

## Jonah

Here was a man whose very existence has been, in many minds, considered to be a myth, or his story, a mere parable. Why? Because of the ludicrous nature of his recorded exploits as presented in the Book of Jonah. To have sunk to the depths of the sea, been swallowed by a huge fish that some think may have been a whale, and then cast ashore alive may seem even harder for anyone to “swallow” than it was for the fish to swallow him. However, to doubt the truth of the story is to deny the validity of Scripture. Also, his story is referenced too many times in other parts of Scripture in a manner such that its literalness must also be accepted. In a limited though meaningful way, he is every bit as much a type of Christ as was Joseph, or Isaac, as Scripture makes very clear.

Jesus Himself authenticated Jonah’s exploits as recorded in Matthew 12:39-41 *“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 Jonah: for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here.”* Thus we see that this story cannot be a parable, because a parable is a fictitious narrative about everyday life that conveys a moral, or a message. In Scripture parables, person’s names are never used. If a person is named in the narrative, it is not fictitious, but instead the depiction of a true story. Jonah was real, and his story is real. As if Jesus’ testimony was not enough, and it most certainly is, the Old Testament mentions Jonah as an accredited prophet in 2Kings 14:25. To view the book as other than historically reliable is to imply that we have both a fallible Bible and a fallible Savior.

Having discarded the allegory rubbish, let us move on and see what we can learn about him, and from his story. Jonah was a citizen of Gath-hephen in Zebulun of Galilee within the northern kingdom during the latter part of the reign of Jeroboam II (825-784 BC) (2Kings 14:22-25), and about 120 years before the final Assyrian conquest of Israel (721

BC). He was a contemporary of the prophets Hosea and Amos. Both prophesied that Assyria would destroy Israel (Hosea 11:5 and Amos 5:27). Most likely this explains why he was so adamant in his resolve not to take God's advance warning of impending destruction to them. He knew that the merciful God would spare them if they took the warning seriously and repented. He probably reasoned that their repentance would make them available to fulfill the prophecies of Hosea and Amos. Nineveh means "the residence of Ninus" that is Nimrod (Genesis 10:11) for it was Nimrod who orchestrated the building of the city that according to archeologists may have had, at the time of Jonah, a population of as many as six hundred thousand to one million. The people worshipped a number of gods including Dagon the fish god, and were known to be among the most violent and cruel of all pagan cultures.

Perhaps this is a perfect example of man believing that his reasoning is superior to God's. Jonah was convinced from prophecies, that God Himself had reliably revealed to the prophets, that Assyria would destroy Israel and that Jonah's people would go "into exile beyond Damascus" (Amos 5:27). If that were true, as Jonah reasoned, God was making a big mistake offering them an opportunity to be pardoned, a mistake in which he wanted no part. Somehow Jonah knew something about the great merciful nature of God, that is that if he delivered this message of condemnation and they chose to repent, God would spare them. Therefore, instead of heading northeast about 550 miles to Nineveh, he went to Joppa and on to a ship bound for Tarshis, the most distant place he knew of, and where surely God would not find him. We could say that he was carrying out his patriotic duty by refusing to give aid or comfort to his nation's principal enemy. Putting country over God in the mind of a genuinely ordained Prophet of God is very strange. Balaam comes to mind as the only other example in Scripture of a somewhat similar attempt to circumvent God's directed will.

Tarshis is generally believed to be a location in Spain from which silver, iron, tin, lead, and ivory were brought to Israel and other countries of the near east. Herodotus (4:152) mentions that these ships traveled "beyond the Pillars of Hercules." This would be past the Straits of Gibraltar and on to the Atlantic Ocean. It is known that they traded at least

as far as Britain. Tin was called “Britannia metal” and was much valued everywhere for its versatility as a metal. It was exported to Europe in large quantities from Cornwall England during the Roman period. Archeological discoveries at Stonehenge confirm an international trade as early as 1500 BC. Perhaps Jonah had intended to go there, until God changed his plans.

Did Jonah actually physically live those three days in the fish, or did he die and was later resurrected? Good scholars can be found on both sides of the issue. I believe for two reasons that he died, and then was resurrected just before the fish delivered him to dry land. First, because in verse 1 and 2 of chapter 2, it says, *Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly, and said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.*” Hell here is Sheol, the abode of all souls whose bodies died prior to Jesus’ first coming. The word belly is a point of interest. The Hebrew word here translated, as belly is “behten” which means, “belly” or the “body of anything,” therefore even the “belly” of Sheol. We see in verse 1 that he first prayed while in the fishes belly and then “cried” out of the belly of hell, from where God heard him. Could this simply be parallelism? I don’t think so.

I believe that it’s two prayers from two places. Second, because Jesus used this episode as a sign, or example. It was a “just as” of what would happen to Him. Jonah’s dead body was lying in the belly of the fish as in a tomb, while his soul descended into Sheol and was then resurrected on the third day just as was Jesus from His “tomb”. This is a much more meaningful parallel to Jesus’ activities than if Jonah had lived through this ordeal. Of course God could have done it anyway He chose. However, the way of death and resurrection seem to me to be much more likely, not only because the words suggest this, but also in as much as Jesus chose this particular event as His way of expressing what would happen to Him. As an analogy, it would be far too weak to be effective if Jonah merely spent 3 days alive in the fish. To me, only Jonah’s death and resurrection would be sufficient to make it an appropriate analogy for our Lord Jesus to apply regarding His own immediate future.

