



JONAH

.....

LOIS ENGELBART

EDITED BY
ROBERT WOLFF

LIVING WAY
BIBLE STUDY

Living Way Bible Study, Inc. (LWBS) is an auxiliary of the Pacific Southwest District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). All studies are written and/or edited by LCMS pastors. We have been providing studies to churches throughout the U.S. and Canada since 1982.

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WELCOME TO LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY (LWBS)

LWBS is a practical course of study with a special emphasis on the application of God's Word to the life of the individual. While emphasizing practical application, LWBS presents each book of the Bible as the holy, inspired Word of God, the confessional position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Our purpose is to help equip believers to live joyfully in God's redeeming love and to share with others God's plan of salvation.

It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will use this study to help you grow in your knowledge and appreciation of our God and His Word. *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (2 Peter 3:18).

STUDY STRUCTURE

LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY SUGGESTS THIS FOUR-STEP METHOD

- 1. PERSONAL** – The student prays for guidance from the Holy Spirit and answers the Personal Application (P.A.) questions at home using only the Bible (no commentaries).
- 2. SMALL GROUPS** – The class meets for an opening and divides into small groups of 8–10 people. The small group leader guides the group through the P.A. questions, encouraging each to share their answers and discuss further as time allows.
- 3. THE MESSAGE** – The lecture or message is given by a pastor or layperson who has researched the material and presents the study, giving personal insight and augmenting, but not duplicating, the author's comments.
- 4. THE NARRATIVE** – The author's comments or narrative, along with the P.A. questions for the next lesson, are given out at the end of the class. At the next class meeting, before answering the P.A. questions, the small groups may choose to review the author's comments of the last lesson, and share what each has highlighted as meaningful or important.

With this four-step method the student has the opportunity to study the particular section of Scripture covered by the lesson from four different approaches. This emphasizes the Bible text and gives the student an understanding and ownership for each section studied.

Each lesson should be stapled together according to the number of the lesson in the right-hand corner of the page. The P.A. questions for the next week should be attached after the author's narrative for the current week, as they will be the home study for the next class session.

The first meeting of the class is an introduction to the study. Since the members of the small groups have no P.A. questions to discuss at the first meeting, they may use the time to get acquainted or to tell what they hope to receive by studying this course. At the first meeting, the lecturer presents background information about the course, using the Introduction lesson as a guide.

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Jonah

LOIS ENGELBART

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LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY

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1 & 2 Samuel

1 & 2 Kings

Jonah

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LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY



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“God understands our human frailty and He is willing to forgive, correct and redirect our lives when we fail to obey Him.”

INTRODUCTION

We have all heard exaggerated stories beginning with “the biggest fish I ever caught,” followed by a description of the “fish that got away.”

The story of Jonah might be titled, “the biggest fish that caught me, when I was trying to get away”...from God’s call on my life.

CRITICISM OF THE BOOK OF JONAH

The book of Jonah has been a point of contention among theologians for centuries. It has been labeled fiction by some, a myth by others and a parable by still others. Many refuse to believe that the God who made the heavens, the earth, the starry hosts and the sea, could have miraculously saved one of His wayward children in the belly of a great fish, which He had created, and then spit him out unharmed on the Mediterranean shore.

Skeptics may want to read the “Weekly World News” of June 16, 1987 which stated, “Shark swallowed fisherman then spit him out alive.” Mikado Nakamura gave an interview from his hospital bed in Kanazaw, Japan.

But Jonah’s encounter was vastly different from Mikado’s. There is no record of Jonah being hospitalized for bodily harm. God cared for and preserved His prophet for future use, inside of the great fish.

GOD’S VERIFICATION OF JONAH

God not only placed His mark of ownership on this often criticized book by placing His name in its contents 38 times, but Jesus personally verified this wonderful account. When speaking to the Pharisees of His day, He said of Jonah, “The men of Nineveh will stand up at the Judgment with

this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now [One] greater than Jonah is here.” (Matthew 12:41)

THE MESSAGE OF JONAH

The book of Jonah speaks strongly and clearly about obedience to God, but it also speaks about God’s forgiveness when we fail to obey. God understands our human frailty and He is willing to forgive, correct and redirect our lives when we fail to obey Him. That is what He did for Jonah, and that is what He has done for each of us countless times when we come to Him with repentant hearts. But perhaps its greatest message is God’s pity upon the heathen multitudes and His desire to save them.

HISTORY OF JONAH

Jonah was born in Gath-Hepher near Nazareth where Jesus lived as a child with His parents. Jonah’s father’s name was Amittai.

The Pharisees of Jesus’ day were wrong when they said, “no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.” (John 7:52) Jonah was a prophet of God who had come from Galilee.

Jonah lived during the reign of King Jeroboam II, who reigned over Israel for 41 years. God gave Jonah the privilege of bringing a pleasing prophecy to King Jeroboam II. He told Jeroboam that his kingdom would be expanded (2 Kings 14:25). Most likely this placed him in good standing with the king.

ISRAEL’S SPIRITUAL LIFE

Jeroboam II was blessed militarily just as Jonah had prophesied. He recovered much of the territory Israel had lost to the Syrians, but Israel’s military successes did not help its spiritual life. Israel remained committed to two golden calves which Jeroboam I had instituted as a replacement for the worship of Jehovah.

The account of Jonah has been said to parallel Israel. It is narrow, selfish, with no love for the world beyond itself.

JONAH, ONE OF 13 MINOR PROPHETS

The book of Jonah is unique among the books written by the minor prophets: it contains only one prophecy. Each of the other 12 books, written by minor prophets,

contain prophetic utterances. Instead, it is an account of the actions of one of God’s prophets. It recounts Jonah’s disobedience to God’s call, God’s intervention, and finally God’s will being carried out by His prophet.

MIRACLES IN THE BOOK OF JONAH

The book of Jonah contains many miracles:

- The raging sea — the calming of it.
- God’s preparation and direction of a great fish.
- Jonah being swallowed by the great fish.
- The fish not digesting Jonah.
- Jonah remaining alive in its belly for three days.
- The fish vomiting Jonah onto dry ground.

But the greatest recorded miracle is the repentance of the pagan Gentiles of Nineveh.

SEEING OURSELVES IN JONAH

The book of Jonah is a beacon especially to disgruntled or half-hearted Christians. It is a call to wake up.

As we journey through this wonderful book, we will become aware of God’s individual call on each of our lives and also of our personal failure to obey God’s trustworthy demands on our lives.

Jonah failed God

We fail God

But

God forgave Jonah and then used him.

God has forgiven each of us by sending His Son to bear our sins on a cross — on a hill called Golgatha. It is there that He set us free to be people of God that can now be used to bring Him glory.

As we examine the contents of Jonah, we will become aware of its authenticity in every detail. It was inspired by God; its facts performed by God. The book of Jonah clearly bears God’s signature.

