

SERMONS ON
THE BOOK OF JONAH

By

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OBJECTIVE

My objective is to accurately convey the historical account, touching on spiritual lessons and offering practical applications.

METHOD

I have divided this book into six sections. Each section is outlined. The discussion is in paragraph form. The three elements of the objective are interwoven throughout the text.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

The only Old Testament reference that we have to the prophet Jonah is found in II Kings 14:25, where it is stated that he was a native of Gathhepher, a town of lower Galilee, and that he prophesied concerning the success of Jeroboam II.

He is mentioned in the New Testament in Matthew 12:39-41 (regarding the “sign of Jonah,” also in Matthew 6:4 and Luke 11:29-32). Note that two signs are referenced: the three days and nights in the great fish’s belly; and, his preaching unto Ninevah.

Ninevah was one of the most ancient cities of the world. It was founded by Nimron (Genesis 10:11-12), a great-grandson of Noah. The city endured until 612 BCE. The city was destroyed in that year by the Babylonians, Scythians, and the Medes. This was nearly 200 years after the preaching of Jonah and the repentance of the people.

It is nowhere stated that Jonah himself wrote the book that bears his name. He is always referred to in the third person (except when he is quoted in the second chapter). Therefore, it seems apparent that the author lived later than the days of the events described by the book.

It is unfortunate that the remarkable teachings of the book of Jonah have been lost in the constant wrangling over the story of the great fish, which was but an event mentioned and soon dismissed. The abiding values of the book are far more important.

(mostly taken from Zondervan Bible Dictionary, 1976; and, Introducing the Old Testament, Clyde T. Francisco, 1977.)

Jonah 1:1-3

Have you ever gotten to the place where you were not going to listen, no matter what? A parent may instruct a teenager in the ways of life, but the teen is bent on doing it his way. So, he refuses to listen to good counsel and he rejects sound reasoning. Usually, such a person ends up in a mess. Do you remember Balaam? God told him not to go, but he did anyway; and the angel of the Lord nearly struck him dead. Or, how about Ananias and Sapphira, who chose to lie unto God? They were struck dead!

Now, you might think you have an option as to whether or not you will listen to God, but you don't. When God speaks, we had better obey. Or else, we will get to the place we wish we would have. Peter had been forewarned about denying Jesus, but he refused to listen. Only afterward did he repent with bitter tears. Jeremiah decided he wasn't going to preach anymore, but God's word was like a fire shut up in his bones. Moses thought it better to strike the rock although he was to speak to it, and he was refused entrance into the Land of Promise.

So it is, my friend. Our only prerogative is to hearken to the word of the Lord. We are to hear, and we are to obey. To do anything else is foolish. Yet, how often do we find ourselves like Jonah, boarding a ship headed in the wrong direction, and, all in an attempt to get away from the presence of the Lord?

JONAH'S CALL AND REBELLION

Our text is a preface to the account of the book. This is where we begin. This is Act I, Scene I, if you please. Most assuredly our common reading of the text reveals to us the introduction for an unfolding and exciting plot (contained in the chapters to follow). Permit me to review these verses and bring out some thoughts which come to mind.

I. THOUGHTS

First, there is a "word of the Lord," (vs. 1). We find the Word of God coming to Jonah. It isn't the word of man or thoughts conjured up in his own mind. Since it is God's Word, he had better take heed. Why listen? Because, God's words are *true words*. If God says it, you can trust it. The commands are genuine. The promises are secure. Also, they are an *accurate* accounting. That is, there is no mistake in what He says. Keep in mind the Bible is true, but not everything contained in the Bible is true. By that I mean, a lie may be recorded, but the lie is not true; a false teaching may be documented, but the false teaching is in opposition to God. The words of God are *authoritative*. As in

this case, the command of God is to be obeyed. Why? Because God gives the command. Then, they are *revealed* words. If we are to know anything about God or His will, He must show it to us.

God spoke to Jonah.

Second, there is the message God gave to His servant (vs. 2). What we find here is that the prophet Jonah, going about his daily business in serving God, receives a word from God. God places a demand upon him to go and preach to Ninevah. God has revealed His will to Jonah. The word is accurate and true. Therefore, since God has spoken, he is only responsible to obey.

Four things emanate from the text. *One*, without question, the servant understood. The words are not cloaked in symbolism, nor is it a parable. There are no word games here; Jonah comprehends the message. *Two*, the servant was responsible for the Word. He must act upon what he knows is true. *Three*, he responds to the Word (vs. 3a). As we will soon see, the servant chooses to disregard God's Word. Also, keep in mind, what God said about Ninevah is accurate, "wickedness." God isn't tricking Jonah into going, He simply tells him how things are. In this two points are revealed: the condition of the city and God's desire for Jonah to preach unto them. *Four*, we find God's recognition of the sinfulness of man. God knows the hearts of all men everywhere (Revelation 2:23b cf. Psalm 139:1-4). He knows men are sinners (Psalm 1:2-3 cf. Romans 3:23). Yet, we see a hint of God's mercy (cf. 4:11). Finally, the message is coming to a man with a hardened heart (cf. 4:2).