Many stumble into what might be called a “sequence trap” by relying on the “then” at the beginning of verse 2 to indicate that he must have done this praying on the third day just before his release from the fish. First, it makes no sense that he would have waited 3 days to begin his prayers. Who in the world would do so? His first prayer probably began as he was thrown overboard and continued on his way down into the deep. He probably said his first amen, even before the fish sucked him in. Think about it. When would he have started praying? Surely not 3 days after such a dire situation occurred. Furthermore, this otherwise troubling issue of sequence is easily reconciled by recognizing a particular characteristic of the Hebrew language. That is to give a full summary account of something, and to then go back and elaborate, or emphasize that which is important. Consider in Genesis chapter 1, how God gives us the 6 days of creation, and then goes back to give us more detail on what He has previously revealed.

Might we call Jonah a “renegade prophet” much like Balaam, except for what seems to have been a more noble cause? Yielding to the Lord’s will was extremely difficult for him. He was so caught up in patriotism and hatred of the national enemy that he couldn’t abandon trying to apply his own will rather than accepting and obeying God’s will. I suspect that we all have this “Jonah problem” in us at various times, and in different ways. Don’t we all have what we believe are justified hatreds? Aren’t there times when we “know” that our way makes more sense than God’s way? If we are saved we know better, yet such thoughts can and do surface occasionally as evidence of our faulty natures. There is much we should be able to recognize and learn about ourselves from Jonah’s story if we muse awhile on it.

As we read his own words of prayer and supplication, we find evidence of genuine repentance, humility and gratitude, but also later, this seems to depreciate to a mere acquiescence to God’s will. Then we find him at the end of the story, still sulking, dejected, and disappointed unto a desire for death because of what he considered his own failure when God accepted Nineveh’s offering, and His judgment on the city thus deferred. We should also remember that he admitted his guilt to the ship’s crew; he knew

that it was his presence that was endangering the ship, and that he chose to die for the salvation of others. Isn't this yet another aspect of his being a type of Jesus? I believe that one must read of his "underwater" thoughts over and over again as expressed in verse 1 through 9 in order to fully appreciate their meaning. He is finally recognizing the awesome power and authority of God. He sees a miraculous answer to his prayers, and comes to an understanding of something extremely important that we may easily miss without careful study. This is that little five-word sentence at the end of verse 9; *"Salvation is of the Lord."*

Perhaps one might think I'm making too much of it, but I see this as a profound discovery he made as a result of his ordeal. Where did that idea come from? One might say he was merely referring to being put back on shore alive, that is having had his final death postponed. That is all physical salvation can ever be. It is my opinion that he may have met Abraham and probably others in Sheol, and got a first hand briefing regarding what eternal salvation is all about! The preceding verses and what follows these five words combine well as a logical sequence of this meeting. But this pearl of his added wisdom seems to stand out by itself. Perhaps it is a remembrance of something important that he had recently learned and felt compelled to insert in the middle of other thoughts. Could it be that his soul/spirit really did spend those three days and nights in "Abraham's bosom", as would Lazarus about 800 years later. (Luke 16:-24) I believe that this is where he got this incredible insight. Back on shore we find a bleached but miraculously strong and healthy Jonah taking on the 400 plus mile trek to Nineveh. While yet reluctant, he proceeded in full obedience to God.

As noted, almost anywhere it's ever mentioned, Nineveh was a "great" city comparable to Babylon only much bigger in its outer expanse. It had double walls, an inner one containing the city proper, and an outer one that encompassed huge pastures and farms, making it largely self-sufficient even in the event of a long siege. I have read that the circumference of City along the outer wall was 60 miles. This may be why in chapter 3, verses 3 and 4 it says, *"So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord, now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. And Jonah*

*began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*" It may be that it took him a whole day to reach and pass through the outer gate to where there were people to hear his message, and two more days of travel within the city before he got a hearing with the king. I believe that this could explain the "three days journey." Simple reading of the text seems to indicate that it took him 3 days to get to the city after he was spit out on shore. However, that cannot be. If we look at a map of the region and scale the straight-line distance between the nearest shoreline and Nineveh, we see that it is about 400 miles. Such a journey would take weeks even by horse or camel.

If the three day walk within the walled city seems to be far fetched, perhaps a more plausible explanation is contained in what archaeology has discovered. Nineveh was upstream, a small distance from the confluence of the Tigris and Zab rivers that formed a V-Shaped valley naturally fortified by the two rivers, and a range of mountains to the north. Within this large expanse of such a naturally fortified area, was a cluster of cities including Nineveh. Excavations have found several, two of which are named Calah and Khorsabad. We also find in Genesis 10:11, 12 "*Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah: the same is a great city.*" So now we know that there was a cluster of at least three cities in this area. This Asshur was not the descendant of Shem, but another Asshur, a Cushite, and probably a son of Nimrod.

Another interesting point is the linkage between Nineveh and Calah with Resen in between. The ruins of Calah are 20 miles from Nineveh. This supports the idea of metropolitan character of Nineveh. We might call this greater Nineveh. We tend to include the five boroughs of New York as New York, or Roxbury, Mattapan, Hyde Park, etc. as part of greater Boston. These were all individual towns or cities that eventually overlapped each other. Los Angeles is probably a better example in that it now encompasses hundreds of square miles, with its original downtown area but a small part. I understand that within what is now called Los Angeles there were once 28 separate cities. If we can accept all of this, we can reason that upon crossing the river, and thus to

the edge of the “greater Nineveh area”, it required a three days journey for Jonah to weave himself through the labyrinth of the “suburban cities” to reach the walled perimeter of this core portion of that “great city.”

