



BETHEL CHURCH  
INTERNATIONAL WORSHIP CENTRE



A STUDY ON THE BOOK OF

# JONAH





# THE BOOK OF JONAH

When most people think about the Book of Jonah, they think about an adventurous children's story. Others recollect a story they have heard so many times that they assume there couldn't be anything new to learn from it.

What do you think about the Book of Jonah? Have you fathomed its hidden truths? Or are these truths lost in a sea of fascinating incidents in the life of this prophet? One thing's for sure – the *Book of Jonah is more than a whale of a story!*

The name, Jonah, is mentioned only once in the Old Testament outside the book chosen for our study. **2 Kings 14:25** identifies him as the son of Amittai and as a prophet during the reign of Jeroboam II (786–746 B.C.) in the northern kingdom. He lived in *Gath-Hepher* in the Zebulun territory, better known as Galilee - the town where Jesus ministered – situated a few miles from Nazareth. In accordance with Jonah's prophecy in 2 Kings, Jeroboam II expanded the territory of Israel, restoring its boundaries to Lebanon, even capturing the city of Damascus, the capital of the Aramean kingdom, which was constantly at war with Israel during the time of Elisha (14:25, 28). Jonah was recognized as the prophet of Israel right after Elisha's demise.

The Book of Jonah is an account of a person's encounter and struggle with God. It is power-packed with theological truth and practical implications. As we follow the storyline, we realize that analyzing Jonah is like looking in the mirror. We may not like what we see. Many a time we have run away from God and His explicit guidance. We have also run back to Him in times of need. When we reminisce further, we remember the delight of running with God. But sometimes we run ahead of God and give Him our suggestions and advice.

*Prophet Jonah is a comic figure: he is wrong at almost every turn, yet through him, the LORD God of Israel does everything right.* In order to understand this book, we must be willing to identify with the ridiculous prophet. Otherwise, we will miss the point of the joke.

Jonah means “Dove” and interestingly Jonah is appointed as God’s messenger of peace for a place that is bound for destruction. Also, Jonah, the son of Amittai, means “Son of Faithfulness.” So, in full, Jonah is the “dove of peace founded on truth and faithfulness”.

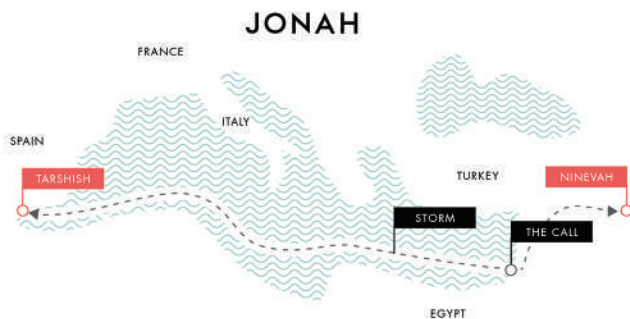
One will find that Jesus identifies Himself with the story of Jonah when He says, “*the sign of Jonah*” is given to an evil and adulterous generation who is seeking after a sign (Matthew 12:38–42, Matt. 16:1–4, Luke 11:29–32). Therefore the story of Jonah is of great significance in the life of a believer.

# THE BIG IDEA

**The central theme of the Book of Jonah is God's nature of mercy for all humankind.**

Jonah's life leads us to a place where we realize that our God is way bigger than what we thought. Not only will we learn everything we wanted to know about the brutal Assyrians of Nineveh, ancient seafaring ships, and large aquatic creatures, but we will also be challenged with the same message that confronted Jonah - **Are we willing to let God be God, to move us out of our comfort zones, and embrace a calling that might be quite uncomfortable?**

In the book of Jonah, upside-down seems to be the right side up. Everybody does the opposite of their stereotypes - the pagans repent but Jonah doesn't. The sailors worship Yahweh but Jonah is angry with Yahweh. The sea, the wind, the plant, and the people in the land obey God, except Jonah. The only constant is God's character of forgiveness and inclusion. **The question here is do we really believe and obey God with all our hearts?**



# CHAPTER SUMMARY

The book of Jonah is divided rather accurately into two halves, in both of which Jonah is a blessing to the Gentiles, but not to himself. He is indeed the only Israelite in the story, and because of him everyone is saved from the wrath of God: a boatload of Gentiles in the first half, and the great city of Nineveh in the second half.