Third, God's Word demands a response (vs. 2). "Arise, go..." Here I find that God chose to use man (His servant Jonah). The message he was to bear was negative in content, for it was a message of sin, judgment, and a call to repentance. In this instance, the demand is clear (i.e. pointed). Then, assuredly, God's word was a command, not a request.

Fourth, God is aware of the events of mankind (vs. 2). God knew the sins of evil people. God also knew (as we soon see, 1:4; 2:9-10; 4:4, 9) the actions of His people (in this case, His servant).

Fifth, the servant's response, "Jonah rose up to flee" (vs. 3). As I have pointed out, Jonah knew exactly what God wanted. Here, we find him doing just the opposite. About this, I direct your attention to four things. *One*, it is deliberate (disobedience). Jonah has no excuse. *Two*, his best alternative to

God's will, in consideration, is a bad choice. *Three*, when a servant disobeys God, he is attempting (or, soon shall) to flee from the presence of God. I am reminded of Psalm 139:1-2. *Four*, notably, a servant running from God will always "pay the fare thereof."

Sixth, notice also, that the trip to Tarshish and the city itself was not evil in and of itself, but the difference was the **motive** of the traveler. There are many things in life which are good in and of themselves but how we use them or why we want them makes them evil. Also, I submit to you, as we pursue the lessons of this book, recall that Jonah began his journey away from God before he left the place wherein he knew the truth of his Savior's will. True, he hopped a ship to go to Tarshish, but he already possessed a bitter heart and had decided not to follow God. I am reminded of the prodigal in Luke chapter 15 (vss. 11-24) who asked for his inheritance prior to his departure; his heart was in the "far country" long before he got there.

Ninevah, at this time, was the capitol city of the Assyrian Empire. It was located at the top of the fertile crescent; whose modern day equivalent would be the mounds of Kouyunjik and Nebi Yunus to the East of the Tigris River and opposite the main part of the city of Mosul. Tarshish was a city nestled on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The exact location is unknown but it is commonly placed in the Western portion of the Mediterranean.

[Elwell, Walter. Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. 3. Baker, 1988. *s.v. Ninevah; s.v. Tarshish*]

Simply stated, Jonah is not headed in the right direction!

Jonah 1:4-17

We have all heard the term "Mother Nature." This maternal deity supposedly watches over the Earth and all things therein. She runs the ecology. She supervises every creaturely aspect. She is responsible for the weather. She

guides every plant. She dotes on nature. She *nurtures* nature, as it were.

Perhaps, it is well and good if the deity were female. But, the last time I checked, God is presented as masculine. He is called the Heavenly Father. He has an only-begotten Son. He, not she, is the sovereign God of the universe. By Him all things consist. By Him all things have life. He holds the atom together, keeps the stars in place, and guides the path of every planet or heavenly body. Nothing occurs on Earth without His direct supervision. Either it is caused by Him or permitted by Him. If *it is*, it is either by His directive will or by His permissive will. But, He is the doer of it.

Now, I know God has given laws within the bounds of nature. There is design and purpose. Gravity always works, unless of course, God should suspend the law. Yes, I agree that God normally works in accordance with the laws already in place. The system functions well. But it is God, not “Mother Nature,” which rules and reigns in the universe. The world does not run itself.

The foundation for the story of this book will illustrate this to be true. Let us develop the plot. As we go along, we will learn a little about God’s ability to intervene in the affairs of “nature.”

THE PERFECT STORM

I. LOSS vss. 4-6

The Scripture is very clear that the LORD sent the storm. It is called a “great wind,” and would be comparable to a hurricane. The Apostle Paul experienced one of those on his trip to Rome (cf. Acts 27:14-20). It was a severe storm, so much so, the seasoned sea veterans were afraid. Consider in this: God is sovereign over nature; God’s timing is exact; the storm’s *fierceness* is appropriate; and, notice the effect that a Christian’s disobedience can have on the world!

The storm did not arise by accident. God sent it along, and He had a purpose for it. In fact, it blew in at the right moment. A few days before or a few days after, and Jonah would not have been affected by it. But God sent a storm; and, by our definition, He sent a “doozy.” If it had been a passing shower or a mere thunderstorm, the sailors would not have been alarmed, nor would Jonah be afraid. The storm had to be of sufficient size to get everyone’s attention. Then, have you ever stopped to realize that this ship, with all of its passengers and cargo, is at risk *through no fault of their own*? Jonah’s punishment spills over to the world.

Three lessons emerge from the text. *One*, God does chasten His own (cf. Hebrews 12:6-7, 11). If we choose to run away from God we can expect God to track us down and display some discipline. *Two*, sometimes, true is the case that the Christian is unaware of the chastening. Jonah is asleep! The sailors fight with the storm, the people cry out to their gods for help, all the while Jonah is snoozing. It is not until the people wake him up does he realize the storm is upon them. Yet, I assure you, God will bring His chastening hand to your attention. Someone will eventually wake you up! *Three*, the folk on the ship are religious and desire for Jonah to seek his God. The ungodly, yet, religious crowd had more sense than the man of God. They were looking for some sort of divine intervention and they implore Jonah to do the same. It is a shame when the world must motivate the Christian to seek after God.