Notice in chapter 3 verse 4 that as Jonah entered the City he cried, “... *Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*” It may be that he spoke many more words than those eight as he gave the Lord’s message. However it seems unlikely that he softened it in any way. Given his attitude, there is no reason to believe that he would have elaborated in any way that would offer them hope. Have you ever wondered how this simple message could have such a profound impact on the king and over several hundred thousand people within this huge metropolitan city? There was no radio, T.V., email or even megaphones. He probably spoke on every street corner from the Tigris River to the city hall, for the effect to have been what it turned out to be. He must have attracted huge crowds at every stop, and his words must have spread rapidly by word of mouth over the whole region. But why should crowds have gathered to hear this weirdo with his crackpot message? After all, this was a huge and powerful empire. They worshipped many gods and they had been good to them. Why should they have taken this guy and his God seriously?

Scripture gives us some clues for our imagination to feed on. First, he was preaching the Word of the great Creator God of whom they surely had heard, but apparently didn’t take as seriously as their other gods, as far as His involvement with them was concerned. However, here was a guy with a very convincing persona. He was probably bleached white as snow and bald as an onion from his physical ordeal in the fish. Such a spectacle would surely attract much attention by itself. However, if he told his whole story, including running from God and his 3-day trip in the fish that would have also perked their ears, for here was a man from the people of the great God.

His appearance certainly made the ordeal most plausible, but when he spoke of God having resurrected him and re-commissioning him to deliver to them this message, they really must have been severely shaken, for surely this great God had in fact sent this man to speak to them. Note also, as mentioned earlier, among their gods was Dagon, the fish

god. Because the great God used a fish for His own purpose, they could see that Jonah's message was from a far superior God than their fish god Dagon, or any of the others they worshipped. This God controlled the storms, had the power of raising the dead and even had authority over the fish of the sea. Even before he got to City Hall, verse 5 tells us that the people already believed, all of them, the greatest and the least of them. There is historical evidence that two plagues and a total eclipse of the sun had occurred a few years before Jonah came with his message. These may have been God's way of "softening them up" so as to be a little more receptive to His message.

Jonah's message required a very rapid response if there could be any hope of God's curse being negated. The rapid universal coverage it got over such a large population attests to there being many hundreds or thousands who heard him and became strong, impassioned messengers themselves. As far as we can see, Jonah didn't speak of any possible change of fate if they were to repent. He only spoke of their impending unavoidable doom. The king himself stated the hope of Gods' repentance if they repented, as we see in verse 8 and 9 of chapter 3. Nowhere else in Scripture do we find such a quick and complete spiritual turnaround on such a massive scale as this. Obviously, their repentance was not one of spiritual salvation, yet it was wide enough and deep enough and sincere enough for God to "change His mind" and spare them physically, for a while. What may have been God's purposes for this particular involvement with the Assyrians at that point in history? It is my suggestion that Assyria was at that time a rapidly growing evil power that God would eventually use to destroy the Northern Kingdom. The time was not yet right for that event. Israel had a ways further to go before God's patience would end, and His wrath against her would take place. While God knew that Nineveh would eventually revert to its old ways, this national repentance by Assyria would cause a respite both of their military aggressiveness and their geographical expansion.

The conquest and destruction of Jonah's country Israel, occurred over a century after he delivered his message to Nineveh. As God tells us in several places, He orchestrates things to happen "*in the fullness of time,*" that is, that things will happen according to His sovereign time schedule. There are several other examples in Scripture where God has



intervened in what seemed to be imminent and inevitable for this same reason. When the Northern Kingdom, had reached a certain point in their idol worshipping and departure from Him, He used the Assyrians as His instrument of punishing wrath. It seems reasonable to suggest that Nineveh's repentance provided the exact amount of delay of their expansionist policy so as to bring it in concert with God's timing for the punishment of Israel. God also orchestrated the growth in power of Babylon in a similar manner to later punish Judah, the Southern Kingdom, and also to destroy Assyria for their excessive cruelty in dealing with Israel. Another reason for His intervention in this manner was to demonstrate to Israel and other nations the magnitude and expanse of both His power and His mercy, even to heathen gentile nations. This was also an example for Israel to learn from. God had sent her many prophets preaching repentance and all had been rejected. Here through the words of but one small prophet, a great evil nation did hear and did repent.

Again back to our man Jonah. After having delivered his message, he moved out of the city and set up camp to wait and see what would happen. There is something very interesting here that we should not miss. God's message to Nineveh was that He would destroy them in forty days, period. As far as we are told there was no "escape clause" in that message. So why did Jonah find the commission so utterly distressing that he felt compelled to disobey and run from delivering it? Hating Assyria as he did, this would seem to have been as message after his own heart. What was the problem? What did he know that we are not privy to? As noted above, I believe he was a very sensitive soul who knew God far more fully than the story reveals. Ironsides put it very well when he observed that "these Ninevites addressed their prayers to Elohim; and as a result, we are told that God saw their works, that they turned from their evil ways, and God repented them of the evil, that He had said He would do unto them; and He did not (verse 10). Would any find a difficulty here? Let them know that He with whom judgment is a strange work is ever ready to repent Himself, and manifest His grace upon the least evidence of a breaking down before Him, and contrition of the heart because of sin." This is what Jonah knew about our merciful God, and feared that Nineveh might choose repentance and thus cause God to do so as well.

