

Minor Prophets: Jonah

Introduction

The prophet Jonah holds an interesting place in all of prophetic history. His short four-chapter book is unusual among the prophets because it does not contain much of the content of his message, but rather the story of the surrounding events of his message from God. This abruptly ending book focuses on the unwilling servant of the Lord and the Lord's will to teach him to obey. It deals with how some prophets had to get over prejudices to speak for the Lord to the nations. Jonah is taken on a supernaturally-ordained journey because of his disobedience. Even in the end of the book, one may be hard-pressed to find this hard-headed prophet obedient to the Lord. It shows that God can use us in spite of ourselves!

Who Was Jonah the Prophet?

In the book the only things that we learn about Jonah's life are that he is the son of a man named Amittai (Jonah 1:1). We also learn much about his character, more so than most of the Minor Prophets. Where most of the prophets do not give much information about themselves because their books are much smaller, Jonah's whole story of the message he didn't want to deliver gives us great insight into his character.

Jonah was probably quite the patriot for Israel. He might have been part of a school of prophets in which he engaged others with the same calling as himself. We know that he enjoyed in 2 Kings to pronounce good things for Israel, but had the roughest transition prophesying salvation and repentance to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, a brutal force in his time. Jonah continued to disobey and even run from the Lord's will for his life. Many times in the book of Jonah, you will see the verb, "to descend" or "go down" when Jonah runs from the presence of the Lord.

Jonah and History

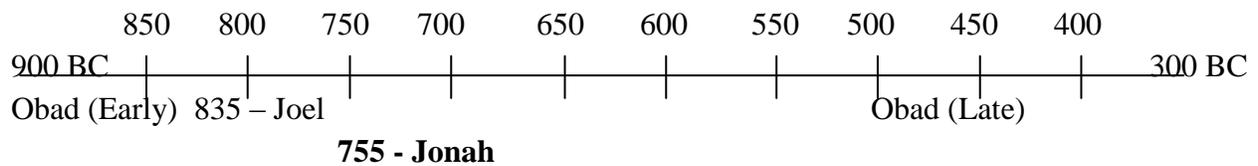
Because we don't learn much about the historical surroundings of Jonah, and the book could have been written later than the prophet lived, although we will take here that Jonah did write his own book, many scholars would love to give the book a very late date. Quite frankly, most scholars would not even believe the book is credible because of the giant fish and some other so-called "discrepancies." Until recently, we had no good sites to find the city of Nineveh because God so indefinitely wiped it off the map in His judgment.

One of the best places to gain information about Jonah is from the references to his ministry prior to the writing of the book under the king Jeroboam II. Jeroboam was ruling in the southern kingdom of Judah while one of his relatives ruled the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He was a godly king and it was just after the division of the kingdoms. In 2 Kings 14:25, we learn that the patriotic Jonah was able to prophesy military victories and taking back of certain cities from their enemies, the Assyrians. Little did that prophet know that the Lord would soon call him

to preach repentance to their arch enemies. We believe that Jonah was a real person and that all he says happened in his book happened. Jesus considers him a historical character when He speaks of him in Matthew 12:39-41. Therefore, it is good enough for us. The man who prophesied against the Assyrians some time later in his life would be called to that same nation.

Dates and Timelines

* I am using James Smith's Survey of the Minor Prophets as a guide.



Outline of Jonah

- I. The Lord Calls Jonah to Nineveh (1:1-2:10).
 - A. Jonah rejects God's call and runs the other way (1:1-6).
 - B. God causes a storm to fall upon Jonah's ship (1:7-16).
 - C. God sends a fish to rescue Jonah (1:17).
 - D. Jonah prays for salvation for himself in the fish (2:1-10).
- II. Jonah Obeys the Lord's Call to Nineveh (3:1-4:11).
 - A. God recommissions Jonah to Nineveh and he obeys (3:1-5).
 - B. The people of Nineveh respond to the message in repentance (3:6-10).
 - C. Jonah becomes angry with the Lord for His mercy upon them (4:1-4).
 - D. God appoints a plant and worm to give Jonah an object lesson (4:5-11).

The Message of Jonah

Chapter 1

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

The book opens with background information about Jonah. It does not mention his former ministry as a prophet in Israel, but we read about that from 2 Kings 14:25. The last time we know of that Jonah prophesied, it was a matter against the Assyrians. He was quite a patriot and had no desire for the Assyrians because they were ruthless and fought against Israel. The book opens as abruptly as it closes.

It also opens in a common way. The reason for the prophetic writing is that the Lord spoke. That's the only reason needed. When God speaks through a prophet, they must preach the word He gives. Jeremiah said it was like fire shut up in his bones. The prophets had a compulsory desire to speak what God gave them. Some of them even refused to control it, leading to the idea of ecstatic speech. But Paul tells us that a prophet could control the speech and method of delivery. And we see that in some of the poetic passages throughout the prophets, as well as the wonderful use of vivid imagery.

What do you do when the Lord speaks to you? Some people don't even notice! Other people are going around like Joseph telling everyone in a bragging way what God has declared. But there's a balance to prophetic ministry. Some people act like they can't control the word. The word of the Lord certainly is powerful. That same word created the universe and can break the cedars of Lebanon. But it is a word God gives to us that must be spoken, yet by the Holy Spirit in God's time. We need to become veterans when it comes to prophetic ministry. We must watch for all the weird things the devil likes to do to destroy the ministry of the prophets.

The *dabar* YHWH, the word of the Lord, is the common thread through the prophets. Like all others, Jonah has a word that must be spoken. Also like many others, he gives a scant amount of biographical information that does not help us link him to Israel's history. He tells us his father's name. But that does not familiarize us with his clan or background. Our only other references to him are the reference in 2 Kings and Jesus' reference in Matthew. Otherwise, we would not know anything about Jonah. But to Jonah, it's most likely his biographical information is unimportant compared to speaking the word of God for the hour at hand.

1:2 "Arise! Go to Nineveh, the great city, and cry out against them because their evil has come up before Me."

Unlike the former words from the Lord, this one later in Jonah's life is a very different and hard word to handle. The Lord tells him to get up, to arise. This is the idea of calling him

into service once again, to speak God's word. A prophet spoke the word when the word was given. Perhaps for a while God had not given Jonah a word to speak.

But now God calls him back into his prophetic ministry once again. We must remember that although God speaks every day if we would listen, he does not necessarily call us to proclaim a new message every day. Sometimes the message is a seasonal one. And sometimes God does not command us to speak it, as He does here.

Now the next part is not something Jonah expected or wanted to hear at all. The Lord tells him to go to Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital city of his arch enemies the Assyrians. These were the same group of people that earlier had taken Hebrew land and now God wanted him to go minister to them? But they were the bad guys! Nineveh is indeed a great city, meaning that it is a large city, not that it is great in deed or morality. We find from the end of the book that in Jonah's time there were 120,000 people there!

But at least Jonah likes the part of God's word where God tells him to cry out against them. At least he will once again be able to be abrasive to his enemies. We learn later from the book that Jonah realizes, as most of the Israelites would have, that God is merciful and kind. He knows that if anyone repents God will relent from His wrath because Israel personally experiences God's grace all the time. Jonah's only hope is that the city does not repent because of pride and that they don't learn how to repent before the Lord, the God of Israel.

You will notice as we travel throughout this book a key worldview marking the twists and turns of Jonah's story. The words for ascending and descending are used many times in this book. The word for going up or ascending is used here. Any time throughout this book when you see ascending, we are getting closer to God's will and God's commands being obeyed. But anytime you see the words go down or descend, you will notice that we are getting farther and farther away from God's will.

Here we see that the people's sins have gone up before the Lord. He is in heaven and watching the whole earth from there. That is why the sins go up to Him, almost like the smoke of a fire into his nostrils. We have seen this kind of language before when God is about to change human history through his involvement. And it is no different here. Another example of this is the cries of Israel in Egypt before the Exodus. It is only after the cries have come up to God for deliverance after a time that He acts and changes the fortunes of an entire nation. Here, He will do the same in Jonah's time for a nation that is not His chosen people.

What do you do when the word you receive from the Lord is at best a hard word to hear? Jonah had lived his whole life prophesying good things for Israel, and now God wanted to use him to save his enemies. God calls us to do the hard things, the things we forget. That's why He wrote them in a book, because they don't come naturally. That's why He commands us, because we don't do them on our own. Sometimes, hearing God's word means swallowing pride and prejudice. Is there anything in your life right now God's speaking to you about but you're not hearing because you don't want His needed change?

1:3 But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish away from the presence of the Lord and he went down to Joppa and discovered a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and descended into it to go to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

Contrary to most of the prophets, when the word of the Lord comes to Jonah this time he runs away instead of doing what the Lord commanded. Very seldom in the Old Testament do we find a man who is a prophet and does not obey the Lord. In fact, one story of Balaam, who is a secular prophet, shows that God will make him obey! Although the verse starts with a vav consecutive and the story is continued, it takes an unexpected turn, so we translate with “but” instead of “and then”.

Jonah arose as many prophets have in the past, but he fled instead of followed. His intent in rising up was not to obey but to disobey. He went to Tarshish, which if memory serves, is where the Apostle Paul is from. More importantly, Tarshish is exactly opposite in direction to where Jonah was to go if he would obey and go to Nineveh. Jonah did not just decide to disobey the Lord. He did it with flare! He went the opposite way of what God had commanded. It wasn't just that God said, “Do this,” and he didn't do it, but that he did the opposite.

For the first time of many in the story of Jonah we see the verb for “descend.” You will find it is always in a place where Jonah does not obey the Lord, as if the text is saying that when we don't obey, we descend into the depths rather than climb the heavens to God's abode. It is always a statement of defiance and the loss of presence. This first time it is used, the text clearly explains that Jonah was fleeing God's presence. Apparently he did not read the experience of David in the Psalms where he said, “Where can I go from your presence? You are everywhere.”

Joppa is a port city that would have a harbor. Jonah goes there on his way to Tarshish in the opposite direction. He finds exactly what he wants, a ship headed to Tarshish. It amazes me that God allows Jonah to get this far in his insolence. Not only that, but God even gives him a boat to escape! But all of this is part of God's plan. It seems that even in using our free wills against God, He always operates in our lives for our good even still. Once Jonah gets on the boat, he's on his own with the Lord, but Jonah doesn't know that yet.

Jonah has no problem paying the fare for the boat and getting to Tarshish. Then once again that same word is used here when he boards the boat. He descends or goes down into the lower decks. For the second time in one sentence the verb for descend is used as Jonah continues to make his getaway. Also for the second time, it is made abundantly clear to us as readers that Jonah's purpose in doing all of this is to get away from God's presence. He is bold in his attempt to flee God's purview. The man who had prophesied against the Assyrians in the past would rather be on his own without God than obedient and ministering to his enemies.