II. LOTS vs. 7-8

Being as we say, superstitious, the sailors decide to determine the cause of the storm by casting lots. Usually, the idea behind casting lots in the Bible is that of a form of voting. Sometimes black and white stones were used. Each person would use the stone which meant “yes” or “no” for how they wanted to vote. In this case, however, casting lots was a way of individual selection. It would be like going to each person and flipping a coin. The one who came up with “heads” was the cause.

The lot fell on Jonah so he was determined to be at fault. They recognize he was to blame for their suffering. Therefore, they seek answers from him. They want to know who he is, where he is from, why he was on board.

III. LIABILITY vs. 9-12

Although on the run from God, and probably having a sense of their apprehension of him, he is truthful. One might have thought he would have the tendency to lie. He didn't. Jonah acknowledges the true God. He even confesses to his wrong-doing (vs. 10b). The lost men wonder at his departure. Not so much that they were amazed that he would walk away from God (though the world recognizes the inconsistency between our supposed faith and our actual conduct), more so, that he would bring his problems upon them. “Why hast thou done this” (vs. 10a)? Why drag us down with you? He definitely became a liability to the ship.

Now that the world knows the Christian is the cause, they wish to know

how to avert being a part of the chastisement. They inquire of Jonah what might be done so the storm would go away (vs. 11). Somewhat surprisingly, Jonah offers a solution to the problem (vs. 12a). He understands the impact of his disobedience (vs. 12b). His suggestion, however, seems extreme to me. Couldn't he have repented and got right with God, vowing to go preach? Couldn't he plead for forgiveness and intercede for the ship so that it might be delivered? Instead, he asks for the unthinkable, "cast me forth into the sea." Through this we see a little of Jonah's attitude and hardness of heart. He was wrong and he knew it, but he refuses to get right with God. He would rather die than follow God.

IV. LOFTED (i.e. he was tossed overboard) vss. 13-16

Sometimes the world shows more character than the Christian. This is one such instance. Take note of the valiant attempt of the lost to spare the saved (vs. 13). They knew he was guilty, "nevertheless." They did all they could to stave off God's chastisement, but God would have nothing of it. Jonah was not going to get off that easy. Judgment was coming. Finally, out of fear, they cry unto God, (vs. 14). Reckoning that Jonah's God was the One who brought the storm, they forsake their own gods to speak to Jehovah-God. They came to the conclusion there was only one solution, and it was Jonah's solution. At the same time, they didn't want this God angry with them, so they request pardon for what they are about to do. They even express some sense of God's sovereignty. This is their only option. So, they cast Jonah over and the storm ceased (vs. 15)! Verse sixteen speaks of how the men had a new respect for this God of the sea; they, for the first time in their lives, feared the true God. They offer sacrifices and make promises.

V. LORD vs. 17

The same God who sent the storm without reprieve, had also made preparation. God made things ready. From the start God knew how to handle the situation. He could have done any number of things in order to get Jonah's attention, even, ultimately, killing him. Instead, God had a plan for Jonah's life, so He "prepared." God delivered him from death but unto chastisement. Consider that this "great fish" was not spoken into existence. But, many years before, God allowed this creature to be born and grow to adult proportions. God protected it from disease and death. God directed it to take up residence in the Mediterranean Sea. Then, at the right time He had that massive fish swim below the flailing ship during this horrible storm. There was trouble above but

not below. Everything is as it should be. Then, here came a passenger. God directed that fish to swallow up the unrepentant prophet. Jonah ended up in the belly of a whale (cf. Matthew 12:40). The verse tells us how long the adventure lasted, “three days and three nights.” Keep in mind that Jesus made reference to this in application to the time He would spend in the grave, Matthew 12:40.

VI. VARIOUS THOUGHTS

There are five thoughts which arise in my mind of which I shall share. *One*, the sin of one person affected many. Although this storm was not their fault, their losses could not be recovered. They had thrown some of the cargo overboard in an effort to lighten the ship (vs. 5). Perhaps the sea became calm but it was not without cost. *Two*, Jonah didn't seem to be bothered much about his rebellion, “asleep” (vs. 5d). Even when the truth was revealed and he accepted the blame, he didn't appear to sense the guilt. In fact, he would rather die than let go of his rebellion. *Three*, Jonah could run but he could not hide, ...evil men found out his sin, (vss. 7c-8). The Bible teaches us, “Behold, your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23). *Four*, I wonder, did Jonah figure on perishing in the midst of a raging storm because of his rebellion? There is no doubt in my mind that he had never counted on this consequence to his sin. *Five*, the heathen became aware of God even though He was dealing with His own. Fortunately, Jonah's disobedience did not drive them away from the true God. They could have easily said, “If that is a Christian, I don't want to be one.”