Before we go on, let us settle the issue of God's repentance. If we were to take that literally, we would be challenging God's omniscience. If God were able to change his mind, it would mean He didn't know all things and would therefore have to rectify His mistakes by changing His mind when things didn't go as he planned. Obviously this is ludicrous. God does not, and cannot change His mind. The fact of the matter is that God sometimes uses anthropomorphic, that is certain human attributes and terms, which He ascribes to Himself in order to make more clear what He chooses to convey to us. For instance Scripture speaks of God having "eyes" (2Chronicles 16:9). We read of the "arm of the Lord" in many places, even that He has "feathers" (Psalm 91:4). Of course God the Father is a spirit and therefore does not have any of these unless He chooses to manifest physically.

In the case under consideration, God knew exactly what Nineveh would do with the message because He knew exactly what effect it would have. He already put it in their hearts, especially the king's heart, to take a chance on God's merciful nature that they believed could "manifest" if their repentance was genuine. There is another interesting point to be noticed here in this context. This was a most wicked, pagan, idol worshipping culture, about as far removed from the true God worship as anyone could get. How did they know about the One true God, and why should they muster such fear of Him and such hope as to make this monumentally miraculous departure from their natural ways, and these based only on this tiny message delivered by a perfect stranger who came out of nowhere with no compelling credentials? This leads us to several insights that we should not miss:

1. As noted, they knew of the Creator God, the God of Israel, in that they knew to call Him Elohim. To me that in itself is most revealing. It amplified what Scripture has revealed to us several times, typically through Rahab and Balak and others. We must conclude from these evidences that most, if not all of the pagan world knew much about this great God of Israel who was able to part the waters of the Red Sea and of the Jordan river, destroy the entire economy and the armies

of Egypt, and support His million or more people for 40 years in an uninhabited wilderness, that was essentially absent of food and water. They obviously feared this God, but chose to ignore Him as long as He left them alone. They felt comfortable with their own idol gods and may have believed that this God, while He had these great powers, had limited His concern to what seemed to be His “own” people. Thus when this Israelite prophet came to them with his message from Elohim, they took it most seriously, knowing that He could deliver on His promise.

The message offered no hope, it was simply a decree of doom. The fact that it came with a definite time limit strengthened its legitimacy, for no man, absent a divine directive, would dare utter such a thing. Also, were it not truly from God, the prophet would not have chosen to hang around to see its fulfillment, but instead would have ran away as far as possible in order to escape their wrath for falsely alarming them. Because they didn’t go after him at the end of the 40 days when nothing happened, also speaks of their belief in the validity of the message, and of God’s repentance. They realized this was not a toothless threat from a false prophet.

2. They also must have known of Elohim’s merciful ways to those who obeyed. Having first learned of His great power as expressed by the Egyptian and the wilderness events, they no doubt kept watchful eyes on the Israeli nation. Therefore they were aware of Elohim’s continued protecting power over His people. They saw that He repeatedly rewarded, and punished in accordance with their obedience or disobedience to their covenant relationship. With these things in mind, it seems more understandable as to why they might believe the message, and yet take a chance that genuine repentance might reverse God’s decision. They had nothing to loose and much to gain by appealing to His loving, merciful nature. The fact that He had his eye on them and knew of their severe iniquities, and thereby sent them this warning, was in itself a potentially favorable sign in this regard.

3. Apparently the Assyrian religions did not involve real or false prophets or perhaps even priests at the time to confuse the issue. Therefore, the problem before them could be evaluated without the confusion that the Israelites suffered with their many real prophets and even more numerous false prophets.
4. We find the king ordering both man and animal to a complete fast and to be covered with sackcloth. They were also to “*cry mightily to God*” and to *turn every one from his evil way and from violence.*” This is rich with some surprising connotation as they admitted their very evil ways.
  - They apparently knew the ways of God’s people when they were trying to appease the Great God. Sackcloth and fasting were, I believe, unique to the Israelites, and had no standing in pagan culture. This ritual apparently provided the external trappings of true repentance to this God, so that it probably seemed to them a significant starting point in their repenting process.
  - They were to “cry mightily unto God.” That is to the God of Israel. This would be an additional external expression of their sincerity. Based on the king’s impassioned words, as expressed by their universal compliance, their hearts also must have been sincere and contrite, or God would have ignored the mere externals and carried out His threat.
  - Why didn’t they seek rescue from their own many gods, such as Dagon, Nabu, Asshur, Sin, Adad, and others? Obviously they knew these were inferior and useless against God. Why then didn’t they abandon these and long ago embrace the One and Only true God? For the same reason that a large portion of the world today does the same thing. They choose other gods that better suit their more liberal life styles, especially when all is going well they don’t need Him. Besides, they find little gods who are more tolerant and accommodating of their sinful pleasures. When a 9-11 type of situation occurs, we see hypocritical fearful hoards scurrying back to the true God, for a little

while, until the object of their fear passes. We see that this was also the case with Nineveh, because it wasn't long before they were again the cruelest, God ignoring, wicked, and powerfully aggressive nation on earth. How long did it last? A year, or several years? We don't know. However, it most likely lasted as genuine repentance at least several years, or probably a whole generation, for God to have accepted it. Our 9-11 "reformation" lasted a scant month.