You will find an interesting literary design in having similar patterns of events in both halves of the book.

Jonah 1	Jonah 2	Jonah 3	Jonah 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arise</li> <li>• God's word</li> <li>• Jonah &amp; Sailors</li> <li>• Perish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jonah's Prayer</li> <li>• Sea &amp; Fish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arise</li> <li>• God's word</li> <li>• Jonah &amp; Ninevites</li> <li>• Perish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jonah's Prayer</li> <li>• Plant &amp; Worm</li> </ul>

## Chapter 1

### Running away from God

**Jonah 1:3:-**  
*"But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord."*

## Chapter 2

### Running back to God

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

## Chapter 3

### Running with God

**Jonah 3:3:-**  
*"So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord."*

## Chapter 4

### Running ahead of God

**Jonah 4:1:-**  
*"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry."*



# JONAH 1 RUNNING AWAY FROM GOD

## THE PRODIGAL PROPHET

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

Prophet Jonah’s clear mission from God was to go to a great city called Nineveh, and to cry out



against them – i.e., to bring God’s word to Ninevites about their sins and lead them to repentance. But instead of heeding the voice of God, he runs away from the task.

Like the rest of the Prophets, Jonah received the word of the Lord. But unlike the rest, he became an example of an utterly disobedient prophet who ran away from God’s presence instead of obeying God’s word. Though there were some resistant prophets like Moses, Elijah, and Jeremiah who questioned their capability and became disillusioned in their calling, Jonah outdid them all by stepping lower where he thought the voice of God would not reach him. He was more resistant to his call than Moses or Jeremiah, and more comic than Elijah, in that he too wanted to die, but only after an outstandingly successful prophetic crusade!

Background of Nineveh: Nineveh was situated on the east bank of the Tigris River. God, Himself, calls the city of Nineveh a great city. Modern excavations indicate a city of great size—the walls were eight miles in circumference. For Jonah, Nineveh simply meant the centre of Assyrian power and the greatest enemies of Israel. Assyria loomed as a threat to Israel's safety and survival. Also, Nineveh's sins were recorded in detail by the prophet Nahum. These sins included theft, witchcraft, worshipping false gods, cruelty, and plotting evil. Each was an atrocity to God and, rightly so, to God's people. Jonah was a member of a culture that believed the Ninevites' behaviour was worthy of punishment. In the latter part of Israel's history, Assyria captured northern Israel and took many into exile.

Why did Jonah run away from God's mission?

*There were many reasons why Jonah became a rebellious, prodigal prophet. Some are listed below:*

1. He could have been afraid to undertake the difficult task of prophesying to a wicked and cruel city.
2. He hated Ninevites because they were the enemies of Israel.
3. He wanted Nineveh to perish in their sins and was looking forward to God's punishment over them.
4. Above all, there was a deeper reason for Jonah's hesitation to visit Nineveh. In the last chapter of Jonah, he describes what exactly was going on in his mind: "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 4:2).* This phrase echoes the words spoken by Yahweh to Moses about His nature (**Exodus 34:6**). Jonah knew his Scriptures and the heart of God. The prophet turned his back on Yahweh’s command to go to Nineveh because he suspected that if Ninevites responded and repented, God would be merciful to them. This formed the inner core of Jonah’s resistance. The last thing Jonah wanted to do was become an agent for the salvation of his arch-enemies.

Jonah was a faithful prophet as long as God’s plan matched his desires. But when God’s marching orders were contrary to Jonah’s perceived journey, he would not do as he was told.

Ironically, in the end, the whole city repented except for Jonah.

### **Tarshish or Ninevah?**

**Jonah 1:3:-** *“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.”*

The phrase *“from the presence of the Lord”* literally means

**Nineveh** was the epitome of everything Jonah hated in the Gentile world. It was a synonym for Godless tyranny. It was an idolatrous, sin-ridden city in Jonah’s mind, and nothing was more repulsive or repugnant than going there to preach repentance. Jonah’s theology was dominated by a funnel concept of providence—that God’s power and control were limited to the covenant people.