Jonah chapter 2

Sometimes we can get ourselves into quite a mess. Perhaps our priorities are out of whack, or, we are thinking wrong. So, we choose wrong. Or, perhaps, circumstances put us in a situation where we respond improperly. Whatever the reason, too often we are in a rowboat offshore, and we do not have a paddle! I think we would have to admit that most of what comes upon us is our own doing.

Oh, I know there are many reasons as to why God would bring or allow

His rod of correction to come upon us. But, truthfully, I would say, we have most often asked for it.

So, when affliction comes to us and God is speaking the gentle words of rebuke, or He has tapped us on the shoulder, or He has laid the rod of correction to our spiritual backsides, how do we respond? Do we aggravate the situation further? Or, do we submit to His loving hand, repent, and seek the correction God intends?

Our story of Jonah brings us to a time of judgment. Jonah had fled from the presence of God. He had been disobedient to the Lord's command. Now, God brings it home; He gets Jonah's attention.

My friend, if being swallowed by a whale doesn't warm your heart toward the Lord, then you are a cold one indeed. Let us learn a few things from Jonah's experience. Let us notice...

GOD'S DISCIPLINE

I. JONAH KNEW HIS CIRCUMSTANCE

He had surrendered to his fate. He knew the storm was for his benefit and he knew the only resolution was to be cast overboard. It is my opinion that he willingly opted for this alternative. He was wanting to die. So, as desired, he was loosed over the rail of the ship and tossed into the raging sea (1:15). But a portion of our text informs us that Jonah did not get what he expected. Death did not come (2:3, 5-6b). He describes sinking beneath the waves. He does not specifically express the experience of being swallowed by the whale, but merely states the fact (vs. 1) and alludes to it by using the word "belly" in verse two. We find, therefore, the prophet being entangled in seaweed and making a trip to the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea. The circumstances were poor indeed (2:2b). So much so that Jonah refers to being in "hell" (i.e. grave). For all he knew, he was as good as dead. This was to be his tomb. So he thought.

II. JONAH KNEW HIS AFFLICTION WAS FROM THE LORD

Although Jonah was in a despicable place he remained conscious. He had time to think about where he was and how he got there. Three things are evident. *One*, he recognizes his disobedience, 1:10. He would not be able to blame anyone else for his current situation. *Two*, he recognizes the only outcome, 1:12. Aside from being struck deathly ill or even dead, going overboard and into the sea is the logical result. He could not blame anyone else

for his current position. (After all, if he had not boarded a ship to Tarshish to flee from God, he would not have been out on the sea.) *Three*, he recognizes God's hand, 2:3-4a. From his view God had cast him "into the deep" (vs. 3a). God was the cause of the storm. God designed he would be cast overboard. God prepared the whale. He could not blame anyone else for his current punishment.

These things being negative do not preclude that he had little cognizance of the Lord from a positive perspective. The passage speaks of how he prayed (vs. 1a), how he remembered (vs. 7a), how he was renewed (vs. 9a). Even when God is angry, He can be trusted. Like a parent who punishes a child, in the midst of the affliction there remains the love and compassion. God was angry at Jonah. He orchestrated this unique form of punishment. But, He never once left Jonah alone or without hope.

Sometimes it is necessary to be afflicted by the Lord. Often, we will have time to reflect upon the circumstances and what took us there. Usually, there is opportunity to discern the hand of God and the direction He wants us to take. Prayerfully, the chastisement will set us back on the right course.

III. JONAH WAS BROUGHT BACK TO GOD VIA AFFLICTION vs. 7

What I find in this passage is Jonah reaching the stage of complete exasperation. He gave up all human assistance. There was no one who could aid him. He could not help himself. From a human perspective, he was all alone. He was between the proverbial rock and the hard place. But, having time to think allows him the privilege of discerning some things, especially, all of his problems stem from his disobedience to his God. With nowhere else to turn, he returns to the Lord. Fortunately, he, at least, had a source to rely upon. There are those who either deny God or refuse to turn back to God, thereby, eliminating the only true resource. The punishment accomplished its task. God tapped on Jonah's shoulder to get his attention, and He got it!

Happily, we read in verse one that Jonah prays. Essentially, the second chapter is his prayer. Personally, I am confident that he prayed more than this one time, but this is all which is recorded for us; it is enough. What is it that Jonah prays about? Five general thoughts appear in the text. *One*, he prays about his condition. *Two*, he talks about why he was there. *Three*, he accepts God's discipline. *Four*, we find him seeking after God. And, best of all, *five*, he prays about his return to the Lord, vs. 9. The prodigal has returned; at least,

in his heart.

