that he was the reason for the great storm and this was confirmed when the storm ceased when Jonah was cast into the sea. Literally, figuratively and spiritually, Jonah has nowhere else to turn. He knows Jehovah well enough to know that God is the only one that can remove him from his current situation.
- 2) Jonah's prayer begins. Jonah openly states that the reason he is praying to God is because of all of the affliction that he is now enduring. Jonah has reached his lowest point and realizes that all of this is because he has turned from God and the only way out is to turn back to God. He has considered the fact that he may be about to die – man does not survive under water very long. (Parallel passages in Psalm 18:4-6 and 22:24)
- 3) The seaman physically cast Jonah into the sea. However, Jonah knows that God brought this about. The seamen were only the tool of God. (Psalm 42:7)
- 4) Jonah knows that he is cut off from God. Jonah considered himself to be as good as dead. That is right where God wanted Jonah. One of the greatest paradoxes in our relationship to God is that we must die to live in Him. Yet, Jonah believed that he could turn back to God and God would accept Him once again. (Psalms 31:22)
- 5) The weeds are probably the reeds and grass that grow on the bottom of the sea. Jonah was as far down as he could go, physically and spiritually. (Psalm 69:1)
- 6) Jonah saw both his physical life and his spiritual life to God being cut off. Just as a prisoner in a cell is cut off from anything outside, Jonah knew he

- was cut off from God. Yet, Jonah knew God had spared him from this plight. He will be brought back from his watery grave. (Psalms 16:10)
- 7) Only when man is convinced that he cannot save himself will he turn to God. God has told us that all men are lost and condemned in sin unless they believe in and obey God's will. Jonah realizes his insufficiency and turns to God. Jonah knows God and His word and prays in his most extreme hour of need.
  - 8) Jonah refers to the heathen that worship idols. Jonah has just encountered first hand knowledge of the ineffectiveness of the idols of man, he saw the work of the gods of the seamen. When man refuses to have God as their knowledge and in whom they worship, they become vain in their own reasoning. Religion of man is empty and vain, just as the gods they invent are speechless, powerless and deceitful. They willingly turn their backs on the only hope of mercy, which is found in God.
  - 9) Jonah states that he will praise God and obediently do His will. He has determined in his heart to do these things. Jonah has now completely turned back to God and pledged himself to God. Jonah will fulfill his duty as the prophet (messenger) of God.
  - 10) Jonah is delivered by God. He is given a second opportunity to carry out his commission from the Lord. God, the creator of all things, can control all things as he sees fit. He brought this fish to swallow Jonah and now commands it to spit him out.

### **Chapter 3    Running with God**

- 1) Jonah is given a second chance. God repeats His command of 1:1. Once again, Jonah has the choice to obey God or not. God will not stop His concern for the many souls in Nineveh Just because Jonah chose to disobey. God is long suffering considering Jonah
- 2) As stated in 1:2, Jonah is commanded to go and preach against the great, wicked city of Nineveh. Jonah is further told to preach what God wanted him to preach. God gives us the word to preach just like He gave Jonah the message He wanted preached.
- 3) Finally, Jonah obeys God and goes to Nineveh. There is no hint of reluctance on the part of Jonah this time. The city was indeed great. The size being three days journey, either across or around as you would go along preaching. God is not concerned because of the actual size of the city but because of the immense number of souls to be won in Nineveh.
- 4) Jonah preaches God's word and calls the people of Nineveh to repentance. As we have discussed, this nation was in a depressed state and God knew that they were willing to turn to Him. They did not want their very city, the nation they lived in to be destroyed in 40 days, as Jonah had declared. Jonah's message was heard as many listened. Obviously God was done with Nineveh. If they did not repent now, they would be destroyed. Jonah's message was simple. It was not meant to tickle their ears. Jonah didn't worry who he might upset. God's word is final. If we or Jonah

choose not to preach it as He commands and water it down so as not to offend, it will not be effective. The word will not be able to work on souls if we do not present it as God has designed.