1:4 So the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea and there was a great tempest on the sea so that the ship threatened to be shattered.

The boat takes off and there are no problems for a while. But then something bad happens. Something very bad. Notice who the subject of this action is. It is not some demonic force or some freak weather phenomenon. The Lord is the one who sends the wind! God will do whatever it takes to grab out attention in our rebellion. He has no qualms about making sure that we know exactly what we get ourselves into when we choose our own way.

When we choose the path of more resistance, we will endure that resistance. The verb here is emphasized as God hurls the wind at the ship. The wind causes a tempest to arise out of nowhere. We know beyond the text that this was unexpected because these are professional sailors. They know the best times to travel, when to set sail and when to stay in the harbor. The idea of the text is that everything was fine and dandy until the Lord crashes the party.

My favorite part of this section comes in the next phrase where the ship takes on a personality of itself. We call this literary device personification, when an animal or inanimate object takes on human characteristics or actions. The original language makes the ship sound like a mob boss threatening the sailors, picking on them and deciding that it will break up or stay together, like it can be coaxed into staying together. Any of us who have worked with computers and in other areas know that sometimes things seem to have a mind of their own. That is exactly the kind of language that is used here. Just picture a bunch of professional sailors begging “Betsy” to stay in one piece and the ship is like, “We’ll see. What will you give me for it?” like it’s some kind of arbitration!

What we can’t miss is the dramatization of this verse in the large words and the personification, the intensive verbs and the literary genius of it all. The words for hurl and threaten and shatter smack of intense situations and the word great in great wind pushes our imaginations to the brink. The personification of the ship only adds to our ideas of how big this storm really was! When the Lord sends a storm in your path, you know it! He doesn’t let up until you give up.

1:5 Then the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his god and they hurled equipment on the ship into the sea to lighten it for them, but Jonah had descended into the rear part of the ship and had lain down and was deeply sleeping.

This event is no less than a “prepare to meet your Maker” event. The professional sailors are even frightened of this tempest. When the guys who sail for a living and aren’t afraid of anything on the seas are scared, you know it’s an ordeal that you will probably not get out of alive. It would be like the Navy being overtaken by something they had triple checked and planned out!

These men are so afraid that they don’t even cry out to their mommies, they cry out to their gods instead. We see this in our airplanes a lot when an airplane is in danger of going down and people begin to pray. This is exactly what this event is like, catastrophic for the guys running the boat to be hanging on the thread of a prayer. But there’s one giant problem with their efforts and prayerful fervor: their gods don’t exist and cannot save them!

And yet on board is a prophet of the Living God downstairs. This men are praying to their false gods and the situation is unchanged. Yet they continue to pray. I've got to give them a mark for devotion, but at the same time, we can learn one of them ost important spiritual lessons from these men. It's not only about your devotion and fervor in your prayers. Passionate prayers can indeed be very effective. But only when the object of your prayers is the Living God. Who we pray to makes more of a difference in our outcome than any other prayer factor. Make sure you know the true and Living God when you pray, and don't waste your time talking to gods that don't get the job done. Pray to the Living God who can do all things!

They are not just praying to their inefficient and dead gods, but they are also coming up with a plan B. Their goal is to throw over anything that does not matter as much as their lives in hopes that the ship will be lighter and will not sink in this squall. So they take every single thing that would weigh it down and throw it overboard. They leave it for the fish so that they don't themselves become shark bate. The frantic nature of their response to the storm is recorded in the same word from when God hurled the storm. The sailors are hurling off these pieces of equipment.

Then the story has one of those "meanwhile" moments as it flashes to the prophet Jonah chilling in the bottom of the boat, unaware of the dangers on deck because he's sleeping soundly. It must have been very soundly! Yet again for the third time in our story we see the word descend. The author cannot stress enough how much in violation this prophet is of fulfilling God's command.

And yet he's soundly sleeping. Is that happening in your life? Is God screaming at the top of His lungs for you to join in and do something and yet you are acting as if nothing's wrong and God's not speaking to you? He will be persistent until the end! Sleeping through God's call will not last forever. Sometimes the troubles in our lives are not caused by the devil or even our own stupidity, but are the constant plea of God for us to obey.

1:6 So the captain approached him, saying to him, "What are you doing, you sleeper? Arise! Call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a care for us, and we may not perish."

When the captain of the ship, the man in charge, notices that there is one man missing from the frantic sailors, he goes down after Jonah in search of another possible god to pray to and maybe some help with the ship. Imagine his utter surprise that Jonah is soundly sleeping. If it weren't for the fact that Jonah is going directly against God's commands, this might remind us of the surprise of the disciples when Jesus is sleeping in the boat with them during a squall.

The captain wakes the sleeping prophet and informs him of what is going on. He is probably the only person in the ship who is not painfully aware of their plight. The captain can't believe that the prophet is sleeping amidst the storm. So he calls out to him and after the question of surprise demands that the man get up and not sleep anymore in this crisis. Then he gives him orders to pray to his god. The gentile captain would not know whether or not Jonah was a

polytheist or monotheist, unless he asked the man's information from him at the point of boarding. But it is obvious as they ask later after the lots that the captain has no idea. Even in India, a country that worships over 33 million gods, each family picks a god or two to devoutly worship. This is why the word for god is singular, not because the captain is by any stretch a monotheist.

It always intrigues me that the gentile captain does not presume that Jonah's God can do anything at all for them. It's almost like a Hail Mary approach to their situation. Maybe it would work. Maybe not. But it doesn't hurt to try. That is his approach because he probably has had very little success with his god being able to do anything for him. Oh how innately religious the human heart and mind can be! Why serve something that can do nothing? But on the other hand, this captain does not presume that Jonah's God can just fix everything. Sometimes we think we know God's will and God's plans but we couldn't be more wrong. It takes a great amount of fellowship and communion with God and His Word, with His Spirit, to know His mind!

1:7 Then each said to his friend, "Come, let us cast lots that we may learn from whom among us this evil has come." So they cast lots, and the lot fell to Jonah.

After throwing out all of the equipment that could make the boat lighter and not seeing any change for the better, the sailors turn to find who is responsible for this colossal and unnatural tempest. Someone's god must be angry with them, and the men will find out who using dice. Lots were a way in the Old Testament of actually calling on chance or interpreting based on the idea that one's god controlled the dice. Today we call it gambling but it was a way to divine or discern the god's will.

Casting lots was also used to discern who would have a job no one wanted or gain the property from a deceased person without an heir and a host of other things. It's most common usage was divination, a practice used by pagans to discover the will of their gods. This is the purpose for the casting of lots here. The sailors intend to hold whomever the lot falls to responsible for what is going on. It seems the Lord allowed for the sailors to discover Jonah as the culprit.

The word for evil here is not a moral evil but a natural evil, a calamity or a disaster. They are trying to figure out which person's god is causing the disaster they are currently enveloped in with no way of getting out. The disaster to these professional men seems to be unnatural in its origins, and the text has already told us that the Lord is behind the tempest and it is indeed appointed by Him and unnatural. That word for appointing is not used here, but its idea is in this text. God appoints many things in Jonah's path to bring him to obedience.

Although I'm sure God does not enjoy people using lots to discern His will, He does have complete control and sovereignty over everything in creation, including lots. Here, He lets the lot fall to Jonah. God works with lots in other places in the Bible as well. The last time that He works through the casting of lots to our knowledge is in Acts 1 in choosing a twelfth apostle. The next time we see a major decision made is after the baptism in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and

the people then look to the leading of God's Spirit instead. Jonah must now answer for this calamity because he has been pointed to in the lot.

1:8 Then they said to him, "Please inform us, by whom is this evil upon us? What is your occupation? And from where do you come? What is your country? And of what people are you?"

Now the men are certain because of their faith in the lots that it is Jonah. All the pieces fit. The man doesn't seem to care that the ship is going down. He's sleeping through the whole ordeal! So he must know something, and the lot confirms that he is the issue. So they play twenty questions with the prophet of God. They ask him about his background to try to discover why the storm has come upon them all the sudden.

They first ask if he knows why the calamity has come upon them and their ship. Then they ask what he does for a living. The questions are most likely being asked in a rapid-fire approach seeing how their lives are in danger of being ended by the great tempest. They ask him about his origins and his home country. Then they ask him about his ethnicity. Their interests may not be purely to discover why this is happening to them but also to discover who has a powerful enough God to do all of this at a moment's notice. This might be a prime time for some conversion.

1:9 So he said to them, "I am a Hebrew and I fear the Lord God of Heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

Jonah answers every question in a matter of a sentence. He tells them of his origins by calling himself a Hebrew. This would affirm to them that he is from Israel and that he worships one God. It would give his entire cultural background to them, his country and origin as well as his beliefs. He also adds in, one might imagine with flare and with arrogance, that he worships one God, the Lord YHWY. The word for fear is often used to describe one's worship and religious leanings in the Bible. The God-fearing Gentiles in Acts believe in the Jewish God.

The way Jonah describes the Lord is the reason I say he may have said this to these gentiles in an arrogant tone. The Hebrews called their God the Living God because He is not like the idols that cannot do anything. One could hear just a hint of superiority in Jonah's pronunciation of God as the one who created all things. But look at the specifics of the things that Jonah points out God made. He tailors creation to the sailors who know about the seas and know that there is dry land. Jonah's God is not just God of the sea, but also God of the dry land. There are those only two places in the sailors' minds. He is the God of both! Usually there was a separate god for waters and for land in pagan religions. God is more powerful than the gods they know.

When you witness to people, do you put God's strongest image forward? Jonah probably did it by accident and through arrogance, but he still showed God as the strongest God in the

understanding of his audience. Sometimes today we explain God without understanding where people are coming from. It is immensely helpful to reveal God to others in their most needed areas in their lives. We need to represent Christ well by showing Him as the Healer of the broken-hearted and diseased, the Savior from addictions and sins, the Lord who has our best interests in mind.

God's revelation of Himself through us must always speak to the needs of those we are trying to reach. We must contextualize the message of the Gospel of God so that people can see Him as powerful and willing to save from their current situation. Otherwise, we have a God who can minister in some other minor area but not in the most urgent need of this moment. This means that we have to be part of someone's life before we can speak Christ to them in a meaningful way. It means we have to know them and gain their respect. This is not an easy task, but it is necessary for the Gospel to be most effective.

1:10 Then the men surely feared exceedingly and said to him, "What is this you have done!" for the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord because he had told them.