IV. FAITH BEGAN WHERE SIGHT LEFT OFF

Out of all this negativity emanating from a man's disobedience, there emerges something good. Faith appears to kick in. Notice in verse four, despite being in a whale's belly and death seeming eminent, he believes he will survive and will have opportunity to enter the house of God. Verse six informs us that his release from instant drowning indicates he believes that God has spared his life for a purpose, "thou hast brought up my life from corruption." God is seen with the eye of faith (vss. 7c, 9c). He believes God has heard his prayer. He believes that God will deliver him. Yet, between these two statements there is a mention of those without Jesus who have no hope, vs. 8. Those who worship false gods have no real confidence, therefore, in a time of trial will forsake such gods. But not so for the Christian. So it is, faith begins when hope was severed, vs. 2a. Jonah needs the Lord, and God enables him to believe.

When disobedience came, faith fell away. When trouble came, faith returned. So, we find Jonah turning to his only refuge. We see him trusting in the very One Who brought him to this place. We observe him crying out to God in the midst of his affliction. We know he was willing to once again follow the Lord and return to the pathway of obedience. Through it all, God was served, "I will pay *that* that I have vowed" vs. 9b.

Triumphantly, Jonah is delivered, vs. 10. God, Who prepared the great fish, now speaks to the creature. The whale swims to the exact location along the seashore and vomits the prophet out. I wonder, since it is clear that Jonah ended up on dry land, does that mean that the whale beached himself and then regurgitated Jonah? Was the whale's purpose over, so he gave his life for the life of a man? No one knows for sure.

V. THOUGHTS

For me, a few lessons are borne. *One*, our disobedience will bring God's judgment (cf. Hebrews 12:6, 11). *Two*, affliction often brings us to helplessness and then to God. *Three*, God heard the prayer of His disobedient child (vs. 2d). *Four*, God's hand upon us is usually more severe than we think it will be. *Five*, when disobedience is acknowledged for what it is, then approach God for forgiveness. Beneath this point: a) This is not just a realization but the knowledge of an offense to God which produces contrition; b) Don't wait for

afflictions to respond to God; and, c) Alas, affliction may continue for a time after the confession. *Six*, our vision by faith should cause us to look beyond the circumstances. Here I find: a) God may or may not grant deliverance; b) God may or may not give a second chance; and, c) If He does, we had better hit the ground running. That is, God is now the priority in life...

Jonah 3:1-9

Jonah had been vomited up on the seashore. He had been away to the school of hard knocks, but he has graduated and has the opportunity to return home. He was a bit smelly, I am sure; no doubt he needed a change of clothes. Other than that, he was no worse for the wear. Yet, the question remains, “Did he learn anything?” We will see the answer to this question as we finish the book. But, for now, we consider that God gave him another opportunity to serve.

SECOND CHANCES

I would be the first to admit that I have failed the Lord on way too many occasions. I confess I have been disobedient now and again, and I too, have

tried to run from God. I would dare say that none of us are strangers to Jonah's experience. But, aren't you glad that God has been gracious to you? Aren't you glad He didn't take you to Heaven at your first disobedience? Didn't He grant you a reprieve; hasn't He allowed you to continue on despite that stubborn streak?

Not only do I admit my capacity to go astray, I declare God's compassion and mercy. He has been gracious indeed. God gives second chances. This is what we find in our passage.

I. GOD CAME TO JONAH A SECOND TIME vs. 1

This verse is a great encouragement! God came to Jonah with, not only an opportunity to continue serving, but with the same charge as before. How soon, it is not known; logic dictates God's call came shortly after Jonah was coughed up on the beach.

We can learn from this that God is patient and may still use us. A lapse in judgment is not necessarily a disqualifier. Even in the event of willful disobedience, God might be merciful and choose to use us. But, there is no guarantee. Sometimes, God will use another. Remember Moses arguing with God about going back to Egypt? He made several excuses before God became angry and altered His intentions (cf. Exodus 4:14-16).

II. THE CALL APPEARS TO BE THE SAME AS BEFORE vs. 2 cf. 1:2

As great as it is not to be shelved by the Lord, sometimes, from our perspective, a second chance may not be all that thrilling. God called to Jonah and gave him the original task. He had the same destination with the same duty. The problem is, Jonah doesn't like the mission task any better the second time. His dislike of the Ninevites remains. The seaweed and waters of the Mediterranean did not wash away his bitterness.

Not only do we find that God did not automatically dismiss one of His servants because of sin. But He did not give up on others because of one who was disobedient. In other words, God still had compassion toward a wicked people and a purpose in bringing them the message of repentance. True it is, if we don't do what God has commanded us, He will send someone else. God's purpose will not be thwarted, but we will miss out on the blessing of being used. I am reminded of Israel's predicament in the time of Esther. She was fearful to enter the king's presence to plead in behalf of her people, but her

uncle, Mordecai wisely encouraged her to go. He told her that if she did not accept this responsibility, someone else would; deliverance would arise somewhere, but it was likely she would perish (Esther 4:14). I am convinced that if Jonah had refused the second time, God would have killed him and sent someone else. But, that is only a theory, because Jonah went.