Let us then approach the study of Jonah as trusting children of the Heavenly Father, who desire to know Him better, love Him more and serve Him with willing hearts.

PERSONAL APPLICATION – JONAH 1:1-10

*Heavenly Father,
You call each of us to work in Your Kingdom.
What high and holy privilege You have given us.
May Your Holy Spirit enable us to carry out
Your mission with thankful and joy-filled hearts.
Amen*

Jonah 1:1-3

1. We are told that the “word of the Lord” came to Jonah. List ways that the “word of the Lord” comes to us today.

2. Why was Jonah being sent by the Lord to Nineveh?

3. How do you think the Lord views our nation today?

4. How did Jonah react to God’s call on his life?

5. Using a map in your Bible, try to locate Joppa, Nineveh, and Tarshish. Which direction (N.S.E.W.) had Jonah been told to go?

Which direction did Jonah go?

6. Has God placed a call on our lives today? (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19-20; Philemon 6; Colossians 3:16-17; Romans 12:6-8)

7. When Jonah boarded the ship in Joppa, what was he attempting to do?

Is that ever possible? (Psalm 139:7-10)

Jonah 1:4-6

8. How did the Lord stop Jonah?

9. Was Jonah the only one affected by God's action? What does that tell us about sinful conduct in our own lives?

10. How did the sailors aboard the ship react to the storm?

11. Where was Jonah and what was he doing?

12. Who addressed Jonah and what did he say?

Jonah 1:7-10

13. What action did the sailors take to determine the person responsible for the storm? Who determined the outcome? (Proverbs 16:33)

14. When the lot fell to Jonah, list the questions which the sailors addressed to him.

15. Write Jonah's answer and comment on it.

16. Which part of Jonah's reply do you think most terrified the frightened sailors?

17. What information had Jonah already given the sailors?

18. Relate Proverbs 9:10 to the heathen sailors aboard the ship.

19. When Jesus was ministering here on earth, what did a woman listening to him cry out? (Luke 11:27) How did Jesus answer her? (Luke 11:28) Apply Jesus' answer...

To Jonah

To yourself



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“Thankfully we serve an omniscient God who not only sees us when we attempt to hide from Him, but He also ‘perceives our thoughts from afar and is familiar with all our ways.’ (Psalm 139:2-3) He forgives us and restores us, because of Jesus’ sacrificial atonement, won for us on Calvary. We are never out of His mind. We are forever objects of His love and care. Let us continually trust and obey, praise and worship Him, our Creator and our Redeemer.”

GOD'S CALL TO JONAH – JONAH 1:1-2

When God placed a call on His prophet Jonah's life, His call was specific, clear and understandable. It even included an explanation.

Go...to Nineveh

Preach...Against it

Explanation...its wickedness has come up before Me.

As we read God's reason for sending Jonah to Nineveh, we likely will become aware of wickedness in our own nation which is presently coming up before God. Our nation, which began as a people of God, has drifted and fallen into every imaginable sin.

- Violence is commonplace on our streets.
- Homosexuality is paraded.
- Illegal drugs are available in our schools.

- The idolatry of secular humanism is being taught to our children while...
- The 10 commandments have been banned from our schools.

We are a fallen nation. Could it be that God is calling out to us, His children, that remain committed to Him, much like He called Jonah?

Go...Stand for righteousness.

Speak out...Against wickedness.

Call My wayward people back to Me.

JONAH'S RESPONSE – JONAH 1:3

Instead of heeding God's call, Jonah turned his back on God's call by running away from it. Nineveh was about 500 miles east and a bit north of Palestine, but Jonah boarded a ship at Joppa headed the opposite direction. He was headed for Tarshish which was approximately 2,000 miles west of Palestine, in modern day Spain.

At the time, Tarshish was a remote trading post on the fringes of civilization, while Nineveh was the greatest metropolis of its day.

Jonah's travel plans reveal Jonah's misconception of Jehovah, whom he had been called to serve. His perception of God's call given to him possibly went like this, "Since Jehovah is the God of Israel, I can escape His call on my life by leaving Israel." Jonah's perception of God was faulty and it was dwarfed. It is impossible to flee from the God Who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and sustains them. (Hebrews 1:3a)

Jonah did not have the heart of David who said, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? ... if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me. Your right hand will hold me fast." (Psalm 139:7-10)

GOD'S INTERVENTION – JONAH 1:4

Jonah's attempt to run from God's call on his life was unsuccessful. God did not allow His servant to do so. He pursued Jonah with a mighty storm.

Have you ever been in a boat when the wind suddenly began to blow and the shore was not in sight? A young man familiar with sudden storms on the Great Lakes tells this story. "I waded out after the storm had subsided to rescue the passengers in a yacht which had been driven by the storm into a reef and crashed. The man and woman aboard the sinking ship said that several years earlier they had been forced, during a similar storm, to land their single engine plane in a field in unknown territory. But nothing so terrified them as their encounter with the wind and the waves." I believe the men on board Jonah's ship would add their "Amen" to the above account.

STORMS IN OUR LIVES

We, like Jonah, often foolishly ignore or disobey God's call on our lives. But the "Hound of Heaven" does not allow us to become comfortable in our rebellious state. His repeated call comes to us in various ways. Hurricanes, earthquakes, rebellious children, the storm of poor health or poverty, wars and rumors of war, can all be used to bring us to our knees and back to the God Who created us and Who redeemed us.

THE FRIGHTENED CREW – JONAH 1:5-6

The terrified sailors cried out to their gods. Every man to his own god ... except Jonah. He was comfortable in his sin and was sound asleep in the hull of the ship.

It was a pagan captain that God used to awaken His sleeping prophet. A pagan, who feared God even though he did not really know Him. The inner recesses of the captain's heart were bearing witness to him that there is a God who holds the whole world, the wind and the waves, in His hand. God's invisible quality — His eternal power — was clearly seen by him. (Romans 1:20)

SIN HAS CONSEQUENCES

Once Jonah was awakened, he undoubtedly was aware of the crisis he and the crew were facing. He also was aware of why they were all in danger. His sin was not hurting just him, it was hurting every man on board the ship. Sin is like that! It has far reaching consequences which we are not always aware of.

Our personal sins of pride, criticism, ingratitude, temper, bitterness or an unforgiving spirit often hurt the people we profess to love the most, our family and our friends.

CASTING LOTS – JONAH 1:7

Jonah watched as sailors resorted to the casting of lots to determine who was to blame for their frightful condition. Jonah was fingered by God. It was He who determined the outcome of the lots being cast. God's Word tells us, "the lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." (Proverbs 16:33)

JONAH'S TRIAL – JONAH 1:8-10

The sailors held a brief but fair trial. Jonah was questioned by the pagan sailors:

Who is responsible for the trouble we are facing?

What is your occupation?

Which country do you come from?

Jonah's answer is perhaps the one bright spot in the entire account. Jonah confessed that he "worshiped the Lord God, Who made the sea and the land." Jonah still remembered Who he belonged to and unashamedly confessed his faltering faith in the Lord God.