A God with that kind of power, to make more than one thing or to be in charge of more than one thing in creation would have been a new concept to a polytheistic pagan, which is what most of the known world besides the Israelites would have subscribed to. The reaction of these men should not surprise us. They are catching a glimpse, a revelation, of the true God for the first time and it is during an experience that will need His divine intervention.

Often in our own evangelism we have to resort to arguments for God's existence and proofs of His power. We need more than ever the power of God to accompany our evangelism efforts. In a power encounter, God reveals Himself in the midst of a situation rather than us simply telling someone about a time He did that for us. It is so very effective.

There are a couple of intensive adverbs piled up on the verb fear here. These men have come to a realization about God that cannot be denied. They are experiencing His power while the prophet speaks. And they will see Him do another great thing in a few verses. There is an infinitive with the main verb to intensify it and then an adverb "exceedingly" after the verb. You can't get much more intense than piling words upon one another in Hebrew.

All we gather from these men is shock that Jonah would dare defy his God. They now know and see the power of Jonah's God and can't believe he would dare to defy Him. Their response is not a question but an exclamation. It's one thing to defy a dead idol who has no power to respond. Some of them may have even done this. But when you know your God is the true living God, you don't mess with him.

Jonah must have given fleeing from God's presence as his reason for getting on the boat. They knew this about him, but it didn't matter until they were in the midst of a tempest that would take their lives. God is not to be trifled with. He is a dangerous God who commands the heavens. But we as His children must balance that with His grace and love for us. He is both the

Creator of the cosmos and our closest friend, our Father, our beloved Savior. Fleeing the Lord's presence now had meaning to the sailors as they watched waves crash upon their deck and threaten to break up the ship or sink it.

1:11 And they said to him, "What should we do to you that the sea might become calm for us? For the sea overflowed and became stormy."

Their main reaction is less a care about Jonah's God as about saving themselves and getting out of this situation in this verse. Now that changes in a couple of verses, but here they're worried about their own skin. Sometimes people come to God out of fear or because they think He'll fix all of their problems. In some cases that happens. But God is not just the God who fixes our problems but who changes our whole lives!

They ask Jonah what can be done to get God from being angry. He is the one who knows his God and the one whom God is upset with. They are asking the nature of God's quarrel with Jonah so that they can help him and help themselves in the process. They are most worried for themselves and have no anger toward Jonah. They just don't want the squall to continue. The reason they are so ardent and quick about asking him such personal questions is that the sea is not showing any signs of letting up. It may even be getting worse! It is overflowing onto the boat and becoming more and more unstable. Repeating their environment and surroundings shows how desperate and dangerous the situation is.

1:12 So he said to them, "Raise me up and hurl me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you because I know it is me who caused this great tempest for you."

Jonah provides them with the right answer no matter how bad it sounds. God is after him, not the sailors or the boat. The moment God has Jonah, the sailors will be fine again. What is the most interesting about his response is not the shock it presents in its hearers, who are "godless heathens" but the word with which he opens the response. Raise. It is in Hebrew the opposite of the word for descend! The text is clearly making a point about our actions directly affecting our relationship with God using directional and spherical ideas.

It is assumed in the Old Testament worldview that God is above the heavens and Sheol or the place of death is under the earth or in the belly of the earth. So as the text mentions the word descend, it is saying that the action will take Jonah farther away from God and God's purposes. But when Jonah himself offers the solution to the problem of the tempest, he uses the direction toward God's abode, upward or ascending.

We must also note that these sailors actually try frantically other options before throwing Jonah overboard. They do indeed have standards or morals at least to a point. I think one of the rudest things we can do in our attempts to witness to "godless heathens" is to suspect that they have no moral center or compass whatsoever or that they would gladly commit the grossest of atrocities when that may not be true at all. Jonah just told these men to commit murder, to throw

him to the sea and whatever is in it. At the very least he would drown and at the most he would be shark bait! And they refuse to do it. They put their lives on the line to keep from killing him. We must respect those we are trying to reach. They may or may not be as far away from God as we might think.

The verb “hurl” has been used a lot in this opening narrative. It was used of God bringing the tempest, of the men throwing overboard unnecessary cargo in the face of extinction, and now here of Jonah to toss him into the sea. It is a verb of intensity in almost every situation it is used. We must not forget that in the background of this dialogue is still a nasty tempest. These men are probably yelling these lines rather than calmly speaking them.

Jonah admits that the Lord wants him, not the men. He knows that God has chased him onto the boat, out into the sea, and is now forcing his hand. His only hope to get away from having to tell his arch enemies that God loves them if they would repent is to die in the depths of the ocean. He would much rather a deep blue sea death than to obey the Lord and go to that city and preach God’s repentance. He also does not want harm to come to these innocent sailors. So he finds it in himself to offer the sacrifice of himself because it’s easier for this prejudiced patriot of Israel to die rather than preach repentance.

1:13 Yet the men struggled to return to dry land, but they were unable because the sea overflowed and stormed on them.

Although Jonah gave them the solution to their problem the men refuse to throw a person overboard just to appease God or to get rid of the problem. Instead, they try every other avenue, every other possibility. They try rowing harder, getting back to dry land (as if that would stop God from chasing Jonah), and anything else they can think of. They will not find rest until they listen to Jonah and do as he says.

The text says that they are unable. I believe that God did that on purpose. I think that He wanted them to see that there was no other way but to surrender Jonah. In this passage, God seems like an overbearing and mean God who wants what He wants and He’ll threaten lives to do it. But we must look at it from God’s perspective. He does not put these men’s lives in danger. He puts them in Jonah’s hands. Jonah is at fault for even going the other way. These men will not suffer God’s wrath. This is not even wrath. It is discipline.

Aside from that point we must see that these men are experiencing two things about God for sure. First, they know that He is the Creator and that He holds all the power, especially at the moment the power to control the weather and the sea. Second, they know that God’s will is sovereign and it will come to pass because Jonah is refusing to do His will and that is the reason they are in this mess.

I don’t believe that God would have actually allowed these men to die if Jonah would have not obeyed and sacrificed himself. But we will never know because when push comes to shove, the disobedient prophet sacrifices himself to save the others, hoping for death in the sea

and finding more of God's providence. Once again we see the same words used earlier that the sea is overflowing onto the boat and that it is stormy.

1:14 Finally they called out to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, please don't let us perish because of this man's life and don't put on us innocent blood, for you, Lord, have done just as you pleased."

The connector is the usual *vav* consecutive, but in the English translation I wanted to show the process of the decision to throw Jonah overboard. The men tried everything else and then submitted to the Lord's will and threw him overboard. But before they did, they prayed and talked to God. They used a common word of entreaty in saying please. It was not a matter of etiquette as much as it is a matter of entreaty. When someone is speaking of a desired action or a will, they use this term.

They actually use it twice as they are almost begging for God to not take out on them the death of Jonah. Remember that Jonah is a prophet of YHWH. They know God's power and don't want to die because they are the reason one of His prophets dies. To kill a god's prophet was very dangerous, usually incurring the wrath of that god upon the murderer. These men have seen God's power and don't want to be on His bad side.

The idea also of a life for a life is very rudimentary in the Old Testament. It is the idea of equal judgment. The sailors conclude in their prayer begging that the innocent blood of the prophet not be placed on their own heads, that God absolve them from the effects of killing a man. Then they point out that this is what God has demonstrated He wants, for Jonah to be thrown overboard. They are essentially reminding God that when He wants to punish them for Jonah's death, He seemed by not letting up the tempest to want Jonah in the water.

One must point out that pagans are not the only ones who pray this way, fearing God's next response to our prayers. Even believers go years doing the "I want this and you want this, so let's make a deal" prayer. God is not going to beat us up for doing things that seem to line up with His will! That's why He's sending us the message, so we do His will. We don't need to pray the prayer of absolution, almost like a premeditated prayer. "God I'm about to do this, so don't punish me." We must not live in fear of a loving God! Only sinners live in fear of God. We are His children. Our prayers should not be auctions or ultimatums!

1:15 Then they raised up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and it stopped from its raging.

For the second time "raised" signifies the opposite of running from God. It is almost sacrificial language as the men at last resort decide to do what Jonah had recommended. They will throw him over the boat into the sea to get rid of the tempest his running from God caused. The word for hurled is standard in this crisis, showing up yet again and the sea immediately stopped raging the moment they threw him in. The amazement of the sailors is not underestimated in the next verse. The amazing similarity to what Jesus did in the boat with the

disciples is obvious. God is in control of the weather, the winds, the waves. He is sovereign over all of it, and this truth would be abundantly clear to the sailors

1:16 And the men surely feared exceedingly the Lord and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

For the second time the men are touched by the events and God's power. They once again surely fear exceedingly YHWH. As mentioned the first time, this is a piling on of infinitive and main verb with another word for more emphasis. It can't be more emphasized than this in the text. Piling on words and adverbs is a way of showing the greatest degree of effect in Hebrew.

The word for feared contains in it the idea of worship and awe. These men learned who the real God is in this little journey and now they worship Him because He has saved their lives. Although Jonah probably never planned to evangelize them, that is exactly what happens. Jonah seems to have an issue with most gentiles, especially those from Assyria. We must not hold prejudice against any person for any reason, whether it be race or economic status, gender, or any other possible area. God will use us despite ourselves. We need to be a welcoming people because Jesus at one time welcomed us. He has broken down walls we put up in favor of a family of God.

These men knew how to offer a sacrifice to a god. We don't know if they would have known how to offer it to YHWH, but they did what they knew in the sacrifice, and it seems that God honored their efforts. They do not have the special revelation of the Torah but all the same they make vows to God. Usually believers tend to make vows to God in the midst of a trial. We make deals with him like, "If you do this, I promise to go to Church or read my Bible or pray more often," or whatever our case may be. These men vow their allegiance to God after they have seen a demonstration of His power. How long has it been since we have seen a demonstration of God's power in our own lives? Or is all we have to go on the promises we have made and unfaithfully failed to keep?

1:17 (H 2:1) But the Lord appointed a great fish and it happened that Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Verse 17 in the English Bible is a final verse to the first chapter that transitions into the prayer of chapter two. But in Hebrew, it is the first verse of chapter two. For the Hebrew rendering, it would be a background setting for the prayer. In English, it transforms all of the actions to say that although Jonah would rather die, God had other plans.

The word for appointed first shows up in this verse and will appear several times throughout the book. It speaks of God's sovereignty and providence. Although it seems Jonah is getting away with being defiant, God is guiding him back to obedience. The idea of God's appointing has happened twice, though the word was not used in the first instance with the tempest hurled on the waters.