*“from the face of the Lord”* and appears 16 times in the Hebrew Bible. The first time is in the story of Cain’s exile from Eden after his brother’s blood cried out from the ground (Genesis 4:16). The author of Jonah brings very clear analogies of disobedience between Jonah and Cain, something to be noticed while reading the text.

Nineveh, though a place detested by the people of God, had divine appointment for the prophet of God.

Tarshish signifies a false Eden where people like to build their own kingdom without dependence on God. Jonah flees to Tarshish just as all biblical characters attempt some kind of *“return to Eden”* by their own power and scheming.

**Tarshish** is the place of Gold. The mention of Tarshish is seen in the story of Solomon where ships of Tarshish brought gold and other exotic items every year (2 Chronicles 9:21).

The *“ships of Tarshish”* are a source of wealth, idolatry, and pagan influence in Israel and, therefore, a target for Yahweh’s judgment (Isaiah 2:12-16)

Most of us have our own Nineveh and Tarshish. One is the city of faithfulness and obedience; the other is a place of escape and evasion.

Our Ninevehs are those clear revelations of the will of God. It can also be those we hate or whom we have judged. Nineveh can simply be the Lord urging us to change our behaviour or do some obedient action that demands more than we are ready to give.

Whatever else, Nineveh is the call of God sounding in our hearts to put Him first, be His person, and accept our vocation to be servants in mission.

But running off to our Tarshish can happen in our soul long before we physically head for Joppa or board a ship travelling in the opposite direction. Some run away from God without ever leaving their geographical location. We can run away by filling our lives with activities so that God is squeezed out of it.

Interestingly, as a preacher says, *a Jonah lurks in every Christian heart, whining his deceptive message of arrogant prejudice, and empty traditionalism, but with an exclusive solidarity to God.*”

Jonah is trying to flee from the one God from whom no one can escape, the God who looks down from heaven to survey the whole surface of the sea and the earth and all who dwell therein. Can you really hide from the Lord whom David describes in **Psalm 139:7-10**:- *“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? <sup>8</sup>If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. <sup>9</sup>If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, <sup>10</sup>Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me.”*

Jonah thought he was finished with God, but God was not finished with the defecting prophet. You can run but you can't hide from an omnipresent, omniscient God.

## JONAH, THE SHIP AND THE SAILORS

**Jonah 1:4:-** *“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 had a false idea that he could flee the presence of God. He lost. After he had boarded the ship for Tarshish, he immediately went below to anesthetize himself with sleep.

The sea became boisterous with turbulent waves breaking over the ship. The sailors cried out, each one to his own God (v. 5).

Yahweh, the only and true God, was not beseeched to help because none of the sailors knew

Him. The only person on board

who did know Yahweh was asleep in the hull trying to sleep off the calling he had rejected. The captain of the ship found Jonah sleeping and requested him to pray to his God. The words must have mocked the runaway prophet.



Meanwhile, the sailors cast lots to identify the guilty person on board, who was the cause of the storm (v. 7). The idea behind this was that some God or Gods were angry about someone on the ship, and they were all being punished because of him. Interestingly the sailors knew that Jonah had been running away from God's presence.



**Jonah 1:10:-** *“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.*

At this point, Jonah knew that he had totally blown it and put the whole ship in danger, but his repentance or fear was unclear.

Jonah knew that the storm was God’s judgment on him, but why didn’t he either set things right with God or get off the ship? Instead, Jonah made the sailors responsible. *“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”* (v. 12)

Note that the ship’s crew tried everything before complying with Jonah’s request to be thrown overboard. They tried to row to shore, but the sea got even more tempestuous (v. 13). Then it was the sailors, not Jonah, who prayed to Yahweh (v. 14). It was an amazing prayer of confession and contrition to the Lord. After they did throw Jonah overboard, the sea ceased raging (v. 15). Then they knew that Yahweh was, indeed, sovereign over the sea.