His confession of faith brought terror to the pagan sailors who did not know Jonah's God. They had many gods but they did not have a god who could make such a claim and then back that claim by sending wind and waves to crash against their once seaworthy ship.

The terrified seamen asked Jonah one rhetorical question, "What have you done?" Jonah had already answered their question. He was running away from the Lord.

Jonah, God has called you, can't you hear His voice?

Souls of men are dying as you run and hide.

CONCLUSION

Jonah was trying to do the impossible... run away from God. There are times in each of our lives when we become "Jonahs" by running away from God ... thinking He doesn't see us:

- When we fail to read His Word.
- When we do not take time to pray.
- When we forego receiving His body and blood to strengthen our faith.
- When we decide a football game (or anything else) is more important than attending church.

Thankfully we serve an omniscient God who not only sees us when we attempt to hide from Him, but He also "perceives our thoughts from afar and is familiar with all our ways." (Psalm 139:2-3) He forgives us and restores us, because of Jesus' sacrificial atonement, won for us on Calvary. We are never out of His mind. We are forever objects of His love and care. Let us continually trust and obey, praise and worship Him, our Creator and our Redeemer.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I am so much like Jonah.

I have often buried myself in the bottom of a ship

When I should be out proclaiming Your salvation to the people You have placed around me.

Forgive me and use me to tell each of them about You...

My wonderful Savior

Amen

PERSONAL APPLICATION – JONAH 1:11-16

*Heavenly Father,
 You allow storms to enter each of our lives,
 But You never make us go through them alone.
 You are always with us, holding us secure in Your loving arms.
 We thank You for Your constant love and protection,
 But most of all for Your salvation won for us by
 Your Son Jesus Christ, our Savior.
 Amen*

Jonah 1:11-16

1. God, Who made the heavens and the earth, spoke to Job out of a storm. Using Job 38:8-11, describe in your own words how God made the sea. What words in Job 38:8-11 line up with God's account of creation in Genesis 1:3,6,9,20 and 24? According to Job 38:11, how are storms stopped?

 2. When Jesus was here on earth, what action did He take to quiet storms? (Mark 4:37-41) (Luke 8:22-25)

 3. How is the storm which pursued Jonah described in 1:11?

 4. Whose advice did the sailors seek?

 5. Since the sailors were familiar with the sea and its storms, why do you think they sought advice from Jonah? (v. 9)

 6. What advice did Jonah give them? Why might Jonah have been willing to make this suggestion? (Psalm 51:3) (1 John 1:8-9)

 7. Did the sailors immediately take Jonah's advice? What did they do? What did all of their effort accomplish?

 8. Tell of a personal "storm" such as sickness, death of a loved one, financial difficulties, family problems, etc. which you have encountered. How were you able to handle your storm? Whose help did you seek?

 9. When facing your personal "storm," did its intensity remain the same, decrease or increase?

-

How did you finally gain peace? (John 14:27)

10. When all else failed, what did the beleaguered sailors finally do? (Jonah 1:14a)

11. These heathen sailors did not have God's written word. Apply what we are told in Psalm 19:1-4a to their situation.

12. Who did the pagan sailors pray to? (Jonah 1:14)

13. What words do they use to describe Jonah?

Is their description accurate?

14. How is God's action acknowledged by the sailors? (Jonah 1:16)

15. What "word of the Lord" were the seamen unknowingly acting on? (Psalm 107:28)

16. What did the sailors finally decide to do? Describe the result of their action and relate it to Psalm 107:29.

17. How did the sailors react to God's marvelous miracle? Relate their action to Psalm 107:30-31.

18. Remembering storms in your own life, relate Psalm 107:28-32 to your personal storms.



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“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see!”
LSB 744 v. 1”

THE ORIGIN OF STORMS

Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm. He said... “Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt’?” (Job 38:8-11)

With these words, God identified Himself not only as the Creator of the sea, but also as the ONE who controls the sea.

THE STORM CONTINUES TO ROCK JONAH'S SHIP – JONAH 1:11

God had not yet called to the proud waves, assaulting Jonah's ship, to halt. In fact, we are told that the sea was getting rougher and rougher. The storm was gaining hurricane strength.

The psalmist accurately described their condition with these words. “He spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunkards; they were at their wits' end.” (Psalm 107:25-27)

All of the sailors' prayers to their false gods availed nothing. The same is true today. Prayer rugs are regularly unrolled and used to pray to false gods in many parts of the world, and on our own soil. The people using them are sincere and dedicated in their devotion to their gods. But sadly, all of their misdirected sincerity and devotion accomplishes nothing. There is only ONE God who hears and answers prayer: the Lord God Almighty, the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

THE SAILORS SEEK ADVICE FROM JONAH

In desperation the sailors turned to Jonah for advice. He had claimed that his God created the sea. He had also revealed that he was running away from his God, so he was the logical person to ask, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?”

JONAH’S ANSWER – JONAH 1:12-13

Since Jonah was a chosen prophet of the Lord God, he undoubtedly had confessed his sin to God and he knew that he was forgiven and purified from all of his unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). So he did not try to defend himself to the sailors. It was his sin that had brought them into harm’s way and he was now willing to save them from their impending destruction.

Jonah asked to be thrown into the churning, wind tossed waves so that the sea might become calm. He was willing to lose his life to save their lives. Jesus would one day say, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13)

The same Jonah who had fled from God’s call to save a pagan city, was now willing to lay down his life for a boatload of pagan sailors.

But the sailors bent their backs and rowed more feverishly than before, trying to reach the shore. They did not want to kill Jonah. But all of their well meaning “self help” availed nothing. They could not save themselves, nor could they save Jonah.

The same principle is true theologically today. We cannot save ourselves, nor can we save others. But we can direct them to our Savior Who gave His life to save them. He is the Lord of heaven and earth and He alone controls the storms in our lives, and brings us through them and finally to our long awaited home in heaven.

THE SAILORS FOLLOW JONAH’S DIRECTION – JONAH 1:14-15

Jonah’s suggestion was finally embraced by the sailors as a last resort. But before they threw Jonah into the deep, we are told, “they cried to the Lord,” not to their false gods. They were finally tapping into the only true power source.

The sailors’ prayer is recorded for us to read. “Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased.”

The distressed sailors had no knowledge of God’s recorded Word. But God heard their desperate cry for help. These heathen sailors had acknowledged Jonah’s God as the sovereign “I AM.” Then they threw Jonah into the wild, churning sea — and the raging sea became calm.

God’s Word speaks about the very thing the sailors had just witnessed. “Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, He brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed.” (Psalm 107:28-29)

THE SAILORS’ RESPONSE – JONAH 1:16

The sailors had never experienced the miracle working power of the Lord God Almighty. They made their living working on the sea. Now they had witnessed the hand of the Creator and Sustainer of the sea.