- Their admission of their evil and violent ways from which they now choose to repent, speaks to the fact that they well knew right from wrong, and deliberately chose wrong as their way of life. (So is there anything different in our culture?) How else could they have known of what to repent from in order to placate God? This speaks compellingly of an innate knowledge of good and evil through a God-given conscience that even yet lived in them, but had been successfully subdued and subordinated by their evil human nature. Fortunately for them, they allowed it to manifest in this time of great peril and fear. (So what else is new?) There probably was a profound remembering of this event and the power of this God when their king Sennacherib's army, ready to lay siege to Jerusalem, suffered an overnight loss of 185,000 soldiers through the work of but one of God's angels. Eleven years earlier God had let them destroy the northern kingdom. After that slaughter of his soldiers, the king returned to Nineveh and was later killed by his own sons. Although Assyria retained dominance over the "world" for another one hundred and fifteen years, they never again sought to conquer Judah. It remained like a tiny independent island in a large sea of Assyrian power and control.
5. Another thing we may learn from this episode is something of which Scripture speaks very little. It shows us that God keeps watch over pagan Gentile nations as well as "His own people." This was something that from the beginning He had charged Israel to be a participant in, that is to go out, and "evangelize." It was something they failed to do, but finally will do during the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel

(Daniel 9:24) through the 144,000 (Revelation 7). Here was one example of God's divine intervention for the benefit of even pagan nations. Might we not consider this as but one case of God's many merciful acts about which He chose not to reveal? Perhaps this was recorded as an example so that we might realize that He is also active among other peoples, and is often most merciful to them, and not necessarily, just the God of vengeance and punishment, as most of the Old Testament seems to relate where pagan cultures are concerned.

In chapter four, we see a Jonah still pouting, peevish and provoking to God. It is a strange chapter, and one about which we might wonder why God chose to include. Because all of Scripture is for our learning, there is a purpose, even though it has nothing directly to do with the Nineveh story. Let us see what we can learn from it.

At the end of chapter three we are told that God repented of His judgment because they turned from their evil ways. Chapter four begins by telling us of the great displeasure Jonah felt because of this, and of his telling God that he had warned Him this would happen even before he left Israel, and that this was why he refused to obey Him. He concludes his remarks by asking the Lord to take his life because that would be better than living with the guilt and humiliation for his part in saving these hated people. To this our Lord only asked tenderly, in effect, *"Is doing well such displeasure to you?"* Jonah's words to God seem extremely bold, accusatory and lacking in due respect. This borders on being man-to-man- like bantering, rather than a man-to-God- like discussion. I can recall only one other incident in Scripture, where such boldness is expressed. Both are where Moses at Mt. Sinai argues with God regarding His threat to again destroy the whole human race because of sin. Abraham also "bargained" with God regarding Sodom, but in a far more respectful way.

What a strange situation this was. Men have despaired and left the ministry for their lack of success, while here Jonah wants to quit and die because of his success. However, that success was from God's perspective, not his. Perhaps Jonah's attitude was also the result of his recognition of how readily these pagan enemies yielded to God, while his own

people retained such obstinence to repentance, and to the honoring of God. Perhaps he saw this also as a bad omen for his people in that perhaps God would abandon them as His people in favor of other nations more prone to obedience. The fact is, God did put Israel on the shelf for a while because of their denial of Jesus. They have been there now for over 2000 years. However, we know, that those who read and understand what Scripture most clearly reveals, is that their day is coming soon, and all of God's promises to them through Abraham and through David will be fulfilled.

Verse 5 tells us that "*Jonah went out of the city*" to wait and see what would happen. It seems to me that perhaps the sequence may differ from where these words occur. The earlier conversation with God suggests that at that time, the 40 days had gone by, and repentance had taken place. Otherwise, why was he in such grief? It's logical that he left the city prior to the 40-day deadline so as not to be caught in the devastation that might occur if they didn't repent. So it seems that his departure indicated in verse 5 happened before the conversation of verse 1-4 occurred. So now we have Jonah sitting in his little shed on the hillside looking down on Nineveh, sulking and hoping to see something bad happen anyway.

Then "God prepared a gourd". I have read of plants like this that grow as much as 18 inches a day and have leaves two feet wide. However, this was supernatural in that it grew full size over night, so that it might provide a shadow over Jonah's head, and greatly comfort him during the heat of the day. But then, the next night, God sent a worm that killed the gourd, so that by the next morning it no longer provided any protection. He then sent a "vehement east wind" a super hot wind that caused Jonah to faint and again wish he were dead. What was that all about? It seems to have been a God-orchestrated object lesson. In verse 9 God asks the same question about Jonah's anger over the loss of the gourd, as he had in verse 4 regarding Nineveh, he asked that did it provide him any benefit to be angry over the loss of the gourd? Jonah had taken great comfort in the gourd, yet he failed to praise the Lord, even though he knew that it was through God's grace that he received it. So God justly deprived him of it, and added that hot wind so as to compound Jonah's discomfort, and thereby increase his appreciation of

what he had been given and then taken away. Our “gourds” wither also, and we wonder why. Can our lack of appreciation and gratitude for what we have also be the cause? Jonah seems to have been a chronic complainer. Could it be that we also see here that when there is such lack of gratitude, God is willing to provide the complainer a steady supply of things about which he can keep complaining? We should not miss the day-to-day relevance of this message for each of us.

