

Jonah Rejects God's Call

Printed Text · Jonah 1:1-4, 11-17; 2:1,10

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will COMPREHEND that God's sovereignty is irreversible, FEEL REMORSE for how our disobedience can impact others, and COMMIT to follow God's will even when we may not understand His larger plan.

In Focus

Our math system, like our calendar, is not perfect. Under certain conditions errors show up! This little word puzzle may be one of many such occurrences where errors crop up. Many math teachers enjoy offering this paradox to their students. See if you can solve it.

Three guys are at a hotel and order a pizza. The front desk says it will be \$30, so each guy puts in \$10. When the delivery guy brings the pizza, he says it is only \$25, so he gives each guy back \$1 and keeps \$2 for a tip.

You might be thinking if $\$30 - \$25 = \$5$ and $\$5 - \$3 = \$2$ what's the problem?

The three guys originally gave \$10 each. They each got back \$1 in change. That means they each paid \$9. Three times \$9 is \$27. The delivery guy kept \$2 for a tip. \$27 plus \$2 equals \$29. Where in the world is that other dollar?

Many people put complete faith in imprecise mathematical systems and formulas created by imperfect people. These same people will tell you that there is no way a person could survive in the belly of a fish for three days.

When we put our faith in people and their systems, we will often be disappointed. When we put our faith in God and are obedient to His word, we will never be disappointed.

In today's lesson, we will delve into the story of Jonah's outright disobedience and the consequences of his actions.

Keep In Mind

"But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD" (Jonah 1:3, KJV).

Words You Should Know

- A. **Made vows** (Jonah 1:16) Hebrew Nadar — To promise. Denotes an act of verbally consecrating something to God. There were conditional and unconditional vows. The unconditional vow was an oath that was absolutely binding. The conditional vow was characterized by "if . . . then . . ." clauses. Most likely, the sailors in Jonah made conditional vows.
- B. **Inside** (2:1) Hebrew me-ah — From an unknown root which probably meant "to be soft." The word generally refers to internal organs such as the stomach or intestines. Signifies the innermost part and is often used metaphorically to represent emotions.

Say It Correctly

Nineveh. NIN-uh-vuh

Tempestuous. tem-pes-CHU-us

KJV

Jonah 1:1 Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

4 But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

11 Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.

12 And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

14 Wherefore they cried unto the Lord, and said, We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee.

15 So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows.

2:1 Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly,

10 And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

NLT

Jonah 1:1 The Lord gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai:

2 "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are."

3 But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the Lord. He went down to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, hoping to escape from the Lord by sailing to Tarshish.

4 But the Lord hurled a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship apart.

11 And since the storm was getting worse all the time, they asked him, "What should we do to you to stop this storm?"

12 "Throw me into the sea," Jonah said, "and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault."

13 Instead, the sailors rowed even harder to get the ship to the land. But the stormy sea was too violent for them, and they couldn't make it.

14 Then they cried out to the Lord, Jonah's God. "O Lord," they pleaded, "don't make us die for this man's sin. And don't hold us responsible for his death. O Lord, you have sent this storm upon him for your own good reasons."

15 Then the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once!

16 The sailors were awestruck by the Lord's great power, and they offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him.

17 Now the Lord had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights.

2:1 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from inside the fish.

10 Then the Lord ordered the fish to spit Jonah out onto the beach.

The People, Places, and Times

Jonah (dove). The prophet who was swallowed by a great fish before he obeyed God's command to preach repentance to the Assyrian city of Nineveh. Jonah was not always so reluctant to do God's bidding. He is the same prophet who predicted the remarkable expansion of Israel's territory during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.); (2 Kings 14:25). The passage in 2 Kings also indicates that Jonah, the son of Amittai, was from Gath Hopher, a town in Zebulun in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Jonah's story is somewhat sad and tragic. We know nothing of the reluctant prophet after he returned to Israel from his adventures at sea and preaching in Nineveh.

Joppa (beautiful). An ancient seaport city on the Mediterranean Sea, about 35 miles northwest of Jerusalem. Joppa was on a rocky ledge about 116 feet high overlooking the Mediterranean. It supposedly received its name "beautiful" from the sunlight that its buildings reflected.

The first mention of Joppa in the Bible indicates that it was part of the territory inherited by the tribe of Dan (Joshua 19:46). The city was the seaport for Jerusalem and the site of significant shipping in both Old and New Testament times. Rafts of cedar logs from the forests of Lebanon were floated from Tyre and Sidon to Joppa and then transported overland to Jerusalem to be used in building Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles 2:16).