Sometimes in our own lives we cannot see God working through his appointments. We often talk about appointments as divine when we are witnessing, that God helps us find a person who needs to hear the Gospel. But God appoints all things, not just special moments of evangelism. And not all of these appointments would be viewed by us as positive. Sometimes He appoints what must be done for us to be obedient and for our discipline. These are actually good moments that we don't normally view as good at the time. What's God appointing for you today? How is He working things out for your betterment? Many times only hindsight can tell us the answer to these questions. But know that there are no coincidences. God walks through every situation with us.

Most talk of the book of Jonah sadly revolves around the great fish God sends. Scholars debate the book's historical accuracy and truth because of this fish and children are taught that this is the point of the book. It is not. It is just one of the ways God appoints things for Jonah to discipline him and show him how much better obedience to God can be. While remembering the book of Jonah because it's the one with the big fish, that is not what we should focus on.

It is quite possible, considering God made all things in creation, for there to be a fish that could swallow a man whole. I believe what the Word says. So this fish is a giant mammoth fish that swallow Jonah whole as he is sinking to the bottom of the sea. Even if you have to say it is a miracle that God would keep a man alive in the belly of a great fish for three days and three nights, I would much rather settle on that than the idea that this is a falsified account. It can be proven to be true and it stands to both faith and reason that this truly did happen. Even Jesus points to this as a historical event when He prophesies that He will be in the belly of the earth for the same time that Jonah was in the belly of the great fish, three days and three nights.

Although Jonah attempted to flee from God the opposite direction, God appointed a tempest to force him from going any farther away from his true mission. Then when Jonah attempted to have himself killed by drowning, God once again steps in and appoints the great fish to swallow him and take him back to Joppa. Rest assured, God will not allow anything to happen to you until He is finished with you no matter how hard you try to debunk His will. He will allow you to go your own way, but every situation that you run into will be ordained by God to bring you into agreement with His will.

Chapter 2

2:1 (H 2:2) Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish.

In this new situation, after attempting to die to get away from God's presence, Jonah found himself in the midst of the belly of a giant fish. The fish was large enough to have a human being in its stomach or intestines. The word for belly suggests simply the inward organs of a body. It does not give us a specific organ. But if the big fish swallowed him, he would logically be in the belly of the fish.

It is in this place of desperation that Jonah cries out to the Lord. He prays unto God to save him from his situation. One of the characteristics about this prophet we continue to see is his selfishness. It is only in his own dire need that He prays or communes with God, when he's not getting his own way, and yet the Lord hears him even then. Another characteristic is to pray to God in the midst of a trial or deadly situation, rather than all the time. To be sure, the prophets and the people of God prayed in good times as well as times of trial, but the reader of Jonah is keenly aware of the trial-time prayers in Jonah.

One final point that will be hashed out throughout this chapter is that almost all of Jonah's prayer to the Lord in the midst of the fish is not his own. It almost entirely comes from the Psalms and other regular references to common prayers and worship songs. While this is not a wrong practice of praying, I will seek to impress upon you the fact that while many biblical scholars look to this chapter to be the defining moment of change in following God's will for the prodigal prophet, we will later see more insubordination. This makes me believe that Jonah never really did come clean with God in this book, and that his quotations of other people's prayers were not as heart-felt as some believe. And yet God still used him in spite of himself!

We can learn much about prayer from these points of interest. First of all, God still hears us when we pray for stuff and are in danger. He still listens to us. He does not get bored with hearing from us, even when we are not obedient to His will and even belligerent. He always listens no matter what.

Second, and almost the same point of the first, is that God will even still listen to us in our selfishness. Many times when we pray for others or ourselves, we seek our greatest good rather than the good of others. Sometimes when I am praying for healing for someone, I must remember that God will do the work or not do the work. Sometimes I want him to do what I ask so it will affirm my spirituality, but that is not what intercessory prayer is about at all. We must be unselfish and clean vessels when we intercede for others.

Finally, there is nothing wrong with praying scripted prayers or using prayer models. I use prayer models when I pray every day. Many have gone before us and prayed beautiful and succinct prayers of faith. But we must also remember that there must be a personal touch to prayer. Prayer is communing with God. We must personally do this.

No one can do it for us. And other people's prayers, no matter how effective or beautiful they were in the past, will not substitute for our personal interaction with God. We must learn to uniquely pray to Him. Let's not become fake with God in prayer, but remain genuine and honest with Him. He already knows how we feel. Be real with God in your relationship!

2:2 (H 3) And he said, "I cried out from my distress to the Lord and He answered, out of the belly of Sheol I cried for help, and you heard my voice.

Jonah's opening to his prayer is almost descriptive rather than direct speech of his prayer. His quotation makes reference to Psalm 120:1 and also Psalm 3:4. Psalm 120 concerns the deception with lies of enemies and Psalm 3 speaks of the salvation of God, His sustaining power in the midst of great distress. The verse as a whole might make reference to Lamentations 3:55-56. This is a common experience of those who cry out to God in prayer, that He hears and answers them. There may also be a reference to Psalm 118:5 here, which seems similar to the others in the image of crying out to God and receiving an answer.

The word for belly is the same as that of the last verse where Jonah is in the belly of the great fish. Belly connotes the innards of an object, not really a specific area. Here the belly of Sheol is poetically made to be connected to the belly of the great fish. Jonah was trying to die so he could escape God's presence, because going the other way to the nations did not work. Sheol is not extremely well defined in Jewish understanding of this time. It is believed to be a pit or a holding place for the souls of those who are physically dead, like purgatory without the fire and the moral equivalents. We don't know if both the wicked and the righteous were in Sheol to Jewish understanding.

However, Sheol here is referring more to the image of holding a soul rather than being like hell or a pit. The prophet wanted death but was held in a holding place alive because God was not finished with him yet. So the belly of the fish might as well for him have been the belly of Sheol. What we can see for sure, besides the abundance of references to Psalms, is that God answers when we call on Him no matter how desperate our situation, even when we are not on His side. Interestingly, if there is a reference to Psalm 118, that is the theme of the Psalm, that God is on the prophet's side. But God put the prophet in the fish.

2:3 (H 4) For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the currents surrounded me, all Your waves and Your billows pulled me along.

Verse three is no different than verse two in its referencing of a couple of psalms. The images are borrowed poetry from these psalms, which they would have sung in Israel regularly. So Jonah in the midst of his trial and fear because of being swallowed by a great fish, sings to the Lord the prayers he is familiar with in Israel's Psalter. Just because you sing a worship song in the midst of trial does not mean you are committed to obeying the Lord.

The image of being thrown into the depths comes from Psalm 88:6-7, once with the image of being thrown into a pit, and then with waters flooding over a person, surrounding that person in the psalm. The heart of the seas speaks of the depths, the very bottom of the ocean. The word for currents here is translated by most “floods” but the word is the word used for rivers. Since rivers generally move, I used the word currents.

The second image of the currents flowing over Jonah in the ocean as he recounts his drowning before the great fish found its dinner come from Psalm 42:7. The image there is of being drowned by all of God’s waters that He has made. The word for pulled along could also be translated passed over. The imagery is of the sea having complete control over Jonah and not giving him a way to do what he wants. Ironically, he allows the currents to take him wherever they wish, but he refuses to let God’s will lead him to Nineveh.

In many situations in life, we feel like we have control over what goes on. But any sense of control that we have is a fake sense. WE are not in control of anything. Even our next breath is given by God. We are uncomfortable creatures when we cannot feel like we have control over a situation. But what is God wanting to control in your life? Some turn to alcohol and other substances that help them lose control and go against their inner desires. But very few will allow God to take complete control. That is a greater adventure than we can make for ourselves or even alcohol can take us through. If you’re going to be adventurous and let someone else take control, let it be God, not alcohol or drugs or, in Jonah’s case, the ocean!

2:4 (H 5) Then I said, “I am cast away from Your eyes, yet I will continue to look upon your holy temple.

The idea of being driven or cast away from God’s eyes speaks of being out of God’s presence. We know this is a quote because Jonah is not concerned with being out of God’s presence. The concern issued here is a quote from Psalm 31:22. Jonah has been fleeing out of the presence of the Lord from the beginning of his book. That is what got him in the current situation. He has been fleeing the presence. If he thinks he has succeeded in being in the fish, then he would be happy, not alarmed.

Beyond this point, he would not continue to seek God’s presence, since He has been running away from God’s presence. To be before someone’s eyes is to enjoy their presence. The idea of presence is that God can see all that is happening for you. Presence is spending time together. Married couples spend time together, learn to enjoy one another’s presence. So this worry about being out of God’s sight is quoted from a psalm, not a heartfelt cry to God.

I am not saying through this section that Jonah did not want God’s help now that he was in situations beyond his control. I’m sure that he prayed these prayers in earnest. But I am saying that they seem to not indicate his true nature in his situation. He had achieved the goal of being away from God’s presence.

One other point of interest can be mentioned here. The second part of this verse recounts the idea that being away from the temple in Jerusalem means being out of God’s presence. This

was common understanding to the Jewish Old Testament. They did believe that God is everywhere and knows all things. However, they believed that God really dwelled at the temple and that to know God more, you would have to go there. The temple was the center of their relationship with God.

This may be part of the thought process of the prophet as he sought to run from God's presence. The farther the other way from God's will he drove himself and the farther away from the temple in Jerusalem, the lesser the opportunity of God to change his mind about going to his arch enemies and preaching repentance to them. Part of his desire to not preach was based on his prejudice against the people.

They were not good enough for God's grace in his mind. They also might have killed him for insolence, going to them and telling them they are sinners. To look upon God's holy temple was to desire to be in His presence again, something Jonah only wanted if he was afraid for his life all of a sudden after demanding to be thrown into the sea by the sailors earlier.

We need to be careful today to not think this way. God is everywhere. In fact, the New Testament tells us that our own bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Psalmist asks, "Where can I go from your presence?" And we need to think about evangelism. Is there anyone in your life you don't believe can be saved? Don't give the pat Sunday School answer. All of us have presumptions and prejudices. That's part of being human. Let's not allow them to hinder the work of God!

2:5 (H 6) The waters encompassed me up to my neck, the deep spiraled around me, weeds bound up my head.

This verse while continuing the quite literal allusion to drowning in the ocean for the prophet is taken from other figurative texts of mourning and loss. The idea expressed shows up in Lamentations 3:53 and more poignantly in Psalm 69:1. The idea of taking Jonah's life is apparent and expressed by most translations, but the word for life here can be translated neck as well as life or soul. "Up to my neck" is a Hebrew idiom for over my head, being fully covered or drowned or saturated with water. It essentially means to take the life of the victim.