Finally, we come to the crux of the issue that seems to be God’s viewpoint. God reminds him of the fact that he took great comfort in the gourd, something he didn’t lift a finger to provide and now he is angry because he no longer has it. For comparison, God now points out that there are 120,000 innocent people in Nineveh, probably the children who know nothing of the evil, who were not guilty of these great sins, but who would have nevertheless perished along with the evil ones, in this judgment. Should not God have offered repentance to the wicked for the sake of these children? Jonah said he did well to be angry but couldn’t prove it, while God said He did well to be merciful, and He did prove it! Later through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, God “did well” to the entire world of sinners who would believe in His Son.

Here the story ends. Had not our Lord memorialized it by His reference to it in Matthew 12, it most likely would have been relegated even more widely to the “why is it here” portion of Scripture. Yet as we have seen, there is much here to ponder, as God has chosen this book through which to reveal so much about Himself, as well as some valuable insights about faultiness of man’s continual condition.

To summarize Jonah’s brief hour on the stage, let’s look at the ten-recorded miracles God performed in order that His will would be done through him.

1. The first was the storm. God said that He caused it. It was extremely fierce, greater than any of these mariners had ever seen, and so they believed that it was supernaturally caused. The fact that it stopped instantly, as soon as Jonah was off the ship was further confirmation to them. This is a good example of how God



- uses natural things, as well as humans, in order to affect His will on people and events.
2. A second miracle was the selection by the mariners of Jonah as the one whose guilt caused the storm. As we look into it, some interesting things took place in the ship before Jonah was cast overboard. First the sailors, and passengers each prayed to their own gods for mercy, but it didn't work. It is logical that sailors would conclude that the storm was supernatural due to its unusual intensity. Pure superstition might cause them to believe that someone on board was responsible for this situation. However, it seems that the manner in which they were able to determine that it was Jonah, must enter the realm of the supernatural.

The ships that traveled long distances, as did this one, were large, and this one may have been carrying a hundred or more passengers and crew. We get some glimpse of this from Paul's shipwreck story (Acts 27:28). In order to determine who it was quickly, in the midst of the frightening turmoil, needed supernatural guidance. When they found Jonah asleep, they awakened him and asked him to pray to his god as well. Then they cast lots to see who on board may have been the one responsible for the anger of the gods. It was of course by God's divine call that the casting of lots revealed that Jonah was the one they sought. By his confession they knew that it was the Lord, the great God that they apparently knew about, but were not accustomed to dealing with. Even after they knew the whole story, they refused to punish Jonah, because they were not willing to shed innocent blood.

From their perspective, he had committed no sin worthy of death so they again attempted to row to land. When seeing that this was of no avail, they prayed to the Lord God, not to their gods, that what they must now do would not be charged against them. The moment Jonah was in the water the storm stopped. This it seems brought them to a faith in the One true God to whom they offered sacrifices and made vows. What kind of vows? I believe that their vows were to abandon their old gods and give full allegiance to our Creator God. I believe that we may

- see here a mass conversion to the real faith. They both feared, and were in awe of the God who punished his own for his transgression and had mercy on those who would recognize and worship His omnipotent nature.
3. The sudden subsiding of the storm was unmistakably the work of supernatural forces as the sailors well recognized and gave thanks to this most powerful God. Prior to this, it is evident that they were simply pagan worshippers of idols, as were the Ninevites. However, they probably also knew of the one true God as we might surmise from their subsequent action. It might be safe to conclude that this episode changed forever their religious understanding and faith.
  4. The great fish that God prepared “just happened” to be at the right place at the right time. Absent faith and recognition of God’s supernatural powers, one would need to conclude this was a mere coincidence. However, we who study Scripture, and are believers, know that there are no coincidences. The fish was there by divine appointment and divinely prepared for a divine purpose.
  5. The preservation of Jonah should be regarded as a miracle, whether or not he remained alive for the three days. Even though it’s alleged that others have survived similar experiences, does not negate it as a miracle in these cases as well. God uses “natural” phenomenon most often to perform miracles. God’s original miracle was the creation of everything from what seems to have been nothing. Therefore, all that exists, all “natural” things are miracles in their origin. How difficult then should it be for us to understand, or simply accept, that by His will He chose to manipulate “natural” things in unusual, and to us, mysterious ways in order to serve His purposes?

The skeptic, in order to explain away such things, must in desperation seek understandable “natural” causes for everything in order to remain in denial of God, or at least in the denial of an intervening God. To the skeptic, the storm was simply an unusually excessive wind, and its rapid subsidence concurrently with Jonah’s leaving the ship, was simply a coincidence. Jonah’s survival is but another unusual yet wholly possible event. However, to say he died and was resurrected cannot be allowed as only a possibility, because this would indeed be

explainable in no other way but through God's intervention. As noted earlier, and for the reasons there given, I believe that Jonah did die and was resurrected just as was Lazarus. These resurrections put them temporarily back into their corruptible bodies that would eventually die again. Jesus came back in His immortal, incorruptible body, the "First Fruit" of that incredible miracle that all redeemed souls will one-day share.