In New Testament times, Joppa was the home of a Christian disciple, Tabitha (or Dorcas), a woman "full of good works and charitable deeds" (Acts 9:36). Joppa was also the home of Simon the Tanner (Acts 10:32). It was on the roof of Simon's house in Joppa that Peter received his vision of a great sheet descending from heaven (Acts 10:9-16).

Tarshish (jasper). A city or territory believed by many to be Tartessus, in southern Spain near Gibraltar. When Jonah fled from God's instruction to go to Nineveh, he boarded a ship bound for Tarshish, in the opposite direction from Nineveh (Jonah 1:3; 4:2). Tarshish was famous for its ships (Psalm 48:7; Isaiah 2:16), which carried gold, silver, iron, tin, lead, ivory, apes, and monkeys (1 Kings 10:22; Jeremiah 10:9).

Because the ships of Tarshish carried such great riches, they became symbols of wealth, power, and pride. When God judged the nations for their sinful ways, He destroyed their ships to humble them and to demonstrate His great power (2 Chronicles 20:35-37; Isaiah 2:16-17).

Background

The name Jonah means "dove." Very little is said of the prophet outside of the book that bears his name. In 2 Kings 14:25, Jonah is said to have prophesied that the Southern Kingdom of Israel would expand its borders during the reign of Jeroboam (793-753), a wicked king of the Southern Kingdom. It is safe to conclude that the Jonah of 1 Kings is the same person as the Jonah who is the subject of this book. This is especially true since both are identified as "the son of Amittai" (cp. 2 Kings 14:25; Jonah 1:1). Jonah's prophecy to Jeroboam provides some important background material to enhance our understanding of the prophet and this book.

Jonah was a prophet of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. His predecessors were Elijah and Elisha. Hosea and Amos would likely have been Jonah's contemporaries. Assyria, whose capital city was Nineveh, had already begun to exercise her dominance in the Near East; but for a time, her control would wane, allowing Israel, under Jeroboam's leadership, to expand its borders. Israel's prosperity during this period was solely due to God's grace and compassion for His people, who were greatly

afflicted. It was certainly not godliness on the part of the nation or its leaders that could be viewed as the basis for God's blessings.

Accordingly, just as Jonah's ministry in Nineveh would result in an outpouring of God's grace, so would his ministry in Israel. The difference is that, even though Israel did not repent of her evil deeds, God blessed the nation anyway. The Ninevites, on the other hand, sincerely repented of their sins and God withheld judgment of the nation. In this sense, God's grace was even greater toward the Israelites than it was toward the Ninevites, for God had promised to forgive those who repented (cf. Jeremiah 18:7–8). The Book of Jonah is an unusual book. It is the only prophetic book that places more emphasis on the messenger than the message. The prophetic message of Jonah consists of only seven words. Another unusual feature of the book is that it revolves exclusively around a Gentile nation. Jonah was the only Old Testament prophet sent directly to the Gentiles and the only prophet who refused to obey God.

God's sovereignty is evidenced throughout the book. God "sent a great wind" (Jonah 1:4), prepared "a great fish" (v. 17) and "a vine" (4:6), and sent a scorching "east wind." The purpose of the book is to convict God's people of selfishness and bigotry. The book demonstrates the universal nature of God's compassion. It points to the future redemption of both Jews and Gentiles through the finished work of Christ.

At-A-Glance

1. Jonah's Disobedience (Jonah 1:1–3)
2. Jonah's Devastation (vv. 4, 11–17)
3. Jonah's Deliverance (Jonah 2:1, 10)

In Depth

1. Jonah's Disobedience (Jonah 1:1–3)

The Book of Jonah begins just like eight of the twelve books of the so-called "minor prophets": "The word of the Lord came to . . ." (Jonah 1:1). The difference between Jonah and the other prophets is that they obeyed God's command, but Jonah made up his mind to disobey God.

God told Jonah to go to the people of Nineveh and announce His judgment against them. Jonah's seven-word prophecy was short but to the point: "In forty days Nineveh shall be overthrown" (3:4).

Nineveh, a major city of Assyria, was about 500 miles northeast of Israel. The Assyrians, a powerful and wicked people, were old enemies of Israel. Jonah knew that if he preached to the city, there was a chance the people might turn away from their wickedness. He also knew that if they repented, God would show them mercy (4:1–3). Jonah decided he would flee from God's service rather than allow the Assyrians to have an opportunity to receive God's mercy.