III. JONAH IS OBEDIENT TO THE CALL vs. 3a

This early part of the verse relates to us some good news, “Jonah arose.” He does what God told him to do, “according to.” He finally is going where God wants him to go. It would have been easier if he had done so from the start. Don’t you find it interesting that too often we end up doing what we were trying to avoid, yet, in the meantime procure suffering to ourselves? Then, we ask ourselves, “Why didn’t I just do that from the start?” Jonah may have considered that very thing. If he had any thoughts about going the other way again, his recent experience was a deterrent. The latter part of the verse tells us that the city of Ninevah was a big city; it took three days to travel across it. We are also told he traveled a day’s journey into the city before he began to preach (vss. 3c-4a).

IV. THE CALL WAS SPECIFIC vs. 4

God called Jonah to go and preach. He did exactly that. He speaks the message of God, “the preaching that I bid thee.” His word was that of “yet forty days, and Ninevah shall be overthrown.” On the surface we might not think such a message is the way to evangelize a heathen people, nevertheless, it was God’s method. Three things emanate from this. *One*, we must declare the message even if it is unpopular. A good deal is being said these days about being “seeker friendly.” Honestly, it does no good to bring in those who are seeking if we are going to water down the message to make them feel good. *Two*, we must make the message clear and pointed. The language we use must be understood and specific. The lost need to know they are sinners, there is a penalty for sin, and that Jesus died for sinners. *Three*, those who hear need to respond positively. The Word of God as preached by Jonah was a message: a) of truth; b) of sufficient warning; c) of mercy; d) of action; and, e) of authority.

The inhabitants of Ninevah heard what they needed to hear. They were warned about coming judgment. Yet, the call to repent extended to them the hope of mercy. The message was a call to action; they were to turn from their sins. Since it was God’s Word, they had better take it seriously. Did they?

IV. THEY “BELIEVED GOD” vs. 5a

These words are a good start for them...for anyone. They believe God. As such, they recognize a divine word. They respond to the word. In doing so, they were not following man. The message we give must not be our word, but God’s Word. Those who hear need to follow God, not us.

VI. THEY REPENTED vss. 5b-8

They not only believed God, they repented. Of course, that is what believing God will do. Further, they bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. That is, there was more than a mere profession. They give evidence of their humility and of their turning away from sin. Their actions correspond with the words, “I repent.” What is also interesting is the leadership seems to bear some influence. The king himself is moved by the preaching (vs. 6a) and soon the nobles follow (vs. 7b). They, in turn, make a proclamation to the citizenship. The common man then repented. I realize there is no word of a unanimous response but I would suppose there was a sweeping majority. Remember, Jesus used this event to condemn those of His generation because they would not repent at His preaching, Matthew 12:41.

VII. THEY REALIZED THE POSSIBILITY vs. 9

The message of the king and noblemen was as clear as Jonah’s original declaration. They implore the city to repent. Why did they do so? Because they knew it was God’s judgment (vs. 9a). They had angered God (vs. 9b). They understood it was possible that God might have mercy on them (vs. 9c).

VIII. THOUGHTS

Six thoughts come to mind as we finish this passage. *One*, we see a people entrenched in sin. *Two*, we find God demonstrating compassion on sinners. *Three*, God sent forth a messenger. *Four*, God gave the message. *Five*, God showed mercy. *Six*, several things are true regarding Jonah’s **second chance**. We see a Christian in sin. We recognize God had compassion on him; God sent correction instead of destruction. We realize God’s unique messenger was a whale. Yet, the difference was the Spirit’s work in his heart. Therefore, we find that God grants mercy and extends him a *second chance*.

God may not always give another opportunity, but He did for Jonah. He might also be merciful to you and to me when we try to run from Him.

Jonah 3:10-4:3

In the Old Testament, when the Jews entered into the Promised Land, they separated tribes, half being on Mt. Ebal and the other half on Mt. Gerazim. These were the mounts of blessing and cursing. There was a pronouncement by the priests in the valley between as to what would happen to Israel if they obeyed God or disobeyed God. If they obeyed, they would be blessed. If they disobeyed, they would be cursed. The people of Israel heard the proclamation and gave affirmation.

In the New Testament we find a principle of sowing and reaping. That is, whatever you sow, you will reap. If you sow to the flesh, you will of the flesh reap corruption; if you sow to the spirit, you will of the spirit reap life everlasting. The gospels also tell us that with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again. That is, "What goes around, comes around."

By these biblical thoughts, along with a casual observance of every life, we learn that there are consequences to our actions. That being the case, how we respond to the events of life makes a big difference. Response matters.

Take Jonah as an example. God told him to go to Ninevah and preach, he responded by running from the presence of God. God responded to him by

having him cast overboard and experiencing what it was like to be fish food. Well, as you know, that prompted Jonah to respond to the chastisement with repentance. Jonah got things right with God. When he did, God responded by delivering Jonah onto the seashore, safe and sound. What happened then? God told him to go to Ninevah and preach (God gave him a second chance!). This time, Jonah responded in obedience and went and preached. Your response matters.