Shuddering in awe and wonder, **these sailors who had previously worshiped an assortment of false gods became people who worshiped Yahweh and vowed to serve Him.** Strange twist. Jonah would not go to Nineveh to prophesy to the Gentiles there, but he was caught in a situation wherein



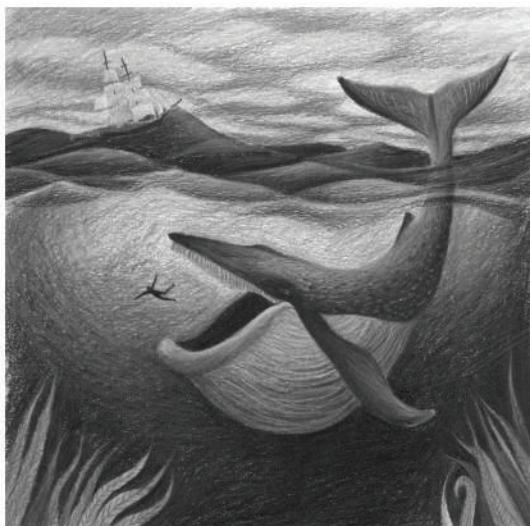
Gentile sailors believed in Yahweh because of Jonah's disobedience against the God who made the sea and dry land. God intended to use the prophet regardless of his resistance.

## JONAH AND THE BIG FISH

**Jonah 1:17:-** *“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.”*

As Jonah was drowning in the sea, the Lord provided a great fish to rescue him from the waters of death. The subject of the first sentence is not the great fish, but the Lord. The point the author wants to make is that God provided a way to deliver Jonah. The outstanding thing is God's intervention to save Jonah and give him a second chance to

follow his original call to go to Nineveh. This point is often lost in the volumes of scholarship on the Book of Jonah as they focus on the big fish.



The biblical authors were aware of great, monstrous creatures in the deep sea. They were considered deities among Israel's neighbours, but for the biblical authors, they were extremely powerful creatures who were under the rule of their Creator. These sea monsters were also known as *Leviathans* (Genesis 1:21, Job 3:8, Job 40:25–41:26, Psalm 74:14, Psalm 104:26, Isaiah 27:1.) Modern bible scholars consider the great fish as whales.

### **EXILE AND BAPTISM IMAGES**

Jonah, swallowed by a great fish or sea monster, is a parallel image to the Jewish people going into exile, yet still alive and having a future as they sing songs in the belly of the beast...” There is a reference to Egypt and Babylon as great sea monsters that swallowed God's people into exile and slavery. Ezekiel 29:3 and Jeremiah 51:34 show images of Israel being “*swallowed up*”, which is consistently an image of being overcome by enemy nations. But God's power can protect His people despite their “exile and slavery” to ensure that re-created people can emerge on the other side.

Jonah, drowning in the depths of the sea is also an image of baptism, especially of that moment when water closes over the head of a believer, who is buried with Christ. Baptism assures you that you have already died with Christ and are now being raised up with God for eternal life. So now we live because of His mercy and salvation.

Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. Skeptics say that no whale could swallow a man in the first place, and, even if it did, the man would certainly never survive three days and three nights in its belly due to lack of oxygen. That's why it's a miracle and our Lord Jesus Christ accepted the account as a true event. He said, *"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."* (Matthew 12:40)

### **JESUS CHRIST AS A SIGN OF JONAH**

When the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign to prove that He was the Son of God, He told them to consider Jonah. What was Jesus talking about?

**Matthew 12:38-41:-** *"Then some of the scribes and the Pharisees replied, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." And he answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and a sign shall not be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah was in the belly of the sea monster three days and three nights, so shall the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. The men of Nineveh shall be resurrected in judgment with this generation and condemn it. For they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold a greater than Jonah is here."*

The Pharisees refused to acknowledge that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah and continued to harass Him for a sign that proved His divinity. Jesus only referred them back to the sign of Jonah and called them a wicked and adulterous generation.