6. Not only was Jonah resurrected, but also he was delivered safe and sound on to dry land. While the location is not given, we can conclude that it was at a place appropriate to where his mission was directing him. It was not some island or random location along the vast shores of the Mediterranean Sea. That he was "sound" is evidenced by the fact he was able to proceed immediately on his mission without any mention of any recuperative need. I believe that this also supports the contention of his death and resurrection. His resurrection at the time of his ejection from the fish would explain his immediate fitness to travel. In fairness to the alternative view, the miracle could have also been God's intervention by immediately restoring his physical / mental health from the 3 days of trauma.
7. The repentance of the people of Nineveh may well be the greatest miracle mentioned in the Old Testament. The parting of the Red Sea, the ten plagues, and the forty-year survival in the wilderness might, by comparison, be considered as mere "parlor tricks" for our omnipotent God. That by mere delivery of a message of impending judgment from a God they barely knew, six hundred thousand to a million people repented of their well entrenched cruel, evil behavior, lifestyle and policies. The fact that they did this in a matter of days, is all but unbelievable. To me, it somehow goes well beyond my concept or understanding of "miracle". These were individuals, hardened, pride-filled, having rebellious wills, each different, yet all contrary to God's will. These were hardened hearts, each in their own ways softened and now moved to the will of God!  
Even the ten devastating plagues didn't soften Pharaoh's heart or that of his people. God's appearance at Mt. Sinai and the formation of the covenant failed to change the collective wills of His own people. Jesus' three and half year ministry

as God Himself among them didn't produce such an impact. For these reasons, this has to have been the greatest of all miracles in the context of earthly man's yielding to God's will so quickly and in such great numbers. Were all who repented redeemed to eternal life in the heavenlies? I don't believe that any were. Perhaps some small remnant may have been, but I believe that this was a fleshly repentance and not a "continue- to- end" spiritual one. They all most certainly changed their ways for a while, but there is nothing of note that would indicate that they became believers, worshipers and obeyers of the precepts God laid out for the Israelites to live by in order to be saved.

8. The gourd was given by God in a manner that was a miracle, in that it grew to full size overnight. What is to be said about it has already been said hereinabove. God gives generously.
9. The worm likewise was commissioned directly by God for a short but divine purpose as previously discussed. What God gives He can also take away.
10. And finally, the east wind was a unique God-ordained miracle wind, not unlike the first of these ten miracles. "*God prepared a vehement east wind.*" This nearly killed Jonah and also provided an additional reason to cause him to want to die. It seems to me that these last three acts of God were His way of perhaps "reconditioning" the backsliding Jonah. Before being tossed overboard, he realized his mistake. In the fish, and in Sheol, he was at least temporarily humbled and prayed for mercy. Then he was given a new life that he seemed to accept with a gratitude that caused him even with continued great reluctance to walk in obedience by carrying out his mission.

Once this was completed, we find him regressed to regrets and despondency at the success of his work. Now God, through the gourd, the worm and the wind seems to be passing him through trials that would bring him into accord with His continued purpose. I believe that an eleventh miracle is here in the making that is not revealed. That would be Jonah's finally getting it right in his heart regarding the superiority of God's way. God has allowed us to witness only a portion of Jonah's brief hour on the stage of history, only that, which was relevant to our

learning and understanding. I suspect that God wasn't finished with Jonah, and this chapter 4 episode is His initial way of bringing Jonah back into some other useful service not recorded in Scripture. The fact that we see here God's efforts to "recondition" him, suggests that there may have been something more to God's plan for the prophet. Just because many of us backslide at times, and so much so that we sense that His grace has been withdrawn and our purpose forfeited, does not mean that He is done with us. God is in the "reconditioning" business big time where His own are concerned. If you feel that you're in the woodshed being smacked on the butt, just realize that probably, that is exactly what is going on. He still has a purpose for you and will lead you back to it if you will leave your pity-party and talk seriously to Him with a contrite heart pray, and then just listen.

What should we take from this strange episode in the life of one of God's prophets? Most certainly there is much here for our learning, or else God would not have included it in His Book. Perhaps the following might serve as a summary of the more evident lessons He would have us apply to our own lives.

1. There is no hiding from God, no matter how far we run, or how deep we sink. Adam and Eve tried it in the garden. It didn't work then, nor can it ever be the answer to anything. This may seem too obvious to even mention, however, who hasn't, in their own way, tried to, or wished that they could, hide from God? Haven't we all committed "little" sins that we hoped He wouldn't notice or only "wink" at?
2. No one can succeed against God's will even the unsaved. Again, it seems too obvious to mention. However, Satan, the most intelligent created being of all, has sought to outwit and succeed against God ever since his venture in the Garden, and he will continue to do so until the end of the millennium. One way or another Satan does influence all lives. Read Revelation or Psalm 2! All the kings of the earth and their great armies will gather at Armageddon to war against God, even though they well know that it's God that they will fight! Also, at the end of the millennium, another great army of men led by Satan will attempt this again. We

all have the “Jonah complex” to some degree, as we believe that our way is better than God’s way and proceed to do that which is right in our own eyes, rather than seeking and doing it God’s way, regardless of whether or not we really understand it. (Judges 21:35). Every sin, that is every thought or action contrary to God’s will, is an act of rebellion against Him, whether we are willing to admit it or not.