RESPONSE

I. GOD'S RESPONSE TO NINEVAH 3:10

God saw their actions. They had responded to God's Word. Their actions were not mere outward motions, rather, from the heart, Matthew 15:19; I Samuel 16:7c (cf. Psalm 51:17). God would have never been tricked by exterior response alone. Since He grants mercy to them, it shows He looked to the inward man and saw it as true. Evidently, they possessed a fruitful "repentant" heart (cf. Matthew 3:8). I also think it is worth noting that their response is in spite of the faults of the preacher. Jonah might not have wanted to preach, or to see them saved, yet they were. We learn from this that salvation is by God and His Word, and not by man (cf. Romans 10:17; Isaiah 55:10-11).

Then we find a somewhat perplexing statement, "God repented of the evil." It is difficult for us to understand the nature of God, so the Scripture often utilizes *anthropomorphisms*. That is, using human terms to describe God. For example, the "face of God" or "God grew weary with man." Such is this matter of God repenting. The problem enters because God is an unchangeable God (Malachi 3:6a; James 1:17 cf. Hebrews 13:8) yet we read He repents. That implies He changed His mind. That is difficult to grasp since God always accomplishes His will in Heaven and in Earth and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, what doest thou (Daniel 4:35). Even the above discussion about God responding to man and his responses is a matter hard to follow. Yet, those actions are said of Him. Here is not the place to argue the theological aspects of these things, but I note them so you may not turn a deaf ear. God never changes but He is said to repent. I would comment, however, with two items. *One*, this passage speaks of Him turning from "evil." Obviously, the word is not evil as in ungodly, rather, *not good, unprofitable*. Such would not have been found to be good for the inhabitants of Ninevah. As a matter of fact, it would have been their judgment, vs. 9b. Further, it would have been deserved, vs. 8b. From man's view such things are bad, but they are not evil in the sense of sin, for God

is holy and cannot do or be evil. *Two*, as mentioned before, God chose to respond to their response. (May I say, He knew what their response would be.) The Ninevites had two choices: if no repentance, then destruction, vs. 4b; and, if repentance, then deliverance...which is what happened, vs. 10c.

II. JONAH'S RESPONSE TO GOD 4:1-3

God sparing sinners from death and destruction should provoke in a Christian an attitude of gratitude. As the angels rejoice when a sinner repents (Luke 15:10), the Christian should also exhibit joy. But this is not the case with Jonah. One would think that after his experience and return to the Lord that he would not relapse. Yet, he does. There are three things to consider. *One*, note his **severe** displeasure, vs. 1. Jonah wants to see them judged. He does not want their repentance. He becomes angry at what God had done. Not just "angry" but "very angry." Observe that his attitude does not match his ministry. *Two*, note his sad prayer, vs. 2. To whom was the prayer directed? "O Lord" He pours his heart out to God. Instead of joy he feels sorrow. He states his purpose for fleeing in the first place, "this was my saying" (vs. 2a). He didn't want to see Ninevah spared to begin with; his view has not changed. Since he knew God's character, "I knew thou art a gracious God" (vs. 2b), he did not want to go and preach because he was sure God would forgive them. So, we have his prayer airing his grievance against God. I find it interesting that he saw God's attributes as good for him, but not for them. In other words, he likes God's mercy and deliverance for himself, but those vicious and vile people of Ninevah do not deserve it! *Three*, note his present recourse, vs. 3. He actually tells the Lord he would rather die than see the lost live. We can only try to imagine the bitterness of his soul. What a sad place for anyone to be!

III. OUR RESPONSE

I wish to make six observations. *One*, we will flee from God when we disagree with His decisions. I remind you, this is not a good response, expect chastisement. *Two*, we should not permit our attitudes to be like Jonah's. May we never become so spiteful of others that we deny them God's mercy. *Three*, we should want for others to have what we have received for ourselves. May we not be so selfish. *Four*, Jonah was only interested in his viewpoint. He did not care for the people of Ninevah. He wasn't interested in God's will. He was not concerned about God's glory. *Five*, a bad spirit will lead to anger, which leads to depression, which leads to despair. *Six*, God has chosen to respond to our responses...may we respond properly in all things.

Jonah 4:4-11

We are taught in the New Testament as to how a Christian should respond to negative circumstance. See Matthew 5:44-48. I confess, that is not too easy. Yet, why should we strive to change our philosophical outlook to match His? Because that IS Who He is. God is gracious, longsuffering, merciful, and compassionate. As his children, we should emulate Him. Doing so glorifies God.

In considering this final look at Jonah, we see a child of God, yea, more than that, a prophet of God. His attitude doesn't reflect God's. His approach is all about what he wants. Jonah desires the Ninevites to get a taste of their own medicine. He wants them destroyed, every last one of them.

The last lesson addressed Jonah's response to God's mercy. He was more than angry. He was greatly upset. So much so, he would rather die than to see a Ninevite live. This passage completes the book, so may we notice...