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech... There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.” (Psalm 19:1-3 KJV) The pagan sailors had daily seen God’s glory and God’s handiwork. His voice was daily heard by them. Now they had experienced His power.

The sailors responded by offering a sacrifice to Him. They also made vows to Him. They *embraced* Jonah’s God.

Jonah’s willingness to be thrown into the sea resulted not only in the conversion of a boatload of heathen sailors, but it also served as a mighty “wake-up” call to Jonah, God’s faltering prophet.

JESUS, THE VERY SON OF GOD

When God became flesh and dwelt among us, He had encounters with the very sea which He had created. Matthew tells of one such event.

“Suddenly a fierce storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke Him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We’re

going to drown!’ ... He got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, ‘What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey Him!’” (Matthew 8:24-27)

The same Lord was in both storms. The same Lord calmed both storms. The sailors were amazed. The disciples were amazed. Are you amazed?

Jonah, now you hear Him.

Jonah, now you care.

Your own soul is crying

Far beneath the sea.

CONCLUSION

“Amazing grace” had saved the pagan sailors aboard Jonah’s ship. Hundreds of years later another sailor, who had spent much of his life as a pagan, would write:

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I
once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see!*

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John Newton, who wrote “Amazing Grace,” was an infidel slave trader. The captain of the slave boat Newton worked aboard referred to Newton as a “Jonah.” Troubled seas appeared to follow him.

It was during one such encounter with a violent storm, believing the ship was sinking, that Newton cried out, “If nothing can be done, may the Lord have mercy on us.”

This was the beginning of the transformation of Newton’s life. The “Jonah” had called out to the Lord.

Newton would later write, “I, who was a slave of every evil, have been changed to stand as a monument of God’s almighty power.”

Most likely the pagan sailors aboard Jonah’s ship sang their own rendition of “Amazing Grace” when they were saved from the stormy sea. They offered “to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that openly profess His name.” (Hebrews 13:15)

They were lost but now were found by God

They, like Newton, would never be the same after their encounter with the Almighty.

PERSONAL APPLICATION – JONAH 1:17- 2:10

*Heavenly Father,
 You provided a great fish to save Jonah's life.
 But more importantly, You provided a great Savior, Your Son Jesus,
 To save Jonah's spiritual life and our spiritual lives.
 We thank and praise You, our Lord and Redeemer.
 Amen*

Jonah 1:17

1. Describe the largest fish you have ever seen. Did it look capable of swallowing a person?

2. How did the fish come into being? (Genesis 1:20-21) Who was placed over the fish? (Genesis 1:26)

3. Who provided just the right fish for Jonah? (Jonah 1:17)

4. How many days was Jonah in the great fish?

5. Using your imagination, try to describe how Jonah felt while inside the great fish.

6. Who verified the account of Jonah being in the great fish? (Matthew 12:40) What comparison did He draw and then relate to Himself?

7. We know that death is an inevitable fact of life for each of us, unless the Lord returns first. What comfort does the Apostle Paul hold out to each of us? (1 Corinthians 15:20-23) Whose likeness will we then bear? (1 Corinthians 15:49)

Jonah 2:1-10

8. What does the psalmist tell us in Psalm 46:1-3? Where was Jonah when he decided to pray to the Lord? Relate Psalm 46:1-3 to Jonah's prayer.

 9. When does the Lord say we should pray to Him? (Psalm 50:15; Philippians 4:6)

 10. Is it ever possible to pray too much? (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

-

11. How does Jonah describe his situation in v. 2? Have you ever had feelings similar to Jonah's? Explain.
-
12. Who does Jonah point to as causing his present troubled situation? (v. 3) How could Jonah have avoided his present situation?
-
13. Which words of Jonah speak of utter despair? (v. 4a) Compare Jonah's words with those of Jesus'. (Mark 15:34) How does Jonah temper his words with a glimmer of hope? (v. 4b)
-
14. What did David pray in Psalm 25:17-18? Have you ever prayed a similar prayer?
-
15. How does Jonah describe his underwater experience in v. 5-6a? Compare Jonah's underwater description with the words of David in Psalm 69:1-3. Do you think David was actually in water, or was he using water as a metaphor? Explain. Share a time when you felt as David felt in Psalm 69:1-3.
-
16. When had Jonah turned to the Lord in prayer? (v. 7a)
-
17. How does Jonah acknowledge God in v. 6b?
-
18. What do we forfeit when we cling to worthless idols? (v. 8) How important is it to worship the true God, our Lord Jesus Christ? (Acts 4:12)
-
19. How does Jonah end his prayer to the Lord? (v. 9a) Compare Jonah's words with those in Psalm 107:22.
-
20. Who rescued Jonah from the great fish and how did He do it? Relate Isaiah 55:11 to Jonah and also to your own life.
-



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“The same Savior Who during His ministry said, ‘I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly’ (John 10:10), was guiding and controlling the great fish so that Jonah ‘might have life.’”

JONAH IS SWALLOWED BY A GREAT FISH – JONAH 1:17

Several decades ago, a motion picture captivated large audiences with its portrayal of a large fish pursuing swimmers and boaters. “Jaws” was a huge box office success. “Jaws” was not a gentle dolphin which could be played with; “Jaws” was a huge hungry fish waiting for its next victim to come across its path.

The movie “Jaws” managed to frighten young and old alike. For some, swimming in the ocean ceased to be a joy. “Jaws” was fiction, but the account of Jonah being swallowed by a large fish is fact! God’s word tells us, “There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number — both large and small.” (Psalm 104:25)

As Jonah was being cast into the churning sea, God had His radar set on a large fish which He had created and He was guiding it to the very spot where His wandering prophet Jonah had entered the water.

We can’t help but wonder about the degree of terror Jonah experienced as he saw his personal “Jaws” approaching him.

Jonah went from the belly of a ship where he was trying to forget who he was, to the belly of a great fish where God reminded him who he was. He was God’s prophet!

JONAH LIVES INSIDE OF THE GREAT FISH

Jonah lived inside of the great fish for three days and three nights. Jesus, the Son of God, verified this account while here on earth. He told the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three

nights in the heart of the earth.” (Matthew 12:40)

The timeless God who says that “a day is like 1,000 years,” is not only here speaking of His resurrection, but also of our resurrection.

Just as Jonah came out of a seemingly impossible life and death situation, so our Savior Jesus actually came out of His grave making the way for each of us who believe in Him, to also come forth from our grave when we hear His voice calling our name.

Scripture tells us that Christ is “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1 Corinthians 15:20) But then Scripture addresses each of us with our own good news. “And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man [Adam], so shall we bear the image of the heavenly Man [the resurrected Christ].” (1 Corinthians 15:49).