Just like Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights, and was resurrected to preach in Nineveh, so was to be the death and resurrection of Jesus. If we don't get this, it is because we think there is some greater or better sign, which He could give us. That is precisely what makes us evil and adulterous: we are to forsake all others and cleave to this one – *His death and resurrection alone as a sign of our salvation.*

To call Jesus "*the sign of Jonah*" does not mean that He signifies Jonah. The reverse is closer to the truth. In calling Himself the sign of Jonah, Jesus makes Himself the sign to end all signs. Interestingly, Jonah offered Nineveh no sign, but himself. Jonah did no miracles in Nineveh and had little to say to the people in Nineveh. Jonah showing up in Nineveh itself was a sign of God's salvation. The Ninevites knew better, and when Jonah came as a sign among them, they believed his word and repented. Similarly, Jesus came into this world miraculously and continued to perform miracles and heal people. Since people chose to disbelieve, the only sign that was left for them was the sign of Jonah.



## JONAH 2 RUNNING BACK TO GOD

### JONAH'S PSALM FROM THE BELLY OF THE FISH

**Jonah 2:1-2:-** *“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.”*

Jonah had tried to run away from God. Now he ran back to God in prayer, which is described in the Psalm of Jonah 2:1–9. It is filled with moving expressions similar to the Psalms and the devotional messages of his people. The psalm expresses Jonah’s rediscovery of Yahweh’s omnipresence and His grace to those who turn to Him in their distress.

First, the prayer shows us how to converse with God in the midst of failure, when our distress has been caused by our own disobedience. Often, this is when it is most difficult to pray because our self-condemnation makes us think that either we have no right to call on God or if we did, He would not listen. If an errant like Jonah could pray through affliction, which he brought on himself, so can we. God meets us even in our self-imposed trouble. He brings us to the place where we acknowledge the impossibility of making it through a self-imposed crisis without His help. He allows us to discover the gift of darkness, and death to self-wilfulness before He resurrects us out of our tomb.



The second thing we learn from Jonah's psalm is to thank the Lord for confronting us with our disobedience. The storm at sea convinced Jonah that he could not escape from God. His rebellion was exposed. Actually, it is a great source of hope for us to know that He will not let us continue forever in our personal brand of rebellion. It would be devastating if God did not care enough to pursue us when we try to flee from Him.

So the lesson Jonah learned is that his disloyalty became an idol and it almost cost him his relationship with God, who is consistently loyal and steadfast in mercy. It is a new Jonah who confesses loyalty to God in verse 9. He promises to sacrifice, express thanksgiving, and pay his vows to Yahweh. His near-death experience brought him running back to God. With personal conviction, he could say *"Salvation is of the Lord."* He was ready to obey and share with Nineveh the mercy he had experienced. *"So, the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land."* (v. 10).



## JONAH 3 RUNNING WITH GOD

### JONAH OBEYS AND NINEVEH REPENTS

**Jonah 3:1-4:-** *“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you. 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!”*

In Chapter 3, Jonah is called back to the mission. Charles Spurgeon once said, *“He who obeys God, trusts God; and he who trusts God, obeys God.”* When God first called Jonah to go to Nineveh, the son of Amittai simply could not trust that Yahweh was right in extending His mercy and giving the enemies an opportunity to repent. Jonah did not trust that God knew what He was doing. The *“death-water”* conversion shocked Jonah into promising that he would obey God. And so, God trusted Jonah to spearhead the mission.

The message received by Nineveh, is condensed into only five Hebrew words in verse 4 - *“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”* Surely Jonah’s message was longer than this, but the book’s author emphasises that the prophet

got right to the point. Jonah preached his decisive message as he walked into the centre of the city, announcing Yahweh's message to the city. He did not bother to discern whether people liked him or approved of his message and surely did not wait for a response from them.

Astoundingly, the response to Jonah's brief, sharp message was positive. The Hebrew text clearly states that the Ninevites put their trust in God. But it was not the prophet's rhetoric or oratory skills that swayed the city. Yahweh was working through him. In this context,

faith is a gift from God. The account of the gifted faith of the Ninevites had a profound impact on the readers of this book. They were forced to see that faith in Yahweh is not an exclusive gift. It also exposed their lack of faith in Yahweh as they rejected many of God's prophets in the past. This is exactly what the author of the Book of Jonah intended!

**"Yet Forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown!"**

In the Bible the number forty indicates a time of trial or testing that leads to holiness, renewal, homecoming, and salvation.