A LESSON ON COMPASSION

I. GOURD PREPARED vss. 4-6

God in His eternal infinite wisdom knows how to deal with every situation. In this instance, He questions Jonah with no recorded answer (vs. 4). Although he does not say anything, Jonah's actions speak for him. He goes to the outskirts of town, most likely climbs a mound or small hill overlooking the

city, he builds himself a shelter, and he waits. What is he waiting for? Jonah still hopes for their destruction (vs. 5). What does the Lord do? He prepares a gourd to give Jonah some relief (vs. 6). From my perspective, Jonah prepared a way to be shaded from the sun, but being on the East side of the city (vs. 5a), the shelter would block the sun until early to mid-afternoon. As the sun passes the apex of noon headed toward sunset, the sun would be in his face. He not only had to endure the hottest time of the day but he also had the brilliance of its rays right in his eyes. That, my friends, is the importance of the gourd. Actually, if you think about it, God shows compassion to his hard-hearted prophet.

Five things come to mind about Jonah's situation here presented. *One*, Jonah's bitterness remains. *Two*, Jonah's attitude brought him to his present condition. *Three*, Jonah endured affliction because he chose to stay there. *Four*, Jonah welcomed the relief HE received. *Five*, it is his bitter choices which compounds his circumstance and leads him to despair.

II. GOURD DESTROYED vss. 7-8

As Job so aptly put it, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away" (Job 1:21). God brought the gourd, God took it away (vs. 7). He instructed one of His creatures to move in and take up residence within the gourd. Which in turn, the worm feasted until the gourd was ruined and withered away. Then, as it does everyday, God commanded the sun to rise. This day, however, was a bright and sunny day with not a cloud in the sky! More so, God sent a searing wind to blow off the desert sands. The Eastern inhabitants of that region call it the Sirocco. What it boils down to is God brings great affliction upon Jonah (vs. 8).

Permit me to give you a few items to consider. *One*, God "prepares" more often than we acknowledge. He prepared a fish, a gourd, a worm, and a vehement east wind. *Two*, positive conditions may quickly fade. Jonah thought he had it pretty good with the unexpected gourd coming to his aid. Yet, it did not last long. Truly, we never know for sure what is going to happen during the day (cf. Proverbs 27:1). *Three*, not all of God's appointments are good in our sight, but they are good in His and for our best. Jonah didn't like it that the gourd was gone, but God had His reasons. I am reminded that the great promise of Romans 8:28 is not about everything being good, rather, that all things **work together** for good. *Four*, even in severe distress, our stubbornness prevents us from changing locations. I wonder why Jonah didn't get up and

find some shade. Why didn't he leave his vantage point overlooking the city? Why did he insist on sitting there in such miserable conditions? I think you know the answers.

III. GOD'S LESSON vs. 9-11

At last, we find Jonah in the school of hard knocks,...again. Here he is, sitting in the blazing sun with a blast furnace blowing in his face. We read that he experiences the symptoms of heat stroke, yet, all he can do is wish for death. Then, God questions Jonah again (vs. 9a). This time he answers. You can almost sense the furious tone in his voice. He is angry at his circumstance and he isn't afraid to tell God about it. As you look at his answer (vs. 9b) you can discern his spiteful and capricious spirit, "even unto death." A bad spirit will lead to extremes.

God, once more in His infinite wisdom, as a teacher to a difficult student, points to the facts of the matter (vs. 10). The truth is, Jonah expresses great concern over something minor. He had pity on a gourd. Further, he had no personal investment in it. He didn't make it come up, "thou hast not laboured." It came one day and was gone the next and he didn't have anything to do with that. Yet, may I submit unto you, he did have a personal interest. He had received benefit from the gourd. It was a blessing to him. You see, it was still *all about him*. God is not finished teaching.

God applies the lesson, vs. 11. In comparison, Jonah has not responded very well. God, therefore, shows the contrast of his value system and points out that his responses have been disproportionate. On the other hand, the sovereign God has done well. God did have an "investment" in Ninevah. They are His creatures. He gave them life. He provided all the necessary sustenance for life and living. Apparently, His eternal purpose involved their repentance. As God grew the gourd, He "grew" Ninevah. Thus, God did have an interest in their deliverance. Without question, the impact is of greater importance than a mere plant. There were over 60,000 young children living in Ninevah. That isn't counting the teens and adults. That isn't counting all the other creatures He made, such as, cattle, goats, camels, sheep, etc., as expressed by, "*also much cattle.*"

There are three things we can learn from this. *One*, bitterness toward men will bring bitterness toward God and eventually, despair of life. *Two*, priorities must be properly identified. *Three*, God's grace must be recognized.

IV. CONCLUSION

As we close this book, I share six final thoughts. *One*, compassion must extend beyond ourselves. Our motives and values should be more than, “What do I get out of this?” *Two*, compassion involves the depth of others. That is, we must care about someone other than ourselves. Caring about a gourd is okay, but to not care about another human being is selfish and cruel. *Three*, we learn that compassion is tainted by our selfish viewpoints. *Four*, compassion is a characteristic of God; we do well to emulate Him. *Five*, if compassion is good for us, it is good for others. If we desire mercy, shouldn’t others have it as well? *Six*, it is our place to submit to God in all things and glorify Him. It will not do us “well to be angry.”