The hymn writer Stephen Starke wrote about this great day:

*“All the earth with joy is sounding:
Christ has risen from the dead!
He, the greater Jonah, bounding
From the grave, His three-day bed,
Wins the prize: Death’s demise-
Songs of triumph fill the skies.”*

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JONAH PRAYS – JONAH 2:1-9

Prayer may not have been an active part of Jonah’s life recently, but prayer suddenly became Jonah’s lifeline. It was his only way of reaching out to his God who had the hairs on his head (which most likely were standing on end right now) all numbered.

The psalmist tells us, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.” (Psalm 46:1-3)

Jonah had fallen into the heart of the sea with its waters roaring, foaming and surging. He needed God to be his “refuge and...present help in trouble.”

It was a distressed, fearful Jonah who called to the Lord for help. He was, in “the depths of the grave.” (v. 2)

We are not told that Jonah simply “said” a prayer, but that Jonah “cried out” to the Lord his God. Jonah’s personal relationship with the Lord was suddenly *all and everything to him!*

We, like Jonah, have fearful times in our lives. But we have an awesome loving God, Who knows each of our trials and tells us, What times you are afraid — Trust in Me. (Psalm 56:3)

“Jonah strongly declares, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’”

FEAR AND FAITH TAKE TURNS IN JONAH’S HEART

Despair gripped Jonah when he cried out to the Lord, “I have been banished from your sight.” But God did not leave Jonah in his despair. God reached into Jonah’s distressed, sinful heart and encouraged His wayward prophet so that he could utter words of faith and hope: “Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.” (v. 4) Solomon had prayed to the Lord when dedicating the temple, “May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day... so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place.” (1 Kings 8:29) Jonah remembered God’s Word as he prayed.

Jonah had turned his face away from sin and toward the Lord. But Jonah’s terror had not yet ended. Even though “faith and hope” had sustained him, the water was at his throat. He was drowning. He was tangled in seaweed and the mighty waves tossed him like a lead weight to the bottom of the sea. (v. 5)

But hope does not disappoint. Jonah tells us so, “You brought my life up from the pit, O Lord my God.” (v. 6) Prayer, even Jonah’s prayer from the bottom of the sea and from the bottom of his spiritual life, rose to heaven and the Lord God became his stronghold to which he clung. (v. 7)

Jonah’s prayer ends with a song of thanksgiving. God’s grace had seen him through his dreadful encounter with death. Jonah strongly declares, “Salvation comes from the Lord.” (v. 9)

GOD SPEAKS TO THE GREAT FISH – JONAH 2:10

It was easier for God to control the great fish than to control His prophet Jonah. God simply spoke to the great fish and Jonah was released from its protective innards. He was vomited onto the shore. (It has been suggested that three days of undigested Jonah was all the fish could tolerate.) We can only imagine Jonah's relief when he found himself lying on the sandy shores of the Mediterranean, breathing deeply to fill his foul lungs with fresh air. Most likely he basked in the sunshine once his eyes had again adjusted to light. Then he probably waded into the cleansing salt water and washed the slime from his body and his clothes.

Jonah had experienced God's Word at work in his life. The Lord had kept him from all harm — He had watched over his life; the Lord had watched over Jonah's comings and goings. (Psalm 121:7- 8) We also experience God's keeping power in our lives on both our comings and our goings.

Our God asks us to "pray without ceasing." (1 Thessalonians 5:17) He desires to hear our voices and to see our hearts lifted to Him steadily in prayer.

He invites us, "in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Then He adds a promise we all desire, "the peace of God ... will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)

J. Sidlow Baxter had this to say about Jonah's prayer from inside of the great fish: "It consists of thanksgiving, contrition and rededication. It is a — 'Te Deum'; a doxology — the novelty of singing a doxology — inside a

great fish in mid-ocean is absolutely without rival."

*Jonah, go and tell them
God has heard your prayer.
You're once again set free
To speak God's prophetic word.*

CONCLUSION

In the movie, "Jaws" was a large killer fish. In the book of Jonah, the large fish was a protective, life-sparing fish.

The same Savior Who during His ministry said, "I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10), was guiding and controlling the great fish so that Jonah "might have life." In time, Jonah's life would become an abundant life as he carried God's Word to the Ninevites.

*God saved Jonah's life — miraculously
and*

*God saves each of us who believe in Jesus as our
Savior — miraculously*

Let us worship and praise Him!

An Aside:

"The skeletal remains of an enormous fish were found near Joppa. (Where Jonah had embarked on his voyage.) They were taken to Rome where their display caused great curiosity. The ribs appeared more in height than those of an Indian elephant and the length of the bones were 40 feet." G. Townsend

PERSONAL APPLICATION – JONAH 3:1-10

*Heavenly Father, You gave Jonah a message for his generation of sinful people, which brought them to their knees in repentance. Place your message for our generation on each of our lips,
And give us willing hearts, empowered by Your Holy Spirit, to speak
Your Word with boldness, but also with love. Amen*

Jonah 3:1-3

1. State what you know about Nineveh. (Genesis 10:6-12; Nahum 1:14, 3:1-3, 18-19)

2. God could have sent someone other than Jonah to carry His message to Nineveh. Why do you think He gave Jonah a second chance?

3. When we are going through difficult times, we often make promises to God which are later forgotten. What promise had Jonah made while inside of the great fish? (2:9b)

4. How was Jonah now carrying out the promise he had made to God while inside of the great fish?

5. Have you ever made a promise to God while you were going through difficult times? Were you able to fulfill your promise?

6. Whose message was Jonah being called to deliver to the Ninevites? (Jonah 3:1-2)

7. Apply Proverbs 3:5-6 to the call God placed on Jonah's life. Also apply it to your own life.

8. Jonah ran and attempted to hide from the Lord when he was called the first time. What are we now told about Jonah?

9. How is Nineveh described in v. 3?

Jonah 3:4-5

10. What did Jonah begin doing the first day he entered Nineveh? What was his message?

11. How did the pagan residents of Nineveh respond to Jonah's message?
-
12. Since the Ninevites did not have God's Law as the Israelites had, how were they able to correctly respond to Jonah's preaching? (Romans 2:12-15)
-
13. Most likely Jonah was a gifted preacher. Do you think he was responsible for the people of Nineveh responding as they did? (Romans 10:17)
-
14. How did the people of Nineveh demonstrate their repentance?
-
15. What was taking place in heaven because of the Ninevites repentance? (Luke 15:7)
-
- Jonah 3:6-10
16. How did the king of Nineveh personally respond to Jonah's message? (Jonah 3:6)
-
17. What further action did the king take?
-
- List his requirements and comment on them. (Jonah 3:7-8)
-
18. What statement made by the king reveals some knowledge of Jehovah, the God of Israel? (Jonah 3:9; Psalm 103:8-10; Lamentations 3:22)
-
19. How did God respond to the repentant Ninevites? (Lamentations 3:31-33)
-
20. How does God respond to us when we have repentant hearts? (Isaiah 1:18)
-
21. What will the people of Nineveh do on Judgment Day, and why will they be allowed to do so? (Matthew 12:41)
-



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“God has repeatedly shown grace to our sin filled nation. How long do you think He will continue to extend His hand of blessing to us?”