The word that I have translated spiraled can also be translated surround, swirl, turn about. It has several ideas, but all in the same family of ideas. Jonah can't get out of this one. There is an image in the last part of this verse that is not as easily expressed elsewhere, perhaps more original than all the psalmic and poetic allusions to other texts, that the sea is acting like a monster taking its victim. The arms of the sea in the currents sweep Jonah under so that they encompass even his life. Then if we didn't grasp his hopelessness in drowning, the weeds like tentacles grab his head and pull him under the water. He's not going anywhere but where the Lord wills through the sea. But he also wouldn't be in this mess if he would have obeyed the Lord.

So many times in our lives we make trouble for ourselves by disobeying God and by not choosing the Spirit's wisdom. We put ourselves in precarious situations because of some minor

issue we have with our marching orders. But God wanted to protect us from the very problems that we have. And He won't necessarily simply rescue us from them, because we chose them with their consequences. But He never abandons us in our trials. He walks with us. Let's make it easier on ourselves and heed the Master's will the first time.

2:6 (H 7) I descended to the roots of the mountains, to the land whose bars were upon me forever, yet You brought my life up from the pit, O Lord my God.

Some versions combine the first phrase of verse six with the last phrase of verse five, but it does not fit very well this way. A better idea is how I have translated it here, as tied to the next image, not the previous one. The image is of Jonah going the whole way to the bottom of the ocean, the foundation of the mountains. The word for root also speaks of foundations. He's at rock bottom.

As Jonah descends into the land of foundations and bars of the earth, he sees his future being wiped out with every bit of water through which he is continually pulled by undercurrents. He is doomed to die in the seas, going to the very foundations of the tallest mountains. He's in way over his head, quite literally. Bars are used across gates and doors, and here these bars speak of the underworld, of Sheol or what we would think of as Hell. The bars are cosmic bars on the doors to the land of the underworld.

That makes sense when Jonah is then encouraged even in the midst of his drowning and the draining of his life as he sinks to the ocean floor. He then says of the Lord that He can bring his life back up. Even though he is descending, God can make him ascend. Notice that word again? Here is another instance of the word for going down or descending. As I mentioned in the beginning chapter, we see this word in many instances where the prophet is not doing what God wants. He is descending when he is not obeying. And here it is again. But even in the midst of disobedience, God can still save and bring a life up from the pit, from the worst case scenario. God is a God who comes to our rescue!

2:7 (H 8) When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord and my prayer came to You in the holy temple.

Jonah is still talking about his near death experience in drowning into the sea. The Lord saved him by bringing the great fish to swallow him up and keep him from drowning. Sometimes the Lord's rescue is just as scary and drastic as our plight when we are in need of Him. It reminds me of firefighters whose masks and heavy clothing have a tendency to scare children, but they are the ones rescuing them.

Jonah's life was weak and getting weaker as he sunk through the seas. But in that time, he remembered the Lord, crying out to Him as he sunk through the waters. No matter what our situation, how needy we are or how dire it gets, we can always call upon the Lord. He does not

need to hear our voice, for Jonah surely could not have spoken while under water, but He knows our thoughts.

No matter how far away from the temple Jonah was, his prayer was heard. He was away from God's presence as far as he knew, and yet the Lord answered his prayer for rescue. Perhaps he had been thrown off the boat trusting that the Lord would rescue him somehow. Whatever his thoughts, the later chapters of this book speak against a completely willing prophet. If this is a moment where the prophet, who served the Lord faithfully in the good times of Israel against its enemy Assyria, truly does call out to the Lord and promise to do His will, then there is a relapse later. If it is not, then Jonah here is only rescued in spite of himself so that God's will can be accomplished. Who can know the thoughts of Jonah or the mind of the Lord?

2:8 (H 9) Those who care for worthless idols abandon their steadfast love.

This phrase seems a bit out of place here, as if the prophet is chiding the gentile sailors he met earlier, who showed more trust in the Lord than him, or if it is a testament to God's power to save out of the darkest situation. Either way, there is a hint of this saying in Psalm 31:6. The word "care" here is the same word for keeping the law or guarding the heart from evil. It is a word of active obedience.

So those who actively obey idols give up God's steadfast love for them. The perspective is of them receiving His steadfast love, not losing their own love. The idols are described as vain or empty or worthless because they can't do anything. They are not living or real. Anyone who trusts in an idol gives up God's grace and love in their own lives. You cannot have an idol and the Lord's love. The word for love here is hessed, the loyal, covenantal, established and fortified unconditional love that God has for His people. God is a jealous God, and you cannot have His benefits and serve idols at the same time.

2:9 (H 10) But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice what I vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

Unlike those who do pay attention to and serve worthless idols, Jonah as part of the people of God will instead praise the Lord alone and offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving because God has spared his life even in his insolence. This could also be a reference to Psalm 50:14. The sacrifice of thanksgiving was accompanied with vows of trust in the Lord and thanks for His many benefits and blessings. They were most likely part of the sacrifice itself.

The next line states a truth found throughout Scripture, a main point of the whole of the Bible, that God brings the salvation we need. Whereas the prayer began in verse two with a citation of Psalm 3:4, it ends with a citation of Psalm 3:8, a sort of inclusio of the whole passage. Inclusio serves to link the first to the last, bring the prayer full circle, and magnify the middle in importance.

Jonah ends his prayers, which most attribute to being in the belly of the giant fish, with the simple truth that God will save as He wills. It is not for anyone else to save. Salvation is His work alone. It is quite probable that Jonah did pray in the belly of the big fish, but the recounting of the content of his prayer in this chapter speaks more to the prayers he was praying on his way to his demise in drowning. That is the image we are left with here.

Now a samek closes out the section here, which is rare in a narrative, pointing to this section as a poetic genre of the prophet's life. All of the prophetic books contain poetry in them, but this is a book unusually heavy on biography and light on prophetic utterances. The section ends, and the last verse will continue the narrative that we have been following.

2:10 (H 11) Then the Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

We have a sort of transition verse that finishes out the prayer section of the book as it is sandwiched between two sameks, designating a transitory moment. We are switching now from Jonah's reaction to God's will to have him thrown overboard and wanting to drown himself, and then discovering that he wanted to live and crying out for help, to which the Lord responds by having a mammoth fish swallow him up to keep him alive in the sea, and also speedily transport him toward God's will rather than against it.

Apparently for the three days and three nights that the prophet was in the fish, the traveling was complete. Now, we are led to believe because the prophet is okay with God and completely obedient, the Lord allows the fish to vomit him up. And he lands on dry land, not in the ocean. The unconventional form of transportation gets Jonah back on God's will and sets his feet toward the city from which he ran. It is time to go to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria.

Nothing happens without the Lord speaking to the fish. We see throughout Scripture from the very beginning that the Lord's voice is mighty and powerful. His voice creates the universe, speaks the commandments to the fledgling nation of Israel, and commands nature into obedience. Here, the same powerful voice, speaks to a big fish to not do the natural thing and eat its dinner. And so the Lord's salvation of the prodigal prophet is complete.

But let's not rose-color this picture. The man would carry a terrible stench from the bleaching of the fish's innards. Fish don't even smell good in the first place. And he probably would not have looked all that marvelous either. I don't think he would win a contest of looks at this point. And then, as we will find out, he walks quite a way to the city. I would imagine that he washed up before he started that journey, but if not, it would just confirm the strangeness to the people of Nineveh of this prophet from out of town. Jonah wasn't in Israel anymore.

Chapter 3

3:1 Then it happened that the word of the Lord *came* to Jonah a second time, saying,

Chapter three almost reopens the book as it starts out in the same way, except for one glaring difference. The word of the Lord comes a second time. The Lord brings his same call back to Jonah again. When we are disobedient to the Lord's will, His will is not changed. God doesn't work with plan B. Plan A is big enough to foresee all of the possibilities. God reiterates the word He had given before.

After all of the temper tantrums and near death experiences, the Lord does not kill Jonah. He continues the plan He had in the beginning. The moment that Jonah is once again on dry land and headed in the proper direction, the Lord speaks to Him. It is a comfort to us to know that when God sets us back on track, He will still speak to us. He does not look for someone else, but continues to invest in us and have relationship with us even when we are disobedient.

3:2 “Arise! Take yourself to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it the message which I will speak to you.”

The word of the Lord's contents are found in this verse after the first verse reinitiates God's original call. The words are quite similar to the command in 1:2. It starts with the command to arise or ascend, to get up. As we have seen throughout the book of Jonah, the opposites ascend and descend have been used by the author as directional indicators of Jonah's relationship with God.

When Jonah is obedient, there are continual mentions of the word for ascend or rising up or upward, the direction the Hebrews believed God's dwelling place to be located. But when Jonah disobeys, he is constantly descending or going down into the depths, like the depths of the ship, the depths of the ocean, and even descending to Joppa to pick up the ship. The Hebrews would have seen in their worldview the underworld in the descending, possibly the place Sheol was located and away from God's presence.

Still the same exact wording from the first word of the Lord is the command that follows next, for Jonah to take himself to Nineveh. Jonah's rebellion did not change God's mind. His argument and his willingness to disobey because he thought he knew better than God did not work. God still desired to do what He had set out to do through Jonah. We argue and we fight and we throw our temper tantrums, but when did we ever think we would know better than the God of the universe?

Nineveh is once again referred to as that great city, not because of its reputation, but because of its size, as we will see in the next verse. It was a large city, great in that fact, in its grandiose size. Next we are introduced to a slight change in the word of the Lord from chapter one. The Lord next tells Jonah to cry out against the city, which is the same as last time. But this

time instead of including Jonah in the understanding for the command, the Lord simply says that He will give the message when Jonah arrives.

In chapter one, Jonah was privy to the reason God wanted him to go and cry out against Nineveh, because the city was fiercely wicked and God wanted to destroy it. Jonah had no issue with that destruction. He probably longed for the destruction of the Ninevites, his arch enemies. But we will find from chapter four's disclosure by Jonah that he did not run for fear of the people in the city killing the messenger of the Lord. He ran the other way because he understood God's mercy in the midst of His judgment, but we will get there. Suffice it to say that here Jonah only receives one step at a time. Perhaps God is more willing to give more information when his servant is obedient this time than the first time.

This is an important point to remember in seeking God's will in our world. God does not disclose every little part of His plan. He commands and we are to obey. He gives us the next step so that we must rely in trust on His guidance. If God told us the whole plan, we would do what Jonah does. We would argue a "better way" with the Lord of the universe. But many are queasy about receiving only a little bit each time they ask God for His will. God waits for us to obey and trust Him before He delivers more of His plan.