The reluctant prophet refused to proclaim God's word to the Ninevites. Instead of following God's command to go to Nineveh, Jonah went down to the port city of Joppa. There he bought passage on a ship headed for a city called Tarshish. Apparently, the foolish prophet thought he could somehow escape God's presence (1:3). Tarshish was located in southwest Spain about 2,500 miles west of Israel. The Lord told Jonah to go east, but Jonah went west.

Many times God's will for our lives is different from what we think we need. When these situations arise, God wants us to trust Him and obey. Following our own will often leads to

serious trouble, as the prophet Jonah is about to find out.

2. Jonah's Devastation (vv. 4, 11–17)

Jonah boarded the ship, and the crew set sail across the Mediterranean Sea. The sailing was smooth until God sent a great wind that caused a violent storm to spring up at sea. The storm was so strong the ship was in danger of being torn apart by the raging waters.

The sailors were terrified, and each man began calling out to whatever gods he worshiped for deliverance. Meanwhile, Jonah had gone down inside the ship and fallen fast asleep. The ship's captain found Jonah and demanded he get up and pray to his God. The sailors drew lots to determine who was responsible for their dire plight, and God caused the lot to single out Jonah as the one responsible (vv. 5–7).

The men questioned Jonah, and at some point, Jonah told them he was running away from God. The men now had two more questions for him. The first was, "Why have you done this?" (v. 10, NIV). The frightened sailors wanted to know why Jonah found it necessary to attempt to flee from the presence of his God. Jonah ignored this question because answering it honestly would reveal his selfish disobedience.

The second question was, "What should we do with you to make the sea calm down for us?" (v. 11, NIV). Jonah had no problem answering this question: "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm" (v. 12, NIV). Jonah could have told the sailors, "God wants me to go to Nineveh. If you turn the boat around and sail back to Joppa, God will calm the sea." But Jonah was so determined to have his own way he would rather die than obey God.

We would have expected the sailors to immediately grab the reluctant prophet and toss him overboard. Instead, the sailors demonstrated compassion for human life that was sorely lacking in Jonah. The men took to the oars and tried their best to bring the boat to land. It soon became obvious that their struggles were in vain. The sailors gave up. They prayed to God for forgiveness, then threw Jonah into the roiling waters. The raging sea immediately grew calm (v. 15).

Many times, disobedience to God not only affects the disobedient but those around them. For Achan's sin, all Israel was defeated at Ai. David sinned and 70,000 people perished. Jonah's disobedience brought danger to a boatload of sailors. Is your disobedience to God causing pain for anyone you love?

3. Jonah's Deliverance (v. 2:1, 10)

Jonah would rather have died than submit to God's will, yet God still loved Jonah and had a job for him to do. God "prepared" a large fish to swallow Jonah (1:17). The preparation of the fish meant that God arranged for the fish to be at the exact place at the exact time that Jonah needed it. It also meant that God had somehow prepared the fish to support human life.

Jonah was probably drowning by the time the fish swallowed him, so he viewed the fish as an agent of salvation (2:3). Jesus would later compare His own impending death and resurrection to Jonah's three days and three nights in the fish's belly (Jonah 1:17; cf. Matthew 12:39–40; Luke 11:29–30).

During the three days Jonah spent inside the great fish, he prayed and repented of his disobedience (2:4, 9). God heard Jonah's prayer and commanded the great fish to vomit up Jonah on dry land. Interestingly enough, the great fish obeyed God more readily than Jonah had.

God told Jonah to go east, but instead, he went west. He commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh, but Jonah fled in the opposite direction to Tarshish. It took miracles of devastation and deliverance to get Jonah to obey God's sovereign will. What will it take for you?

Search the Scriptures

1. Who prophesied to King Jeroboam that he restore the borders of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the sea of Arabah? (2 Kings 14:25)
2. God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh, but he disobeyed God and fled in the opposite direction. What city was Jonah heading for? (v. 3)
3. Who did the sailors pray to in verse 5? Who did they pray to in verse 14? What did Jonah tell the sailors that may have made the difference? (v. 9)
4. While Jonah was on board a ship fleeing God's command, a violent storm sprang up at sea. What was the cause of the storm? (v. 4)
5. The terrified sailors had no choice except to throw Jonah overboard. In the sea, a huge fish swallowed Jonah. Who sent the fish? (v. 17)

Discuss the Meaning

1. God described the wickedness of Nineveh as having "come up before me." When Jonah disobeyed God, he "went down" to Joppa, then he "went down" into the ship (v. 4), and finally, he had "gone down" inside the ship (v. 5). What significance does this contrast between "up to God," and "down" in disobedience have for you?
2. As a result of their encounter with Jonah, the pagan sailors came to know the Lord. Is it possible that the conduct of believers facing negative situations can have a beneficial effect on non-believers?