GOD'S WORD IS GIVEN TO JONAH A SECOND TIME – JONAH 3:1-3

God could have used someone other than Jonah to preach to the Ninevites, but Jonah would have missed out on lessons which he needed to learn. It is always God's desire to work in us as well as through us. It was God's care and compassion that caused Him to call Jonah a second time to “Go to the great city of Nineveh.” The Lord was not only showing compassion to the Ninevites, but also to His prophet Jonah.

This time Jonah did not run from God's call. He embraced it. He had clearly seen his disobedience while inside of the great fish and Nineveh was now his destination. Most likely he traveled by caravan which would have taken thirty to forty-five days.

We are not told Jonah's mind-set as he began his journey. Was it...

- Fear – because of the consequences of trying to hide from God the first time?
- Prejudice – since the Ninevites worshiped false gods? or
- Hope – that God would destroy the people of Nineveh who were Israel's enemies?

Perhaps all three were on Jonah's mind as he traveled to Nineveh.

THE CITY OF NINEVEH

Nineveh was the capital city of ancient Assyria. It was founded by Noah's great-grandson “Nimrod.” (Genesis 10:6-12) It had grown to become the

greatest city of its day. One hundred twenty thousand people lived within its city walls and nearly one million resided within a sixty mile radius of Nineveh.

Most likely Nineveh was a tourist attraction because of its splendid walls and towers which were decorated with colossal sculptures of human-headed bulls.

Despite all of its splendor, Nineveh was best known for its cruelty. Ancient writings reveal that people were skinned alive, buried alive and impaled on sharp poles under the hot sun and left to die. Violence was one of Nineveh's greatest sins which has "come up before me [God]." (1:1-2)

Assyria was constantly at war with the Northern Kingdom of Israel. God was using Assyria's repeated attacks as refiner's fire since Israel had refused to repent by discarding their many false gods and returning to the one true God "Jehovah." After numerous warnings through God's prophets, God finally allowed them to be taken captive by their enemies. In 722 B.C., Assyria seized Israel and made it just one more of its captive states.

GOD'S PREPARATION

God first had to prepare His messenger, Jonah, for the task he had been running from. After three days inside the great fish, Jonah's heart was prepared to carry out God's command.

God had graciously gone before Jonah and set the stage in various ways so that the people of Nineveh would listen to Jonah's message. It is a well-known fact that ancient pagans viewed famine and solar eclipses as signs of coming disaster. God had sent the Ninevites two famines: one in 765 B.C. and another in 759 B.C. He had also provided a solar eclipse in 763 B.C. All three events helped prepare the Ninevites to listen to Jonah's prophecy of total destruction.

Nineveh's citizens were also aware of Jonah's survival for three days inside of a great fish and it likely peaked their interest since one of their false gods was a fish god. The Bible scholar William Smith supports the Ninevites knowledge of Jonah's encounter with the great fish with these words: "and the king — having heard of Jonah's miraculous deliverance (from the great fish), ordered a fast."

Jonah's disobedience to God's command and God's remedy had brought about a perfect object lesson for the Ninevites. God had ordained Jonah's miraculous protection inside of the great fish, in part, to captivate the Ninevites' attention.

JONAH PREACHES TO THE NINEVITES – JONAH 3:4-10

It would be interesting to know whether Jonah's prejudice toward the Ninevites was displayed by Jonah as he spoke God's Word to the people. Certainly God's message given to Jonah left room for Jonah's dislike of the Ninevites. "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned" was a message which pleased Jonah and brought fervor to his words. At the same time, it brought terror to the citizens of Nineveh.

Most likely Jonah presented God's Word in various ways to captivate the people's attention. But the central message did not change. It was the "Word of God" given to Jonah to preach and God's Word must always remain unchanged in a changing world.

Jonah's God-given message was short and to the point. It did not include a call to repent and it said nothing about salvation. It was pure Law with no Gospel message. Yet many people immediately responded to God's Word and began fasting and wearing sackcloth. Their outward appearance reflected an inward change of heart.

The Holy Spirit had been at work through God's Word spoken by Jonah and it had convicted the Ninevites "of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment." (John 16:8)

THE KING OF NINEVEH RESPONDS TO GOD'S WORD

When the Word of God, spoken by Jonah, reached the king's ear, he took immediate action. He removed his royal robe, dressed in sackcloth and sat in the dust.

Then he handed down a decree that all people within his jurisdiction should:

- Fast from food and drink (their animals were included).
- Wear sackcloth.
- Pray urgently to God.

*The best news any of us can hear is that a sinner has repented,
turned to God, and been cleansed by the precious blood of Jesus.*

- Stop their evil ways.
- Put an end to violence.

Lastly, the king added a word of hope: “God may yet relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

The king’s last statement reflects some knowledge of the God of Israel “Jehovah,” Who not only forgives sin, but also shows compassion to repentant sinners.

Our great omniscient God, Who sees our hearts and reads our thoughts, saw the truly repentant Ninevites and had compassion on them.

Without a doubt the most wonderful statement in the entire account of Jonah is, “the Ninevites believed God.” (v. 5) Faith in the “Most High” had entered their hearts.

The same is true today. The best news any of us can hear is that a sinner has repented, turned to God, and been cleansed by the precious blood of Jesus.

St. Paul confessed, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His immense patience as an example for those who would believe in Him and receive eternal life.” (1 Timothy 1:15-16)

The Ninevites, like Paul, were “the worst of sinners,” but God chose to have mercy on them. He does the same for

each of us. We are all sinners in need of a Savior.

JESUS SPEAKS OF JONAH

Jesus used Jonah’s preaching to the Ninevites to condemn the religious leaders of His day. Jesus had preached and performed miracles for three years in the Pharisee’s and people’s midst. Yet they had rejected Him. The people of Nineveh had heard one sermon from one preacher and repented and were forgiven.

JEREMIAH’S CONFESSION


God’s suffering prophet Jeremiah confessed, “I remember my affliction and my wandering ... and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind ... because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning.” (Lamentations 3:19-23) Jonah, like Jeremiah, had wandered from God and seen great affliction, but God’s compassion had reached out and brought him back.

- We too wander from God.
- We too see affliction in various forms.
- We too experience God’s compassion drawing us back into His loving arms. Let us praise Him!

*Jonah, remember God’s love.
He forgets and remembers no more; sins which
have brought Him distress
Are now buried beneath the sea.*

CONCLUSION

Nineveh was not destroyed in forty days. God



*God compassionately gave its citizens
time to repent and believe in Him,
which they did — for a time.*

compassionately gave its citizens time to repent and believe in Him, which they did — for a time. Approximately 150 years later, in 606 B.C., Nineveh was destroyed from the face of the earth. The people had forgotten Jonah's God and returned to their wicked ways and to their many false gods.