3. Miracles, that is God’s personal involvement in our lives, happen somewhere all the time, even though we seldom recognize them happening. As He spared Nineveh, so also is He patient and long suffering of the iniquities of all nations and individuals, often dealing with them in miraculous ways. God spared Jerusalem by killing 185,000 Assyrians one night. In the first Iraqi war over 200 missiles aimed to do the most possible harm exploded on tiny, densely populated Israel yet not one Jew was killed. In the 1953 Arab-Israeli 6-day war, the Israelis were outnumbered over 40:1, in every way yet in those six days they had conquered or routed nearly all of the Middle East Arab countries including Egypt! Was all of this luck? Was it superior skill? No, not directly! It was God’s miraculous intervention protecting “His people” who one day soon will again accept Him as their God! Does He get credit for it? Not that you would notice. The ungodly don’t believe in God’s miracles. God showers the world daily with miracles in individual lives, especially those who are His own, or who will one day be His own. I know this most emphatically from many personal experiences.
4. In showing mercy on Nineveh, the capital of among the world’s most wicked and cruel people, God demonstrated the application of an earlier pronouncement to Moses when in Exodus 33:19 He said, “*..I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.*” How many other undeserving and wicked nations has He shown similar mercy? I think many, very many. In this modern day He has shown mercy beyond all human reason to at least one grossly undeserving nation, and this is ours. When will His mercy come to an end and His wrath descend on it? Soon, I fear. One of this country’s biggest industries and export items is pornography and other forms of moral depravity. What Scripture calls an

abomination is proudly paraded, government endorsed, and to even criticize it publically is deemed worthy of severe punishment, and even imprisonment!

This country has one of the most dangerous places on earth in which to dwell. That is in the womb, where every person who is there has a 40% chance of being murdered, even before they catch their first breath. About 30 years ago Billy Graham said that if God doesn't judge America, He should apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah. If it was true that long ago, he should now add Assyria, Babylon and just about every nation He has punished, to his list of those to whom He should apologize. As we look at the conditions today, that day of wrath seems to be getting very close. How incredulous and shocked would our founding fathers be to discover how deep into human depravity their nation has been able to sink? Who could have even imagined this back then, or even 60 years ago? Only the forces that planned and continue to direct it were able to do that.

5. God's will is expressed in two ways. His directive will and His permissive will. In the beginning there was only one will, His directive will. He created man with the capacity to express his own will apart from God's will, if man so chose. In doing so, in permitting man to have a will, God would no longer operate purely by His directive will. Where man's will differs from His, in permitting it, portions of God's will became a "permissive" will. We see this expressed most clearly and simply in the Jonah story. God "directed" Jonah to deliver a message to Nineveh. By his own will, Jonah chose to do otherwise, but could do so only in accordance with God's "permissive" will. Then by God's "directive" will He caused events of such a nature so as to countermand Jonah's will, forcing him to adhere to God's directed will. The main theme of the Bible is Jesus. However, it is also a course in understanding God's directive will. All violations of God's directive will, even though they are permitted, are sinful, and sin always has bad earthly consequences, even though the consequences may not be immediately, or even ever, recognized as such.

This perhaps is what gives rise to the idea that some sins can be hidden from God. They cannot! It's just that the consequences are not recognized as resulting from a particular cause. The summation and compounding of all of the consequences of sin is what has created the world of pain and suffering. If we realize that all sin is simply the application of those aspects of man's free that are in any way other than in accordance with God's directive will, we can begin to understand why pain and suffering exists. Again, it is because the consequences of sin are always painful, enduring, compounding, and infectious to all of creation. The Jonah story expresses, in a very simple and direct way, how this works.

There was no doubt in Jonah's mind as the storm raged, that his sin, that action contrary to God's directive will, was the cause of it, as were also the severe pains and suffering that he then endured. If only the consequences of each of our individual sins could be that quickly and clearly recognized, the amount of sin in the world would shrink greatly.

Instead, each sin is like a single drop of evil falling into an accumulation of trillions of other drops of sins forming a lake of evil that overflows as earthly consequences. These spread out, to a large degree in a manner that seems arbitrarily, across the entire sea of humanity in the form of pain and suffering. Under these circumstances, there is a total disconnect between our individual sins and their justified consequences. That is why we cannot understand the seemingly arbitrary and unfair nature of the disbursement of that pain and suffering. Furthermore, we tend to underestimate the seriousness of our sins, and to overlook many of them. Therefore we find even less reason for our predicament. As a result, most of pain and suffering are blamed on God, for who else has the power to be so universally unfair? We tend to reason that if it's not our fault, and no one else seems to be the cause, then it has to be God's fault. Also, He has the power to prevent pain and suffering, so why doesn't he? Because He is not the cause of it, and because to do so would only encourage much more sin. Collectively we have unwittingly sentenced ourselves, and He has chosen to let



the sentence stand. Jesus that is God Himself, sacrificed Himself to provide just payment for all sins that condemn the soul. This sacrificial payment did not include the earthly consequences of sin. Man must suffer and deal with these himself.

If you belong to Jesus as a redeemed soul, you are in the process (sanctification) of shrinking your contribution to that lake of sin. You also have the blessed hope, that faith tells you that no matter how painful it gets here, one day soon all who share that faith will be rescued, and forever removed to that sinless, painless place with God in the heavenlies. How sad it is for the great many who refuse to see the light and the truth God has provided through Scripture. Their tragic fate is to simply leave this life of pain and suffering and proceed to the “lake” in the outer darkness where there is a more intense and eternal source of pain and suffering. Why must they go there? It is not because of the accumulation of sins that resulted from even the worst sinful lives. There is only one sin that will send them there. It is the sin of their unbelief and lack of acceptance of Jesus as their Lord and Savior. However, in the end, even the magnitude and number of their sins will be relevant in that this will determine the intensity of their eternal punishment. If you are running from God, and refusing His blessed grace, stop, turn around, and genuinely accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior before it is too late. Remember, in this dangerous and precarious life, “too late” might be only a minute away.