Liberating Lesson

The slogan on our money reads, "In God, We Trust." To trust in God means to seek and obey His wisdom when making decisions. Do you believe that our leaders really seek God's guidance in matters of state? Do you believe that God should be left out of governmental decisions?

Application For Activation

Is there something that you know God wants you to do and you are not doing? Perhaps you are carrying a grudge, and God wants you to forgive. Maybe God wants you to demonstrate real love or submit to your spouse. Whatever the case, submit yourself to God and do whatever He wants you to do without worrying about the outcome. Be prepared to share your experiences with the class next week.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Jonah 1:1–4, 11–17; 2:1, 10

On one hand, the Book of Jonah is a story about a personal encounter between YAHWEH and His servant Jonah, who tried to avert God’s plan. On the other hand, it is about an encounter between a wicked people to whom He decides to show mercy. These encounters arise from God’s call to Jonah to go and preach to the wicked nation—Nineveh—so they can repent from their evil ways and be saved. Jonah turns down the commission and tries to flee on a ship to Tarshish in order to run away from that responsibility.

Jonah soon learns that God’s thoughts are different from his thoughts and God’s ways are not his ways; that God is omnipresent and that one cannot escape the presence of the Almighty. He also learns that God’s plans override any human plans. After an unforgettable encounter with God in the belly of a fish, Jonah obeys the Lord and goes to preach to the people of Nineveh. After his successful preaching, he soon learns to his disappointment that God’s mercy is universal and He forgives even the worst of the wicked who turn to Him for mercy. The title, “The Book of Jonah” tends to suggest that Jonah was the author of the book. This is misleading. The book is about Jonah and his encounter with God.

1:1 Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

The first statement in the Book of Jonah begins with a pattern frequently used in the Bible: “The word of the Lord came (un)to” so and so (see 2 Samuel 7:4; 1 Kings 17:2, 8; Jeremiah 1:4, 11). The construction is found mainly in the Old Testament and is almost exclusively unique to the prophets, especially when God gives a direct instruction to a prophet to accomplish a special task. The pattern is found only once in the New Testament (Luke 3:2). It often appears, as in this case, at the beginning of a book (Hosea 1:1; Joel 1:1; Micah 1:1; Zephaniah 1:1; Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 1:1). In Jonah, the writer begins with a Hebrew conjunction *hayah* (haw-yaw), translated here as “now” (KJV) but generally translated as “Now it came to pass” (the same words are used in Ruth 1:1; Genesis 14:1; Esther 1:1; Isaiah 7:1; Jeremiah 1:3; see the February 3 discussion). It can also be rendered “it happened” or “to come about.” However, the KJV translates it as “Now” in Jonah. The use of this conjunction at the start of the book seems to indicate that the beginning is not absolute, but that there is some story preceding it; it sounds like a continuation of a narrative. As we found in the Book of Ruth, the expression is sometimes used for emphasis to get people’s attention.

The expression “the word of the Lord came” is an anthropomorphic use of “the word,” which gives it a divine authority. The “word,” or its Hebrew translation *dabar*, refers to the spoken word, an utterance, a saying, or an oracle. Here, it means that the Lord spoke to Jonah. To express the actual effect of the utterance, we say, “The Lord commanded Jonah,” which means that Jonah had no choice in the matter. The word that came is so powerful and uncomfortable to Jonah that he tries to flee from the presence of God in order to avoid the responsibility.

We are not told how the word came to Jonah—whether audibly, in a vision, by intuition, or in a dream; all we know is that it was strong and powerful. The apostle Paul says, “The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12, NIV). A variant of the expression, “the word of the Lord came” is found in Jonah 3:1. What is the content of the word that came to Jonah? The answer is found in the next verse (v. 2). We shall deal with that later; but first,

who was Jonah?

Jonah was a historical character, the only one so named in the Old Testament. Apart from the book that bears his name, the only place Jonah is mentioned in the Bible is in 2 Kings 14:25. Jonah is known as the prophet who was first swallowed by a great fish before he obeyed God's command to preach repentance to the Assyrian city of Nineveh.

However, Jonah was not always a reluctant spokesman for the Lord. From the 2 Kings account, he was apparently the same prophet who predicted the remarkable expansion of Israel's territory during the reign of Jeroboam II, who ruled about 793-753 B. C. The passage indicates that Jonah, the son of Amittai, was from Gath Hopher, a town in Zebulun in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986). The name is spelled "Jonas" in the New Testament (Matthew 12:39-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32). Peter's father was named Jona or Jonas (John 1:42; 21:15-17); and it is believed that both Peter and Jonah came from Galilee, which discredits the Pharisees' statement, ". . . out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (John 7:52).