Our once godly nation is filled with every imaginable sin. Violence is rampant on our streets. Our false gods are more subtle. Sports figures, T.V. and the internet are but a few. Perhaps our chief false god is materialism. Could it be that God sees us as 21st century Ninevites?

In 2001 on 9-11, large numbers of people returned to church after the Twin Towers in New York were leveled. Church bells pealed throughout our land, calling people to the ONE Who could save them from further disaster. Hearts were changed — for a time.

God showed grace to the people of Nineveh for more than 100 years and then destroyed them. God has repeatedly shown grace to our sin-filled nation. How long do you think He will continue to extend His hand of blessing to us?

God's Word correctly states that, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people." (Proverbs 14:34)

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help our nation to humble itself before You as the Ninevites did. We thank You for allowing our forefathers to establish us as a people of God. Let "In God We Trust" be written on our hearts as we teach the next generation to trust solely in You, our Creator and our Redeemer.

PERSONAL APPLICATION – JONAH 4:1-11

Heavenly Father, there are so many times when we, like Jonah, take Your compassion for granted. Forgive us and renew us by Your Holy Spirit so that we live lives worthy of Your calling. Lord Jesus, giver of love, we love You, we worship You, we serve You alone. Amen

Jonah 4:1-3

1. Why was Jonah angry?

2. Jonah had prayed while inside of the great fish. Now Jonah again prayed to the Lord. Which words of Jonah sound like an excuse for his disobedience to God's call to go to Nineveh the first time?

3. What had David written in Psalm 103:8? Compare David's words to a portion of Jonah's prayer. What does this tell us about Jonah's knowledge of Scripture?

4. Jonah states that God is a God who relents from sending calamity. Relate Psalm 103:9 to Jonah's statement and state your personal feelings about Psalm 103:8-9.

5. How did Jonah end his prayer? Why do you think Jonah prayed as he did?

6. Draw a comparison between Jonah and the older brother in Jesus' parable in Luke 15:21-32.

Jonah 4:4-6

7. God, Who sees our heart and knows our every thought, answered Jonah. What did He say?

8. Does God ever become angry? (Exodus 32:7-10) Why? (2 Kings 22:13) What are we told about God's anger? (Psalm 30:5) (Exodus 34:5-7)

9. How did Jonah respond to God's question? (v. 5)

10. God had already told Jonah that He was not going to punish the people of Nineveh. Why do you think Jonah waited to see what God would do?

11. What did Jonah do to make his watch post more comfortable? What does his action tell us about Jonah's planned length of stay?

12. What did God provide which added to Jonah's comfort? Relate God's provision to Psalm 103:8.

13. How did Jonah react to God's gift? (v. 6b)

Jonah 4:7-11

14. What happened to God's gift the next morning? What gift, which God has given us, cannot be destroyed as Jonah's gift was destroyed? (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9)

15. How did God add to Jonah's discomfort? What effect did God's action have on Jonah?

16. When Job was tested by God, how did he respond? (Job 1:20-21)

17. What did Jonah again say to God and how did God answer Jonah?

18. How did Jonah respond to God's question? State your opinion of his response.

19. God took time and showed great patience in His dealings with Jonah. He does the same for each of us. What does this teach us about our dealings with one another? (Ephesians 4:32)

20. We are all familiar with object lessons. God had provided Jonah with an object lesson. Explain God's object lesson given to Jonah. (v. 6-9)

21. The book of Jonah ends with an open-ended question which God asked Jonah. How would you answer God's question?

22. Who had the last word in Jonah's dispute with God? Who always has the last word in our lives?

23. What is the last word which each of us, who believe in Jesus, can expect to hear from Him? (Matthew 25:34) Does this knowledge bring peace and joy into your heart?



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“It is God’s compassion, shown to us on a hill outside of Jerusalem, that has made it possible for each of us to enter the New Jerusalem and spend eternity with our Savior, beholding His glorious face.”

JONAH BECOMES ANGRY WITH THE LORD – JONAH 4:1

He didn’t want to go to Nineveh — to carry out God’s will. Then—
He didn’t want to leave Nineveh — until God carried out His will.

Jonah wanted to see God destroy Nineveh. He had preached its condemnation with fervor throughout its streets. “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” But Nineveh’s repentance had overturned Jonah’s prophecy and discredited him. Pride and anger were now controlling Jonah’s disgruntled attitude.

God’s anger toward Nineveh had subsided when the people repented. But Jonah’s anger against Nineveh remained red hot. He wanted vengeance, not forgiveness, to fall on Nineveh. It was the capital city of Assyria, Israel’s constant enemy.

JONAH VENTS HIS ANGER – JONAH 4:2-4

It is amazing that the Lord of heaven and earth stooped down to hold a conversation with one of His pouting children. The Lord began by asking Jonah a question. “Have you any right to be angry” because I showed compassion to Nineveh? Jonah did not answer. He gave God the “silent treatment.”

OUR REACTION TO GOD’S QUESTION

We all have times when we become angry with God:

- When we lose a loved one.
- When we are diagnosed with a debilitating or incurable illness.
- When our children go astray.
- When our paycheck doesn't provide for our family's needs.

Thankfully, we have a loving God who forgives our angry moments and casts them “into the depths of the sea.” (Micah 7:19) We who belong to the Lord are recipients of His blessings, even during difficult times in our lives. He stands beside us, lifting our burdens and giving us needed strength.

GOD IS A GOD OF COMPASSION

In the first chapter of Jonah, we were told that Jonah had chosen to run away from God's call on his life, but we were not told why he had chosen to do so. Jonah finally voiced his “why.” “Lord ... You are a ... compassionate God,” was Jonah's excuse.

- It was God's compassion that had kept Jonah's boat afloat during the storm.
- It was God's compassion that had provided a great fish to swallow Jonah to keep him from drowning.
- It was God's compassion that had caused the great fish to safely eject Jonah onto the shore.
- It was God's compassion that had given Jonah a second chance to preach to the Ninevites.

Jonah was a willing recipient of God's compassion, but he was not willing to see God's compassion extended to repentant pagans that were enemies of Israel.

JONAH IS FAMILIAR WITH GOD'S WORD

Jonah knew: “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.” (Psalm 103:8) David had written these words many years earlier, and Jonah apparently had committed them to memory, but he had not committed them to his way of life.

Jonah did not know that one day it would be God's compassion that would cause Him to send His only Son, Jesus, to this earth to become his Savior, our Savior, and the Savior of all — including pagan Gentiles who repent and believe in Him.

JONAH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jonah is a prototype of the “older brother” in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son, who became angry because the father chose to forgive his disobedient sinful brother. (Luke 15:28-31)

We also see “Jonah” in Jesus' parable of the Unmerciful Servant who was personally forgiven much by the king, but then unwilling to forgive a lesser debt owed to him. (Matthew 18:23-33)

JONAH'S PRAYER LIFE

Jonah had prayed to the Lord God when he was terrified in the belly of the great fish. Jonah's prayer then included these words: “In my distress I called to the Lord, and He answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and You listened to my cry.” (2:2)

Now we are told that Jonah again prayed to the Lord. This time, he prayed because he was angry.