It is His way of seeing our faith strengthened until we need not know the next step because we know His goodness more than our own fears. He did this with everyone who walks the walk of faith, from Abraham onward. Abraham was told simply to start walking, and then God would tell him where the land He would give was located. He does the same the second time with Jonah, just getting him to the city, and then the word will come. We need to learn to walk with what we are given.

3:3 So Jonah arose and took himself to Nineveh as the Lord had commanded, and Nineveh was a great city to God, three days distance.

The world of a difference is found in Jonah's obedience to the Lord's word. It seems that he has finally accepted his lot in God's plan. Many have raised the issue that prejudice is one of the reasons for Jonah's refusal to obey the first time. I would agree with this based on the next chapter and his arguments with the Lord. We must be careful to love everyone around us without prejudice so that we can hear and obey God's voice. God loves everyone around us, so we must learn to do the same. His heart is for them, and so our heart must be also.

Jonah's obedience may not be total here. I will argue, as I did in the last chapter, that Jonah simply has no way out of doing what God has commanded him to do. It is not that he is willfully joyful about going to Nineveh even now. But he just tried to go the other way and that was not working out. So he is at best, in my opinion, compliant here for a time.

I say this out of the whole context of the book. The message he preaches is less than complete and helpful to the Ninevites. He tells them they will be destroyed, but does not tell them how to respond to God as other prophets do. Beyond this, almost his entire "turning back prayer" to the Lord in chapter two is copied and pasted from the psalms he would have

memorized and other sections of Scripture. I don't personally see the genuine repentance and full obedience other scholars notice. I must just be a bit harder on the poor prophet, but I believe he should know better.

So Jonah obeys the Lord and walks to Nineveh. Let us not forget that Nineveh is not right on the sea coast. He would have had to walk a long ways to get to the city. To fulfill the Lord's command was a task in itself because he had gone so far the other way. Sometimes as we turn to the Lord in obedience, the journey may be farther than we anticipated because we first have to gain back the ground lost while we were complaining and being rebellious.

There is a play on the word great here because the text says the city of Nineveh is a great city to God, and then it is clarified that the city is three days journey to walk through. This means that the city could have been 60-75 miles across if Jonah walked the typical 20-25 miles a day that most ancient people's could travel. That's a big city! We learn from the end of the book that in Jonah's time, Nineveh has 120,000 souls in it! That's a big city! That's also a lot of people that God cares for, each and every one.

That is the double meaning, the word play we see here. The city is great to God in that it is first very large and boasts many people. But it is also great to God because it is full of people that He loves and dearly cares about. For these two reasons, the city is not negotiable. God cannot simply let it go. He doesn't let one go, not one. Jesus tells the story of the 99 sheep and then one sheep is lost. But the Shepherd goes after the one sheep to restore it to the 99. Abraham argues for the saving of Sodom and Gomorrah, asking the Lord if He would destroy the righteous along with the wicked.

The Lord saves the exact amount of righteous, which is less than the ten that Abraham is satisfied with. God is making a point here. Every person in every city is of the utmost importance to Him! He is the God of salvation on the individual scale. He cares intimately and deeply for every single person in the world in every city. He longs for each to know His salvation. It is not a numbers game with God. He cares beyond numbers and beyond race or background. He cares perfectly for you and me and every other person on this planet throughout all of human history and time.

3:4 Then Jonah began to go into the city one day's distance, and he cried out and said, "Only forty days, and Nineveh will be overturned!"

Once Jonah arrives after a long trek to Nineveh, he then proceeds to go into the city and preach the message God has given him. It is a rather short message, unlike almost every other prophecy recorded in Scripture. This is not to say it is not exactly what the Lord had given him to speak, but one might question where the instruction is. The Lord does not just give judgment without a hope or a method of staying that judgment. Throughout the prophets, we have seen countless times that the prophets would preach judgment, but would also have lines of hope in their prophecies. This is not so in Jonah's preaching to Nineveh.

He walks throughout the city for the first of three days and preaches the short message that Nineveh's got 40 days and then it will be overturned. The idea of overturned here is that of complete annihilation and destruction. Indeed, not in this context of history, but in 612 BC, the city of Nineveh is wiped off the map by the Babylonians through the command of the Lord. Nahum discusses in detail how the Lord is involved in the city's final demise, so much so that the city was hard to find until a recent archaeological possibility.

The prophet cries out with the shorthand message of God. He does not give any instruction on how to repent. The Lord apparently only demands of him that he be the harbinger of their demise. Forty days is a common biblical number. It speaks of a time of testing in most situations. Jesus was in the wilderness after baptism 40 days. Israel was in the wilderness 40 years. The number 40 seems to indicate a time of God's testing to see what will be chosen. That does not mean that it is always a time of testing, but this is a common number chosen in such situations.

3:5 Now the people of Nineveh believed in God and they called for a fast and they put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them.

The response by the people is anything a prophet from Israel could have dreamed about. Israel was infamous for not listening to the prophets, for having a hard heart toward their message when it was anything other than positive blessing and prosperity. Here in Nineveh, the people, most likely to Jonah's utter surprise, turn from their evil ways and begin the road to repentance.

It must be said that it is most likely the prophet might have known this would happen, and thus because he did not care for the Ninevites he did not tell them how to repent to the Lord. There may have been standards of repentance and mourning in the ancient times that were more universal across cultures. Because the prophet does not tell them how to repent, or even suggest that they can repent for that matter, the people seem to pick up on how to repent without his help.

They do what Israel has done in the past, what we see Job doing. They put on sackcloth and call for a fast. These are things that Israel has done throughout its own history, but the information did not come from the prophet Jonah. He only spoke of the danger to the city. The people believed in and trusted the word of the prophet, and they turned away from idols and their own resources to God. This is the second time in the book that irony among gentiles plays a part in the story. First, we had the sailors who called on the name of the Lord. Now we have the whole gentile city of Nineveh believing in the Lord, and quite easily and quickly as well. Israel struggles with God, but the nations seem to easily turn to Him.

The greatest to the least may speak of the leadership and warriors to the common people and peasants of the city. We know from the next verse that even the king, the greatest man in the city, is not unaffected. The fast and sackcloth may be common ways of lamenting and showing a culture of mourning. These would have been the best outward indicators of an inward change

and repentance. So it may have been a common understanding of how to repent despite the prophet's unhelpful statement of destruction.

3:6 The word even reached the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne and pulled his mantel from over himself and he covered himself in sackcloth and sat down in ashes.

The preaching of Jonah would have spread like wildfire, most likely by word of mouth throughout the parts of the city as he progressed. He apparently continues his circuit and does the other two days worth of walking out of the city speaking that same short message. But in his wake would have been people that heard and were beginning to respond. Any other prophet or evangelist would have loved to see 120,000 people come to the Lord in repentance, but Jonah has a different conclusion to his story.

Even the king, the greatest of all the people, and his nobles, literally "great ones," hear the message and receive it, doing the same as the people. The king adds a step besides the fast and the sackcloth. He puts ashes on his head. This was a common sign of mourning, of relating to those who have died, becoming like the dust and ashes of the earth. So he also would have been mourning and lamenting in this manner.

The king arises from his throne. This is yet another appearance of drawing near to God through the word "ascend" or "arise." We will continue to make points about this word being a word of nearness to God while anything that speaks of going down or descending being away from the Lord's presence. The author is making a point using the visual directions concerning the closeness of the prophet and people to the Lord.

The king also takes off his mantel that probably distinguished him as king, making him like everyone else in his mourning and repentance. This was most likely a true sign of humility from an extremely arrogant people. The Assyrians were known for their humility. In fact, if anything, they were the most arrogant empire as of this time in human history. This shows incredible humility and acquiescing to God's demands. This is the biggest surprise of the book and the most ironic thing that happens.

3:7 Then he issued a decree through Nineveh saying, "By discernment from the king and his nobles, to proclaim, neither human nor beast, neither herd nor flock must taste anything nor graze or drink water,

The king only responded to the situation that was already occurring. His decree only made mandatory what was already happening at a grass roots level. The difference the decree makes is that it compulsorily makes those who may not be repenting repent. The decree first gives the author of its edict, the king and his nobles, his great ones. They proclaim an ultra fast in which no one, beast or human, can eat or drink anything. We call this a complete fast because usually in a fast you would still drink water.

Both in groups and individually, there must not be anyone or anything that is enjoying the delights of food at this time of mourning and repentance. The king's drastic measures only demonstrate the sincerity of the people of the city. They didn't go half-way in their repentance. They went above and beyond what a normal fast would be. They went beyond also what may have been required for a regular session of mourning or lamenting. Their desperation shows through in the king's decree.

When's the last time you were that desperate to grab God's attention in your own life? Most of the believers I speak with do not fast regularly at all, let alone to this extreme. Fasting is one way to show our devotion and our desperation to God in desperate times, and yet the Church sits fat and happy eating away and expecting the drink to keep flowing. These gentile Ninevites put Israel to shame in their implementation of repentance. Such a desperation should be ours as well. We should be fasting for the salvation of our neighborhood, our city, our state, our country, and our world. The time is short. Who will show that they are serious about this great need?

3:8 “but let human and beast be covered with sackcloth and let them cry out to God with strength. Let each one repent from their evil way and from the violence that is in their hands

Not only did every living thing, except for plants, fast from food and water, a complete fast, but also all were covered with sackcloth. Can you imagine walking out to the field and covering the cattle and the sheep and whatever other animals you have with sackcloth? One wonders how the animals liked this. But the edict from the king is final and must be obeyed by his subjects. They really go all out in this repentance.

Not only did they all cover themselves in sackcloth, but everyone cried out to the Lord. It was a community effort that we don't see very often in our world. They all realized the gravity of their evil and sin. Yet today, many believers play around with sin and let it poke at them in their lives. We need to hate sin as much as God and want to repent at least to the level the Ninevites repented. The people cried out to God with all their strength. They used up all their might in their devotion and prayer to Him. When's the last time you were tired from praying?

The Gentile Ninevites are meant to make Israel ashamed of its lax spiritual practices. I believe that we must also take note and observe the same passion and devotion to repentance and it should prick the heart of every believer. We get so distracted with the world around us that we forget that this is not our home. We get comfortable and God does not hear our prayers because we are not resolved. We pray more that it would be nice if God would answer our prayers rather than calling out to Him in desperation, knowing there is no other resource or recourse, nothing but God's action can change our situation. But we don't pray like that anymore. The prayers of the Ninevites moved first the heart of God, and then the actions of God.

These people turned away from the evil in their hearts and the wickedness they had done with their hands. Sometimes we pray and ask God to forgive us, but then we sin again, sometimes blatantly. If we really repented, we would not do it again. We would not still allow

our thoughts to linger over sins that entangle us. We would not let our heart be swayed by the barrage of temptation. We would not so easily give in to temptation. We would stand stronger against the evil that longs to rule over us again. Let us not continue to do violence against the Lord in our lives. Let us make a clean break from the sin that is in our minds and hearts. Let us destroy the possibility of temptation taking us for a ride.