2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

The word of the Lord that came to Jonah was a command to "arise, go to Nineveh," and a call to go preach to the "great city" Nineveh. The message is clear and precise. He is to go "and cry against it (the city); for their wickedness is come up before me," the Lord says. The phrase "cry against it" here means "to proclaim," or to warn the Ninevites of their evil deeds.

Nineveh was a famous ancient Assyrian city. It was situated on the eastern bank of the Tigris River opposite the modern city of Mosul. It was also called Nina, for the patron goddess of the city. The Bible credits Asshur as the founder and builder of Nineveh (Genesis 10:11-12) following the flood of Noah. Nineveh grew to become the capital of Assyria. In 612 B.C., this ancient and splendid city was so utterly destroyed, as prophesied by Hebrew prophets (Nahum 3:7; Zephaniah 2:13), that it became like a myth until its discovery by Sir Austen Layard and others in the nineteenth century.

The site has now been extensively excavated. It is estimated that the actual walled city measured three miles in length and less than a mile and a half in breadth, and the wall was about eight miles in length. It is believed that a number of cities, including such cities as Calah, Resen (located between Calah and Nineveh proper), and Rehoboth (Genesis 10:11-12; Jonah 1:2; 3:27; 4:11), constituted "the great city," Nineveh. Other suburbs such as Tarbisu and Dursharrukin added to the aggregate size of Nineveh in the heyday of the Assyrian Empire. The city of Nineveh, and indeed the whole Assyrian Empire, was known for its worship of their god Nisroch under King Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:36-37; Isaiah 37:37-38) and for its wickedness and inversion against Judah and its king, Hezekiah, in 686 B.C. (2 Kings 18-19; Isaiah 36-37).

Against this city, the Lord commanded Jonah to preach. What was God's purpose? As we shall learn from the rest of the story, God's purpose for sending Jonah was to warn the Ninevites of their sin and to give them an opportunity to repent and be saved from the impending judgment of God against them: a total destruction of the city. This illustrates one of the attributes of God: He is merciful and does not punish any person or people without first warning them or giving them the opportunity to change.

Although the Lord did not state His purpose to Jonah, he is fully aware that his God is merciful but does not want Him to show mercy to the enemies of his people. He wants the city destroyed (4:2). However, for God to refuse to warn man of impending destruction and give him an opportunity to avoid it would be inconsistent with God's character (cf. Genesis 19:20-22). What is Jonah's reaction to God's plan? He decides to disobey the Lord and would rather die than see the people and city of

Nineveh spared and saved.

3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

In reaction and protest against God's plan, Jonah decides to flee from the Lord to avoid the responsibility given to him. Verse 3 gives a detailed account of his plan. He decides to flee to Tarshish, thinking that he could run away "from the presence of the Lord" Then he goes down to the seaport at Joppa. Joppa was a port on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea on the southwest edge of the territory of Dan. It was known as the "gateway" of ancient Palestine. Joppa was built on a small, rocky hill about 116 feet high. Its harbor was formed by a circle of great rocks. It became the primary port of Jerusalem during the time of King Solomon (2 Chronicles 2:16). Joppa was well known in the New Testament. It was here that Peter raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36–42); and from there Peter was called to go and preach the Gospel to the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:5–8, 23, 32; 11:5, 13). Here, Jonah boards a ship bound west for Tarshish in the opposite direction from Nineveh, in order to avoid preaching to its inhabitants.

Tarshish was a city or territory west of the Mediterranean Sea with which the Phoenicians traded (2 Chronicles 9:21; Psalm 72:10). It is believed to be the modern city of Tartessus, in the southern part of Spain near Gibraltar. Tarshish was famous for its ships (Psalm 48:7; Isaiah 2:16), which carried gold, silver, iron, tin, lead, ivory, apes, and monkeys (1 Kings 10:22; Jeremiah 10:9). Because the ships of Tarshish carried such great riches, they became symbols of wealth, power, and pride. When God judged the nations for their sinful ways, He destroyed their "ships of Tarshish" to humble them and to demonstrate His great power (2 Chronicles 20:35–37; Isaiah 2:16–17).