Jonah's prayer began with an accusation against the Lord: “Is this not what I said when I was still at home?” Then he quickly turned to an excuse for his disobedience: “That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish.” Next, Jonah went to the heart of his complaint: “Lord, You are a gracious and compassionate God...Who relents from sending calamity.” Jonah ended his prayer with a death wish: “Take away my life. For it is better for me to die than to live.”

The same man who had clung to life and prayed to live while inside of the great fish, was now praying to die, because God was not doing what Jonah wanted Him to do — destroy the Ninevites. They had demonstrated their repentance by wearing sackcloth and sitting in the dust. This was the very thing which Jonah now needed to do, rather than sitting in defiance of God.

Interestingly, there is no mention of Jonah praying for the people of Nineveh while he preached God's judgment to them. He did not ask God to bring revival to the Ninevites. Jonah was a prophet, but he was not an evangelist. He was willing to preach God's Word of judgment, but not His Word of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Jonah was fleshing out the first words which Jesus would one day say in His Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’” But Jonah was not following Jesus’ correction of that statement: “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:43-44)

JONAH WAITS FOR GOD’S DESTRUCTION OF NINEVEH – JONAH 4:5-7

It is disheartening to read that Jonah made himself comfortable while he waited to see Nineveh destroyed. Imagine being comfortable while watching the mass destruction of thousands of people, especially people he had just preached to.

When our Savior walked this earth, He wept over sinful Jerusalem. (Luke 19:41) Jesus also corrected James and John for wanting to call fire down on the sinful people in a Samaritan village (Luke 9:54-55). But Jonah went into the hill country east of Nineveh and picked a choice spot to sit and watch its destruction.

Jonah’s self-serving nature encouraged him to be at ease while he waited. So he built a shelter to shade himself. Then God again showed compassion to Jonah by providing a vine with large leaves to grow over his makeshift home. R. Reed Lessing suggests that it was a qiqayon plant which provided the extra shade for Jonah’s comfort.

Jonah’s attitude had now vastly improved. It is the only time in the entire account of Jonah that we are told, “Jonah was very happy.” His self-designed comfort zone brought him pleasure, and the vine God had provided added to his pleasure.

But Jonah’s comfort zone was short-lived. The next morning, as the sun rose, God sent both a worm to eat the vine and a scorching east wind which likely destroyed Jonah’s makeshift shelter, leaving him exposed to the hot blazing sun. Before long, Jonah became sick. Most likely he suffered a heat stroke.

Jonah had failed to make his shelter “in the shadow of the Almighty.” (Psalm 91:1) So often we, like Jonah, look

to a vine for protection when we should be looking to the Creator of the vine for protection.

JONAH AGAIN BECOMES ANGRY – JONAH 4:8-11

Jonah once again reverted to his angry, “pity me” self. He again stated his earlier death wish. “It would be better for me to die than to live.” (4:8)

God’s Word to Jonah did not change. His question remained the same. “Do you have a right to be angry?” This time Jonah answered the Lord. His thoughtless “I do” response came from a stubborn, self-centered, “I’m right” mind-set, not God’s mind-set which would have encouraged him to “be kind...compassionate...forgiving.” (Ephesians 4:32)

In spite of Jonah’s short, surly retort, God answered Jonah with kindness and wisdom.

God’s earlier provision of the vine was now going to serve His purpose by providing an object lesson meant to help Jonah understand why He had chosen to forgive the people of Nineveh. God said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

God’s question is an open-ended question. It leaves us wondering how Jonah responded.

- Did Jonah again disregard God’s Word given to him?
- Did Jonah try to justify his anger? or
- Did Jonah go back into Nineveh and mentor its new found believers?

Perhaps archeologists have provided a clue to our question. In the ruins of ancient Nineveh, there is a mound which covers forty acres and is 100 feet high. Its name is “Nebi Yunus”, or “Prophet Jonah”, and is believed to contain the remains of Jonah. It lies in present-day Iraq.

GOD'S UNANSWERED QUESTION INVITES OUR ANSWER

Jonah's lack of a response to God's question serves to open His question to each of us. Do you believe that God's message of salvation through Jesus Christ belongs to every person, in every culture, in every nation? God does! That is why He has called us to: "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to all creation." (Mark 16:15)

We have a choice. We can disregard God's Word, or we can respond by sharing the Good News of Jesus' redemption for all people with those around us.

God had the last word in His dialogue with Jonah at Nineveh. He always has the last word in your life and in my life. His last word to Jonah was a word of compassion — compassion for the people of Nineveh.

His last word to each of us who belong to Him will be a word of compassion. "Enter into the joy of your master." (Matthew 25:21b NAS)

*Jonah, you were right.
Our God is a God of compassion.
"His love endures forever." (Psalm 136)*

EPILOGUE

The entire book of Jonah is a clash between obedience and disobedience, anger and compassion. At the end, compassion wins because God is compassion in its highest form. God is love! (1 John 4:16)

While studying Jonah, God provided each of us with a person we could identify with. We share Jonah's struggles:

- Lack of obedience
- Anger
- Frustration
- Terror
- Pain
- Relief
- Testing
- Usefulness
- Questioning

We may not want to be like Jonah, but most of us are. There is a constant struggle in our lives between wanting to please God and wanting to please self. Jonah could be your parent, your child, your spouse, your friend — you. Jonah mirrors many of our lives. Jonah was used by God in spite of his weaknesses. We, too, are used by God in spite of our weaknesses.

Perhaps Jonah is the best example of grace—pure grace. Jonah did nothing to merit God's kindness, yet God showed him kindness and love. He is a perfect example of sinner/saint.

SIMILARITIES WITH TWO PSALMISTS

King David shared many of Jonah's negative feelings when he wrote, "If only You, God, would slay the wicked!...Do I not hate those who hate You, Lord,...I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies." (Psalm 139:19-22) But David did not end his thoughts about hatred and enemies on a negative note. David, "a man after His [the Lord's] own heart," asked God to "Search me, O God, and know my heart...see if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24) That is something which each of us should regularly pray.

We are not told if Jonah's negative thoughts changed. The psalmist Asaph penned words which perhaps describe Jonah's thoughts as the book ends: "When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before You. Yet I am always with You; You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward You will take me into glory." (Psalm 73:21-24)

That is the desire each of us has, to be with our Lord Jesus in glory one day. It is God's compassion, shown to us on a hill outside of Jerusalem, that has made it possible for each of us to enter the New Jerusalem and spend eternity with our Savior, beholding His glorious face.

*May "the Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make His face shine upon you and be
gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you
and give you peace."
(Numbers 6:24-26)*