3:9 “Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from His burning anger, that we may not perish.”

Once again we have a similar response to the captain of the sailors from the king of the Ninevites. These are meant to be parallel to one another. Imagine a Hebrew reading this! For the second time in the book an unknowing gentile who does not know the Lord their God correctly suggests that God might be merciful upon them, that He might extend His grace if they were devoted to Him enough and obedient to Him.

These are meant to challenge believers. When unbelievers have a clearer understanding of God than believers, it should put us to shame. These gentiles don't know the Lord, and yet they hope against hope that God will be kind and merciful. They respond as if all of their work may not get them through. They seem to grasp that no one deed can guarantee that God will not finish what He started, the wrath that He wished to pour out.

They have dealt with many idols, but they have never dealt with the Lord God of the Hebrews. They don't know how He operates or what to expect. They are using conjecture and hoping that He is like what they hope. This is why we see the subjunctive mood in this verse. The king says, “Who knows?” as if they are debating how God will react to their actions. They can hope for the best, but if this God can destroy the whole city, then He is much more powerful than any of their gods.

Three verbs line this king's spoken hope, that God would turn away from, the same word used for relenting or even repenting. Now we must be very careful here. God does not repent. But He does relent. He does not change His mind. This word is used periodically throughout the Old Testament to speak of God's response to true repentance by humans. When the Lord makes a decision and informs the people about it, their reaction is taken into account as part of His will.

God presents two scenarios. If the people don't repent, His will is to destroy them. But if they do, His will includes a changing of the finality of the will to demolish that God can relent or choose the response that brings blessing rather than cursing to the repentant people. This is how He reacts. He relents from destruction and changes to salvation. Either of these options does not change His will, which is for the people to stop doing the evil they are doing. One will destroy them, and so stop the evil. The other will be their voluntary resistance from their evil and so stop the evil. God's will is not changed nor is His mind. He accomplishes His goal with every conceivable option and its resulting consequences. He is a big God!

Next we see the terms for relent and the return to the word for turning away from the current default course of action. God will possibly turn from His judgment and relent, allowing

for an alternate scenario to play out, and then He will turn from the first option. The turning of God to grace and salvation allows for His burning anger to be quenched because the people are not angering Him with their evil. It also allows for the people not to perish in the process of relieving the burning anger of a holy God who will not stand sin before Him.

3:10 When God saw their actions, indeed they turned from their evil way, then God relented from the calamity that He declared to do to them, and He did not carry it out.

The climax of the book is reached here in verse ten as God has sent His servant to tell the Ninevites He will destroy them and they have reacted with repentance, which often changes His method of performing His will. Instead of destroying the city, God relents and chooses instead to accept their repentance. Either way, their evil is stopped and His anger is abated. God reacts to them by seeing their offering of repentance and that they are genuinely stopping their sin.

He reacts in kind, giving them the blessing of His grace instead of wrath, the salvation instead of destruction. He relents, or chooses the second option to be gracious and not destroy them as His servant warned. The word here that describes God's wrathful judgment is the word for evil, but it is best understood not as moral evil but as a calamity of natural or supernatural destruction. We do the same today with the word bad. We say that when someone kills someone, they are bad. But we also say when a mudslide ruins a house that it is bad.

There are different shades of bad, and there are different shades of evil. God does not do evil. But He does do calamity if His will and holiness demand it to stop sin. God stops from what He had declared He would do and the people are saved from their destruction. The Lord shows His goodness in giving them a warning, and then when they commit to change and repentance, He honors their genuine and heartfelt response by bringing good instead of calamity. He truly is a forgiving God. He does the same in each of our lives. When we connect with God and respond to Him in ways that please Him and cause His delight, He responds to us with grace upon grace in our lives.

Chapter 4

4:1 But it was surely a great evil to Jonah and his wrath was kindled.

The opening verse of Jonah's closing chapter presents one of the final twists in this narrative concerning Jonah's response to God's grace and kindness and His relenting from the calamity He proposed. The surprising nature of Jonah's response grips the reader or listener to this story as Jonah reacts in a most unusual way. One would think that when the message of a prophet is heeded, as was so rare in the Old Testament,

However, instead of being greatly overjoyed at the outcome of his message to the Nineveh situation, Jonah is exceedingly angry with God and views His mercy to foreigners as a "great evil!" This same kindness and grace to Israel was always welcome and even demanded as a right. But when it comes to another country, a people that aren't Jewish, Jonah throws a temper tantrum. Make no mistake. Jonah was the prejudiced prophet who did not want God to be the God of the whole world, but only the God of Israel.

God's greatness and kindness in the staving off of His great anger is seen by Jonah as evil. This can't get any more ironic. The prophet is unhappy with a successful evangelistic effort. In fact, he's ripping mad! The word here used for angry promotes the image of kindling a roaring fire. He's not just unhappy that the Ninevites experience God's grace. He's over-abundantly in rage over God's universal grace in this matter.

There are a few issues we need to deal with when we see Jonah's response. First, are you in any way, shape, or form racist or prejudiced? Don't just pass it off as a simple no. Think about the question. Each of us inside ourselves would probably have to answer the question yes. The word prejudice has the connotation within its makeup of pre-judging others. We do this automatically. But the question is whether or not we stick to our decisions that we pre-make. Do we change when we see that a person we prejudged did not line up with our judgment? Or do we force the round peg into the square hole? We need to be careful how we view everyone. While we can't be completely impartial, we need to strive to learn the impartiality of God and let Him be the judge.

Second, the implications for evangelism and the gospel are overwhelming in this idea of prejudice. Who deserves to hear the gospel? Everyone! Who deserves salvation? No one! Not even you or me. But God is the one who saves! We need to understand that we are to present the gospel of Christ to every person we meet regardless of socio-economic status, gender, whether we like them or not, or any other criteria. Every person in the world that we meet is a candidate for God's grace despite any element of their history, geography, race, or other factors. And we must not be flaming mad about it! If you struggle with these types of issues, you must pray and ask God to release you from such bias so that His gospel can go forth. An evangelist who is not clean of prejudice actually hurts the message and gospel of Christ.

4:2 So he prayed to the Lord and said, “Is this not what I said when I was in my country? For this reason I anticipated it by fleeing to Tarshish, because I knew that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, and great in lovingkindness, even relenting from calamity.

Jonah in his anger talks to the Lord and voices his complaints against God. However strange this chapter may seem, it is coherent with the rest of the book except for chapter two where most pastors and scholars talk about how he has finally become obedient. As I have shown, I don't believe he became fully obedient. I believe he saw no other choice but to acknowledge God's sovereignty and still was a rebel in the way he carried out the message.

Humans have a tendency to think they know better than the all-knowing God. Or at least we think that God wants us to put in our two cents. Jonah had no right or place to be able to argue with God whether or not the Ninevites deserved or were allowed the same rules of relationship and grace that God operated while dealing with Israel. It's none of his business how God chooses to act with another group of people. The positive take-away from this interaction is that God treats the Gentile Ninevites in the same manner that He treats Israel. When they are truly repentant, God is no respecter of history or nationality.

In verse two, we finally see the reason that Jonah runs away from God in the first place. In his anger, Jonah responds that he ran because he knew that God would be merciful to the Ninevites and he didn't feel they deserved God's grace and salvation from His wrath. Jonah might have believed that because he was a mouthpiece for God as a prophet that God was required to converse with him on an equal basis concerning His decisions, but this is not the case. It is a privilege to be included in God's plans on any level.

Jonah points to his disagreement with God's mercy as the reason he anticipated God's command and disobeyed, fleeing in the opposite direction to Tarshish. So now we see the true heart of the point and matter of this book. We don't get to decide God's actions for Him. He will do as He desires and no tantrums we get into will change that. This word for anticipate speaks of the ideas of being opposite or contrary, to being in confrontation with someone.

The reason that Jonah leaves and goes the other way, geography only an image of the rift between God and His servant on the matter of the Ninevite's salvation, is because He knows God's awesome nature too well! He basically admits that he knew God would be gracious and merciful and that is why he refused to go as God had commanded. Jonah was banking on God being as good to the Ninevites as He has always been to Israel. We can also bank on God's nature not ever changing. Several times in the Bible we are told that God does not change. He still reacts to those who don't deserve mercy with mercy, and to those who don't need grace with grace.

The attributes of God that Jonah mentions specifically are central and image-filled theological words that we see throughout the Old Testament and the New. God's grace speaks of giving what is not deserved, a gift. His mercy and compassion come from the same root word. It

is the word for the womb of a mother. When God brings His mercy or is compassionate, we are just as safe and provided for and nurtured and loved as an infant in a mother's womb.

We have seen slow to anger before, and it has the image of having a long flaming nostril, so that the wrath takes longer to come out like the fire breathed by a dragon. God waits to release the full brunt and brute force of His flaming and vengeful wrath. The word for steadfast love is hessed, that famous word referring to God's loyal and unconditional covenantal love that always seeks our greater good when we are tied in covenant to Him.

Because God is slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness, He tends to relent from the calamities we deserve often. The word relent speaks to His choice to not destroy us when we respond to Him in repentance. The word for calamity is actually the word for evil, but I tend to avoid the word being translated as "evil" in English because we often automatically associate evil with morality. God's calamities are not evil morally but evil in a natural sense. They aren't for our joy. They are for our discipline.

4:3 So now, O Lord, please take my life from me because it is better to die than to live.

The prophet acts as if God's love and mercy poured out to a different people other than the Israelites is a great cause for death. He completely overreacts here as Elijah overreacts to Jezebel's promise to kill him after experiencing a monumental victory against the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. Jonah here reacts in the same misguided and illogical response. He wants God to take his life because God is letting the Ninevites off easy.

The emotional suspense is coming to a critical and crucial climax, supported by the samek at the end of this verse. A samek usually indicates the ending of a section, but I believe here in a narrative it is almost used like we believe the Selah of the Psalms is used to indicate a pause for pondering. I believe that we are to stop reading here and think about the implications of this shocking turn of events and the unbelievable reaction by Jonah to God and to meditate upon the issue of this text.

The word please is an injunction for entreaty. The word for life is the word for soul, nephesh. It most likely has an idea of the incorporation of the whole person, not just the soul as a part. Jonah really believes that death is a better option than seeing God save the people of Nineveh. Talk about a counter-productive evangelist! And I believe that is why we should pause here. Think about yourself. Is there anything in you that revolts and cringes at God's open and universal grace? He will literally save anyone who is repentant! We are so closed and full of criteria and qualifications. It is built into humanity to have bureaucracy. We fear openness and freedom in the matter of evangelism. But God embraces all who come to Him with true repentance.