The waters of Noah's flood are upon the earth for forty days (Gen. 7:17),

Moses is on the mountain with God for forty days (Exod. 24:18), and

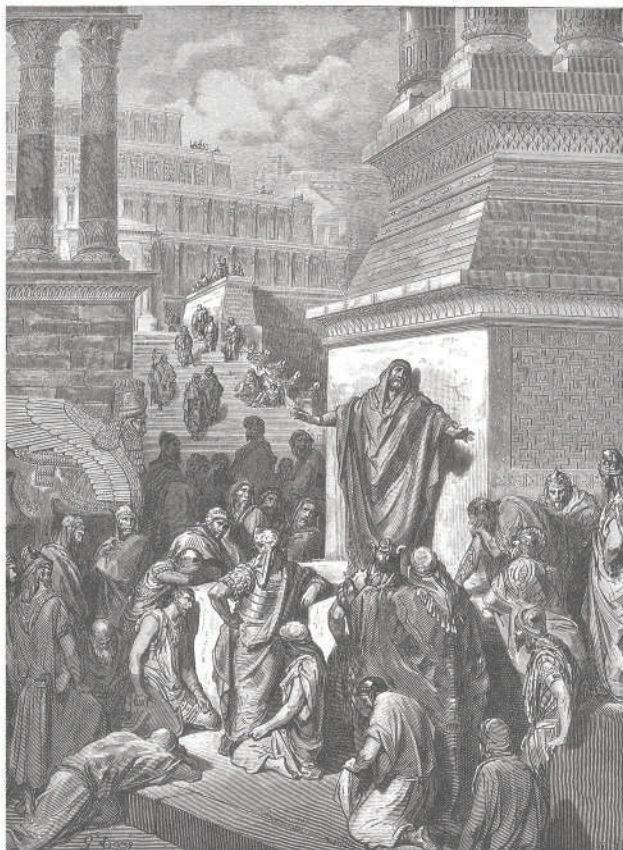
Ezekiel bears the iniquity of Judah for forty days (Ezek. 4:6).

Israel's forty years in the wilderness pointed to the forty days when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness after his baptism.

Jonah was already baptised, plunged into the depths of the sea and brought back up to new life: could it be that these were his forty days of testing?



Scripture explains: *“The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers, ‘Turn from your evil ways ...’ but they would not listen but were stubborn like their fathers, who did not believe the LORD their God”* (2 Kgs. 17:13–14). It was precisely because they did not heed such warnings that Israel was taken into exile in Assyria. So, when the Ninevites believed God (Jonah 3:5) and turned from their evil ways, the people of Nineveh survived long enough to destroy the people of Israel. Ironically, the people of Nineveh turned to God while the Israelites did not.



Ninevites put their repentance into action. The king led a city-wide movement of repentance that encompassed “the greatest to the least” of Nineveh (3:5). He sent out a decree calling all people, including his court, to fast.

*In Judaism, the book of Jonah is read on each Jewish festival and days of fasting. Yom Kippur is the day of national repentance and forgiveness in Judaism. But why read Jonah? Because it speaks of God’s willingness to forgive anyone who is willing to repent and turn from their evil ways.*

Nothing in the story so far prepared us for the stunningly abrupt good news that is captured in this verse - “And the people of Nineveh believed God.” It is hard to resist adding: “And it was counted to them for righteousness” just like Abraham believed God. So, God changed His mind in response to the people’s repentance.

This is the kind of good news the Bible often likes to give us - by putting to shame those who like to call themselves believers but don’t believe in a godly lifestyle. Jesus, Himself, had similar things to say about how the gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon would have repented in sackcloth and ashes if He had done His great works among them, but the cities of Israel did not wish to hear and believe Him (Matt. 11:21–22; Luke 10:13–14).

Jonah was strategic in the process because he ran with God. But he neither expected nor desired the repentance that resulted from his message.



## JONAH 4 RUNNING AHEAD OF GOD

### AN ANGRY PROPHET

**Jonah 4:1-3:-** *“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 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. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!”*

The runner who fled from God, then ran back to Him in the depths of the ocean, and later ran with Him in proclaiming His message to Nineveh, was now running ahead of God in questioning Yahweh's mercy for the Ninevites.