As he boards the ship, Jonah pays his fare and goes down into the ship ready for the trip. The phrase "went down into it" (Hebrew *yadah*), which means "to descend into, to sink down," is significant. He does not simply board the ship for Tarshish, but he goes down into the lower part of the ship, into the hull of the ship, again thinking (and foolishly so) that he would succeed in escaping the presence of the Lord. Apart from trying to flee "from the presence of the Lord," he probably goes straight down into the hull of the ship to avoid detection by other people who might recognize him. There, he falls asleep (v. 5).

"The presence of the Lord" is found three times in this short book (vv. 3, 10). Being in the presence of the Lord is a wonderful and comforting experience for those who love and obey Him (Genesis 28:15; 31:3; Exodus 3:12; 33:14); but to the sinner and the guilty, it is a dreadful place (Job 23:15; Jeremiah 5:22). Adam and Eve tried to hide from the presence of the Lord because of their sin (Genesis 3:8–10). However, multitudes have longed to be in the presence of God, wanting to be in His presence forever. In contrast, Jonah was willing to sacrifice this coveted place, and even his life, in order to save his people from the inhabitants of Nineveh and Assyria. Is it possible to flee from the presence of the Lord, to hide from Him? The answer is obvious. One thing Jonah does not remember is that the Lord's presence permeates everything and is everywhere.

The psalmist, unlike Jonah, shows that he understands this well when he says, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee" (Psalm 139:7–12). Jonah will soon discover the "bitter" truth.

4 But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that

the ship was like to be broken.

At this point, Jonah finds out the futility of his plan and effort to escape to Tarshish. As he boards the ship, the Lord causes a great storm to threaten the ship to the point of breaking. There is great panic on the ship. The ship's crew and captain try everything they can think of to save the ship from sinking. They even throw some of their cargo into the sea to lighten the ship, but nothing happens. Meanwhile, Jonah is comfortably fast asleep in the hull of the ship. Finding Jonah asleep, the captain calls on him to pray to his God for deliverance. The people cast lots to determine who is to blame for the evil that has come upon them. They soon discover that Jonah, a servant of the one true God, is trying to run away from the presence of his God (vv. 4–10). The people are frightened.

11 Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.

12 And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

The people on the ship ask Jonah what they should do with him in order to calm the storm because it was now becoming worse, and the sea was very turbulent. Jonah tells them to throw him into the sea. He says to them, "Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea," i.e., toss me overboard in order to pacify the raging sea. Why does Jonah prefer to die rather than carry out God's instruction? Does he really fear and worship the Lord as he claimed (v. 9)? Or is he just trying to be stubborn? The obvious answer to these questions is simple. His patriotism and love for his people, and (theologically speaking) his ignorance had blinded his spiritual eyes and clouded his mind so that he could not understand God's eternal salvation plan for all peoples (Jonah 4:1–3).

Sometimes our "love" for others (family and friends) and patriotism for our nation can lead us to disobey God's commandment and thereby jeopardize our love for and relationship with the Lord. John says that the evidence of our love for the Lord is to be seen in our obedience to His commandments. Jonah's confession, "I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land" is contradicted by his actions. If he truly feared YAHWEH, he would have obeyed him, rather than trying to die.

God may sometimes ask us to do things that seem, in our judgment, to be unreasonable or unfair; it might not seem logical, but the bottom line is, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22). Stubbornly resisting the will and plan of God, disobeying His precepts, and following a human agenda that contradicts God's Word will lead man nowhere, neither will it alter the plan of God. Just as King Saul learned this the hard way, Jonah too would soon learn, by encountering difficulties in the rest of the story.

Rather than repenting from his sin of disobedience, Jonah decides to give up his life. He tells the people to throw him into the sea, with the idea that he will avert the plan and responsibility God has for him. But God has a different plan for him. God's ways are irrevocable; His plans must be fulfilled. The next four verses tell us the reaction of the people on the ship to Jonah's request.

13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

14 Wherefore they cried unto the Lord, and said, We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee.

The men (that is, the captain of the ship and his crew) try to save Jonah's life by rowing hard to bring the ship back to shore. The verb "to bring" (Hebrew shuw) carries with it the idea of turning back, retreating, or going back from where one started. It can be used for repenting, i.e., turning back to

God. Here, the crew decides to return to the port of Joppa so that Jonah can get off the ship alive. By now, they were probably far out to sea and were a great distance from the shore when the storm began. Under normal circumstances, it is suicidal to try to row a boat to shore in a heavy storm like the one described here. The best advice is to let the wind take its course and allow the people to rely on prayer. The crew tried hard to bring the ship to shore, but their efforts are frustrated by a very tempestuous storm. Realizing the futility of their effort, they resort to fervent prayer to the Lord in order to save Jonah.