- 5) With effective preaching of the word, Nineveh repents. They heard the word and they believed it – a very scriptural procession. From the highest person to the lowest person, it was a state of national repentance. Notice, the people proclaimed a fast – not the king.
- 6) The word, God’s message comes to the king as well. He too believed the word and repented. He got off of his throne, removed his royal robe and put on sackcloth, just like everybody else. He understood that there was not something “special” for him to do. He must respond like everyone else. He humbled himself for the sins he committed and the sins he allowed in his country. That the mightiest man of the world at the time would humble himself so, is evidence of the effect of Jonah’s preaching and the message from God.
- 7) The king extends the fast even to the animals. The animals were included to show complete repentance.
- 8) The king declares that all should be covered with sackcloth and cry to God to be forgiven of the sins they had committed. They were to turn from the evil of their hands. This decree was for them to cease to do evil and begin to do good.
- 9) The king continues to point out that he believes in God and what Jonah has preached. The only way to be assured of being saved is to turn to God and trust that He will do as He has promised. The statement of “who knows” is more of an expression of hope and belief. Jonah’s very presence was proof that there was hope. Why else would Jonah be there if God would destroy them no matter what came of the preaching.
- 10) God’s will and law are immutable. That God repented means that he turned away from His plan to destroy Nineveh due to the change in the people of Nineveh. God did not change His plan until the evidence was clear that the people of Nineveh had changed. Works are both necessary for salvation and a result of salvation.

#### **Chapter 4     Running ahead of God**

- 1) Jonah learns that God plans to spare Nineveh and he is very angry. There are many suppositions as to why Jonah was angry about the salvation of Nineveh. However, one seems to fit the overall tenor and content of chapter 4. Jonah wanted to see Nineveh destroyed in the hope that the destruction would be an object lesson to his people, Israel. Remember, Jonah was a prophet to the northern kingdom and all of their wickedness.
- 2) Jonah prays to God and complains that this is the very reason he did not go to Nineveh when God first sent him. Now he sees that what he feared all along has come true. God has spared Nineveh. Even though this multitude was saved, Jonah did not really care except to complain that God did what Jonah knew would happen. Jonah understands the

righteousness of God. What God said He would do, He did. The saving of Nineveh was due to their repentance and adherence to the word of God preached by Jonah. If only, Jonahs Israel would repent and turn back to God!!

- 3) Jonah states that he would rather die than see Nineveh saved. Despite his successful preaching in Nineveh and their repentance and turning to God, Jonah would rather die than face the prospect of a heathen nation being counted as “of God’s people”.
- 4) God asks Jonah if he is right to be angry about the salvation of Nineveh. God is giving Jonah something to think about and time to think about it. God points out that Jonah may not be doing well in being grieved concerning Nineveh.
- 5) Jonah walks away from God like a pouting child and chooses to go and sit on a hill and watch to see if God will change His mind and destroy Nineveh. Jonah knows this won’t happen (verse 2). Jonah’s knowledge of God is of the ways in the old testament and God continually blessing righteousness or punishing sin in a physical manner. Jonah holds out hope of destruction.
- 6) God is going to teach Jonah yet another lesson. God puts Jonah into a position to understand what God is doing and why. God prepares a gourd to shade Jonah from the heat and Jonah takes great delight in this thing that he has done nothing to bring about.
- 7) God now prepares a worm to destroy the gourd. The gourd is destroyed and falls to the ground.
- 8) Next, God prepares a great hot wind to further destroy the gourd and to bring a great toll on Jonah physically. Once again, contrary to his prayer in CH2, Jonah prays to die. Nothing is going his way and the narrow-minded cynical prophet would rather die.
- 9) Once again, God questions Jonah. This time He questions Jonahs anger over the loss of the gourd. Once again, Jonah says he is right in being angry and would rather die.
- 10) God chastises Jonah for having pity on the gourd, that Jonah had nothing to do with except to enjoy it’s shade. This was just a plant and certainly God places a greater value on the life and souls of people than on a gourd that merely came up over night and died the next. Jonah had done nothing for this gourd, yet he was angry over the loss of this plant. Jonah had actually worked in Nineveh with the people. He had preached to them and had brought about their repentance, yet he still wanted to see them destroyed.
- 11) God points out to just as Jonah wanted this gourd to be saved that God wanted all of these people of Nineveh to be saved. More than 120,000 young children who were young enough to have very little learning. This would calculate out to possibly more than 600,000 people/ souls in the city of Nineveh. Jonah was more concerned for the gourd than for these thousands of souls. How off target could one man be?

VI. Significant lessons

- A. Beware of letting OUR ideas of the results of God's work interfere with carrying out His present will for our lives
- B. Beware not to belittle what can be or what is accomplished for God by our ideas of the significance or insignificance of the place of service.
- C. Wherever and whenever God is pleased bestow His grace and goodness, it is our obligation and privilege to acknowledge and rejoice in that opportunity.
- D. God's ways are not our ways. God does not and will not change; man must change to meet God.