His commitment to his concepts of how God should act was stronger than his commitment to God Himself. And all his protestations of love for Israel were only a projection of his devotion to himself. Clinging to the prejudiced presupposition that Yahweh was the exclusive God of the people of Israel, Jonah had developed a theology that wasn't open to alterations, so much so that he refused to let even God change it.

In essence, the hard inner core of Jonah proclaimed, *“This is what I believe about God, and not even He is going to change it!”* At no point did Jonah say, *“Yahweh, I was in terrible error when I refused to visit Nineveh. You are Sovereign, and I acknowledge Your power to do whatever You decide and to offer Your mercy to whomever You will.”* Jonah’s problem was that he wanted to control God! And what do we do when we cannot get our own way? We get angry... Very angry!

Jonah’s prayer in 4:2–3 shows that he is just as wilfully stubborn as he was when God called him back to his hometown. Jonah’s anger was caused by his realization that he could not manipulate God. Jonah could not get the Almighty to change His mind, and to carry out Jonah’s will that the Ninevites be destroyed for their wickedness. We play God when we continue to be angry with people and groups that God has forgiven. We take their punishment into our own hands.

Jonah saw his death as the only way to get away from God. Fleeing to Tarshish did not work. But Jonah thought that death would give him separation from the God of pity whom he had come to hate because he had no say on who would receive God’s forgiveness.

## A MERCIFUL GOD

**Jonah 4:10-11:-** *“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. 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?*

In response to Jonah’s anger, God asked him a question: *Is it right for you to be angry?* (4:4) God did have the right and cause to be angry with the Ninevites. He also had the right to offer forgiveness. But who was Jonah to express anger when Yahweh chose not to destroy Nineveh? *“Vengeance is Mine”* (Lev.19:18; Deut. 32:35 ).

Jonah would not answer the Lord’s question. He went out to the east side of Nineveh and built himself a shelter and sat under it, peering out over the city hoping that the Lord might reverse His mercy. The Lord was merciful in showing kindness despite Jonah’s angry silence. He provided a leafy plant to grow and to give the prophet protection from the blazing sun. The purpose of the shade tree was to remind Jonah about the goodness of God. Jonah was delighted with the shade but still, he showed no compassion towards Nineveh. He was unwilling to connect God’s graciousness towards him with God’s graciousness to Nineveh.

So, the Lord prepared a worm to attack and destroy the plant, which made Jonah angry. God was trying to point out the confusion in Jonah's thinking. The Lord's new question really puts Jonah on the spot. *"Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"* (4:9). Jonah's pity on the plant was clearly a projection of his own self-pity. If he thought he had a right to pity himself and the plant, did not God have a right to pity Nineveh?

If Jonah could have accepted God's sovereign right to show pity on whomever He chose and repented of his efforts to control God, the prophet could have received the precious pity he lacked so much. The Book of Jonah ends abruptly without that crucial repentance from the unwilling prophet.

On a personal level, the Book of Jonah forces us to see our own power struggle with God. *Where are we right now? Are we in a Tarshish of escape or in a Nineveh of obedience? And what about the hard inner core of ego that has never been given over to God's control? Are there people we resist loving or caring for because of their contradiction with our values, beliefs, or lifestyle? Who are our personal Ninevites? If the Lord said, "Arise, go ...," what would be most difficult to obey? "Do we love the people of Nineveh?" Let us consider what we struggle with God about. What is the command we find most difficult to obey? What instructions from God make us panic? What prompts us to say, "Anything but that Lord"? What assignment from the Lord causes us to dig our heels in?*

Let's learn to Run with God.

## ● CONCLUSION ●

The God of the Bible is very much in the practice of challenging His people with counter-cultural messages that call them to be more than they think they can be ...to stretch them further, push them harder, so that God's people can be more like Him and less like the world we find ourselves in. The message of Jonah is to challenge every believer to move out of their comfort zone of narrow-mindedness and biases, and embrace God's global vision for the world. Let's ensure that Jesus will not have to say what He said of His own generation – "*Ninevites did better than us*" (Matthew 12:41; Luke 11:32).







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