Note that in verse 5, the seamen and everyone in the ship “cried every man unto his god,” but now they turn to YAHWEH, “the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land” (v. 9). In their prayer, they acknowledge two facts about the sovereignty of the Lord. First, they acknowledge that deliverance comes from the Lord alone (negatively put, “let us not perish for the sake of this man’s life”) and that no human efforts can save them from the fierce storm through which God is exhibiting His authority and anger.

Second, they acknowledge that God in His sovereignty does what He pleases. They realize the hand of God at work. The clause “lay not upon us innocent blood” indicates their reluctance to carry out Jonah’s wish, as does their request that, since they have no other alternative than to throw Jonah overboard, they not be held accountable for the action they are about to take. They are begging for God’s understanding concerning the crime they are about to commit. There is, however, one positive outcome of the whole situation: the people who hitherto never knew the Lord God of Israel are able to confess Him as the only sovereign God.

15 So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

After all efforts to save the life of Jonah have failed, and the seamen have finally come to terms with what they must do to save their own lives and the lives of those aboard the ship, they reluctantly pick Jonah up and throw him into the sea. The verb “took” is the Hebrew word *nasa'*, which contains the idea of carrying or bearing something with respect and reverence (Genesis 47:30; Exodus 28:12, 29). As soon as Jonah touches the waters of the sea, the sailors’ ordeal ends and the storm stops.

Here again, as in the previous verses, the sea is personified (vv. 11–12); the reaction of the sea is idiomatically expressed as “the sea ceased from her raging.” The word “raging” (Hebrew *za`aph*), i.e., “indignation” or “wrath,” is used elsewhere in the Bible to denote emotions attributed to kings and to God. The boisterous movement of the sea is restricted, which shows that it is the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, who controls the waves and the sea (cf. Mark 4:37–39). The sailors are about to reach that conclusion, as their reaction in the next verse shows.

16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows.

The author gives three reactions of the sailors: 1) they “feared the Lord exceedingly”; 2) they “offered a sacrifice to the Lord”; and 3) they “made vows.” Rather than being punished further for what is a potentially murderous act, the sailors are given calm and peace. That prompts a different reaction than before. We note that in verse 9 as he confesses to the sailors, Jonah says to them, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land” (NIV). Although they are terrified by that confession, they do not seem totally convinced by Jonah’s word.

Now, however, they recognize the greatness of the Lord by the instantaneous calm that follows the moment Jonah touches the waters of the sea. They begin to fear the Lord. The verb “fear,” or *yare'* (*yaw-ray'*), has a number of meanings, including “to be afraid” or “to be frightened, to be dreadful” as in verse 10, where it is used to describe the reaction of the sailors on hearing Jonah’s confession. It also means “to revere, to be astonished, or to stand in awe.” It is a fear that inspires reverence and

godly awe, as we see here (v. 16). Jonah's confession in verse 9, "I fear the Lord..." is accurately translated "worship" (NIV). Also, *yare'* is to be understood in the same light— they stand in reverence and awe and worship the Lord. Astounded by what they have just experienced, the seamen not only "feared the Lord exceedingly," they showed their reverence for Him by an act of worship: they offer "a sacrifice unto the Lord" followed by "vows." The word "offered" is the Hebrew word *zabach*, pronounced *zaw-bakh'*, and mainly used to describe the killing or slaughter of animals for "sacrifice" (Hebrew *zebach*, pronounced *zeh'-bakh*), a generic noun derived from *zabach*. The verb is often connected with sacrifices to idols (Hosea 11:2; 2 Kings 12:3).

However, it is also used in reference to legitimate sacrifice to the Lord, e.g., by Solomon (1 Kings 8:5; 2 Chronicles 5:6) or Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 30:22). The noun form *zebach* refers to offering (Psalm 40:6) or burnt offering (Exodus 10:25; 1 Samuel 6:5). The noun is also frequently connected with peace offerings (Leviticus 3:1; 17:5). We are not informed of the type of sacrifice the sailors offered to the Lord from the ship. However, the author's use of both the verb *zabach* ("offer") and its noun derivative *zebach* ("sacrifice") suggests they killed an animal as an offering to the Lord. I would suggest that the animals were part of the cargo on the ship or were perhaps reserved for sacrifices to the sailors' gods.

It was customary for sea voyagers to perform some ceremonial rituals just before sailing, during the voyage on the open sea, especially when there was a crisis or danger, and again at the end of the voyage. These ceremonies would take the form of sacrifices and prayers to their deities, such as the god of the ship or the god/goddess of the sea. Before sailing they would ask for protection and safety for the journey; and at the end of the journey, just before they docked, they would perform another ritual (prayer and offering) of thanksgiving.

It is known that animals were carried on board ships as cargo, as a food source, and especially for sacrifices. Thus, larger ships in the Hellenistic period were fully equipped with stables. That is why altars or places of worship (chapels) exist on certain ships (even in the present), where people can go to worship their god, or God, depending on the ship owner. Some ships have different places of worship for different religions. It would be safe to say that included in the sailors' prayer, expressed here as "every man cried to his god" (v. 5, NAS), was the ritual of offering a sacrifice to their gods. When there is no improvement in the situation, they resort to throwing cargo overboard to lighten the ship. Yet the situation still does not improve. However, the moment they comply with Jonah's instruction, the Lord stills the tempest.

Here, the sailors offer the animals in a legitimate way as a mark of their worship, no more to their own individual gods, but instead to the living God of Israel. The third thing the author tells us is that they (the seamen) "made vows" (Hebrew *nadar* [verb] and [neder]). The word "vows" connotes the act of verbal consecration or promise often associated with devotion and service to God. It is usually a promise to carry out some duty, as in the dedication of a place of worship for the Lord by Jacob (Genesis 28:20ff.); a promise to offer sacrifices to the Lord (Leviticus 27); or a vow to abstain from something (Psalm 132:2).

In the Old Testament, vows are usually made to a deity. Vows are an important form of worship. Although vows are entered voluntarily when one is facing danger or making a request, they are also binding. The Preacher, King Solomon, understood this well and offered this advice: "Be not rash with thy mouth. . . When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay" (Ecclesiastes 5:2, 4–5). Jephthah knew the importance of keeping a vow even if it is made rashly (Judges 11:30–39).

Vows are also often associated with prayer. Job says, "Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows" (Job 22:27).

Overwhelmed by the instant quieting of the sea, the sailors make a pledge, not under compulsion or duress, but in appreciation of and thanksgiving to the Almighty God. On whether the sailors become proselytes and follow the true God later, the author is silent.

17 Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

2:1 Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly,

10 And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

As Jonah falls into the sea, the Lord prepares a great fish to swallow him up. The word "now" serves here as both a conjunction and as a transition from where we left Jonah (v. 15) before reading about the reaction of the sailors. With this word, the author brings our mind back to the main character of the story and continues the story from there. The statement (v. 17a) indicates that even before Jonah touches the sea, even before the sailors throw him overboard, the Lord has already appointed a great fish (see Matthew 12:40) to swallow him. The verb "prepared" is the Hebrew verb manah, which also means "to appoint, to assign, to tell," or "to ordain."

We note here that God has control of all His creatures and that He can use anything to serve His purpose. The fish probably lay under the water close to the ship with its mouth wide open, waiting to receive the "cargo" in obedience to the command of God. As soon as Jonah lands in the water, the fish rescues him. Rather than drowning, which is his ultimate goal so that he will not have to go to Nineveh to preach for their salvation, Jonah falls into the open mouth of the fish and down into its belly. There he spends "three days and three nights" praying.

Some argue that Jonah was not miraculously kept alive in the belly of the fish, but rather that he died and was resurrected after three days to become a type of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Matthew 12:40). Christ's reference to Jonah here does not indicate that Jonah died or was dead for three days, but that Jonah was in the fish's belly for three days. It signifies that Jonah was alive while in the fish's belly. The reference here therefore should be regarded as a metaphor for or analogy of Christ's death, or as a simile used for comparison in the same sense as when Jesus says, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19).

The Matthew passage is clear enough to understand that the emphasis is on "three days and three nights" rather than on death. It is proverbial. It is possible that God preserved Jonah alive in the belly of the fish, and that Jonah was conscious of where he was; thus, he spent three days praying (2:1) and obviously fasting too. This was also part of God's design to prepare him for the task ahead. Jonah 2:2-9 contains Jonah's prayer of confession, consecration, and rededication to God. Note his vow and acknowledgment of the sovereignty of the Lord in verse 9. After three days and three nights, the Lord speaks to the fish (again) and commands it to vomit Jonah on shore—and it obeys.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Psalm 139:1-12

Tuesday

Isaiah 54:1-10

Wednesday

Nahum 1:1-8

Thursday

Jonah 1:1-5

Friday

Jonah 1:6-12

Saturday

Jonah 1:7-17

Sunday

Jonah 2:1-10