4:4 But the Lord said, "Is it good for you to be angry?"

The Lord will ask this question of the prophet twice in the text. This first time is to address the prophet's attitude toward the Ninevites. The Lord contradicts the prophet's wrong desire to die instead of see his arch enemies come to God's salvation. He asks how Jonah's misplaced anger is working out for him. This question is a basic idiom of Hebrew that I would contemporize as the popular, "How's that working for you?"

The Lord asks what good comes of such nationalistic and prideful prejudice and anger. The prophet is learning that God is much bigger and greater and international than he had previously understood. But it's a hard lesson to learn for a man who once enjoyed prophesying against the Ninevites like in the book of 1 Kings. Jonah's anger is counterproductive. When we get angry, the first thing we must ask ourselves is if our anger is righteous or sinful. From there, we have to act accordingly. If it is righteous, then we won't hear this question from God. But when it is not, God will address that wrong motive and attitude in us.

4:5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth there for himself and sat in the shade until he would see what would become of the city.

The temper tantrum continues as the prophet leaves the city. He's so disgusted with the response of the people that he leaves. There's another reason for leaving as well. I believe the prophet headed out of town in the small hopes that the people would once again anger God enough for Him to finish what He had given to the prophet in the message. He went out to wait on God and maybe convince Him to smite them anyway.

He sat to the east of the city and waited, watching to see what the Lord would finally do, probably holding out hope that God would do as He had said in the message. But he will be sorely disappointed. It's interesting to note from the next couple of verses that God did not leave Jonah alone in his tantrum. He provided for him just like Elijah in the wilderness, and He discussed the matter at length with the prophet.

He worked on Jonah even in the tantrum. God never leaves us, even when we want Him to leave. He stays and He works us through our issues. I might even equate this to a self-induced time out session for Jonah. The way Jonah is operating, he thinks the city's fate is still in question. When our will does not line up with God's will, we will be sorely disappointed. He is not going to cater to our will. He will do what He wills. We must be the ones to change, not the Lord.

One interesting word here is the word for the booth that the prophet makes for himself. It is the same as the festival of booths commemorating when the Israelites made tents in the wilderness as they followed God's Spirit, although the prophet is not following God here. He is setting up for the light show he hopes God will deliver. We can even do very spiritual or very good looking things in our disobedience to try to force God's hand or to at least make ourselves look like we are righteous and on the right path. But they will not disguise the true nature of our place with God in those moments.

4:6 Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah to be shade for his head, to save him from his misery. So Jonah rejoiced because of the plant, greatly rejoicing.

While Jonah is waiting with a burning anger in the hot wilderness, the Lord actually gives him much grace and provides a plant. Once again there's that word for appoint. The Lord appointed the storm in chapter one and the fish at the end of the chapter. God has been directing this prophet's learning curve ever since the beginning, and that word appoint is the key to see these times of God's interaction with the story.

The plant is large enough most likely with big leaves to provide a substantial shade for the prophet. Now this plant might have been a castor oil plant or some other kind. The point is not the kind of plant but that God provided for Jonah's comfort even in the midst of his adversarial nature toward God. God doesn't hold grudges against us when we are disobedient. He will be patient, at least for a time. This plant was redemptive! It saved Jonah from his misery, at least physically.

Of course, Jonah almost acts like he would have expected the Lord to do this or something like it for his comfort. He responds with rejoicing and he is so happy about the plant and its shade. Now God is setting him up in this microcosm of an image so that he can see the larger point of God's plan, which we will discuss in the last verse. Jonah is so happy about the plant, but it is a selfish rejoicing because the plant is for him alone.

He cannot rejoice with God over the changed hearts of the Ninevites, but he can rejoice over a plant from God specifically for him. He can rejoice when God rewards Israel, but he doesn't want to share God's grace with other nations. We must guard against selfishness in our walk with God. We need to always be ministering outward to others. Jonah is in full revival over this little plant. He is missing the huge picture for a very small part of a picture.

4:7 But God appointed a worm when dawn arose the next day and it struck down the plant and it withered.

Once again we see the word appoint here as part of the teaching that God is giving to this wayward prophet. For a whole day Jonah enjoys and rejoices in the Lord's grace toward him, that even in the midst of us rude tantrum, God provides for his comfort. However, that provision of grace is not eternal while Jonah is still bucking against the Lord. The next day, God ordains a worm just like he ordained the plant.

Something needs to be said on the issue of God doing good things and calamities or evil things here. God appoints both the blessing and the destruction of that blessing in the worm. We need to notice throughout the whole of Scripture that God will respond with the proper consequences for whatever choice we make.

Even in the covenant, there are blessings for adhering to the covenant and curses for turning away from it. God will work good and evil as we see it. The terms good and evil, or

calamity, are from our perspective, what is good for us or what we perceive as evil or hardship. God merely gives us the results of our choosing. This is what God does here to teach Jonah to think on a much larger scale when it comes to who God can save and destroy.

The worm is appointed by God to destroy the blessing for which Jonah rejoiced. There is a larger picture here that we will see unfold as the book ends. But we do see this same type of interaction elsewhere in the Bible. When the Israelites demand meat and say they're sick of God's provision in the manna, he gives them quail. But when they eat it, they die. Lessons are taught by God in this way for those who will wait upon Him and sacrifice their own desires and stubbornness in favor of His will.

It is not that God is putting a carrot on a stick here but that He is showing Jonah that he is missing the bigger picture for the smaller picture. This is actually a very clever and poignant literary device in using a smaller situation to show the larger picture. Nathan does the same thing in telling King David the story of the precious little sheep and the rich man when he had sinned against the Lord and did not repent.

The ending of the story went from the details of the smaller story to David's life when the prophet said, "You are the man!" in reference to the rich man who stole the family's sheep for his own purposes. David had stolen a man's wife. So these smaller pictures get our minds off of our own little corner of life and the world and refocus us so that we can be much more useful to God's kingdom on a larger scale, if we would just heed God's counsel and discipline. God takes away Jonah's celebrated plant so Jonah can learn to rejoice for his enemies as much as for himself.

4:8 And it happened when the sun rose that God appointed a scorching east wind and the sun beat down on Jonah's head and he became faint. So he asked that his soul might die and said, "It is better for me to die than for me to live."

Now after the dawn of that day while Jonah was still grouchy about the plant being killed by the worm, and the verbs here both speak of a destructive blow to beat down something, we see that God is not done appointing and He's not done teaching. Job says it like this, "Should we accept only the good from God and not the bad?" That is part of the lesson in the larger lesson of leaving salvation matters up to God and being obedient to Him.

When the sun rose, God appointed once again another phenomenon, an easterly wind that was hot and scorching. The wind was an inconvenience. It was not a nice cool breeze but a blast of hot air to show Jonah how to be content and satisfied. On top of that scorching wind was the unbearable sun beating down on his head. The worm struck down the plant and the sun beat down on Jonah's head, all the same verbal root. Jonah grew faint because of the combination of scorching wind and sun. He was about to pass out.

Now that adversity had come his way, Jonah returned to his former solution, to ask the Lord to simply take his life because it's better to die than suffer in life. At first, his suffering was seeing his arch enemies be saved from God's wrath. Now his suffering is the inconvenience of

the weather conditions and the loss of the plant. His comfort was no longer a right nor a privilege, and he could not bear it.

There are believers sitting in pews today that run at the first sign of trials. They didn't sign up for the hard life or persecution, even though these were promised by Jesus. "In this world you will have tribulation." But they don't want that part of Christianity. They just want the goose bumps and the potlucks and the fellowship and the God that they can easily understand who does mechanically exactly what they suspected in the way they expected.

They are wimpy baby Christians who will not survive the rigors of the Christian life, and if it isn't for God's grace, they will not make it with or without God. Adversity is the seed and foundation of growth and development, of the strengthening and fortifying of our weaknesses and disbelief. We need Christians who work for the Lord and don't rend their hands over their own situation. It's not about us. It's about Him!

4:9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it good for you to be angry about the plant?" Then Jonah said, "It is good for me to be angry enough to die!"

For the second time in Jonah's little fit, God asks the same question, "Do you do well to be angry?" or in our vernacular, "How's that anger working for you?" Specifically this time God addresses the anger about the plant. He will get to Jonah's bigger anger about the salvation from wrath for the Ninevites, but for right now, God settles on the small picture of the plant.

Of course, Jonah doesn't see it yet, and so he simply responds that he is of course right in being angry about the plant. He put all this rejoicing and emotional response into that plant and then God killed it. That's just not fair. Jonah had anger management issues. He was angry enough about the plant to die. He wanted to die over a plant. Think about that for a second. Talk about messed up perspectives.

What about you? Is there anywhere in your life where you're not seeing the big picture, stuck on the tree instead of seeing the forest, or angry unduly about something that doesn't matter? We focus on the little things just to get angry. But when the good and righteous reasons come by, we're too busy fighting over the little things. There are things worth being angry about and fighting for, and there are many more things that are not worth our emotional response or our fighting.

4:10 So the Lord said, "You are compassionate for the plant for which you did not labor nor did you make it grow, which was started in a night and perished in a night."

The last two verses almost unnaturally contain the climax of the book. There is no resolution, as we will see in verse eleven. But the main point is readily left hanging in the air for us to ruminate upon and meditate upon. The Lord responds to Jonah's unjustified anger with the response of a Lord with a big picture mentality. He shows Jonah how out of whack his perspective looks.

Jonah shows great compassion for this plant because it was a gift to him, something that he selfishly enjoyed for a day. But Jonah didn't do anything to have any capital in that plant. He didn't plant the seed or carefully weed and water it every day and grow it up. He wasn't invested in the plant all that much except that it gave him shade. So his joy may be well founded, but he does not have the right to be so upset about its untimely demise.

The word for compassion here is used also in verse eleven. It speaks of a pity or a mercy toward an object or person. Jonah is so compassionate for this plant, going to anger for it and raging against God because He took it away within a day and then allowed Jonah to be exposed to harsh weather conditions while he was waiting for what he hoped was a giant fire and brimstone storm. He wanted the nice air conditioning while he lobbied for Nineveh's destruction!

Jonah had nothing to do with the plant, but he placed an inordinate amount of care for it and came to its rescue and defense. But he had not invested anything in it. It was not half as important as a person, not even close! But he was so willing to go to its defense. Though many are afraid to say it, I am not because it is warranted in the text. We go to die on hills for causes that matter little in comparison with more important causes. Only in America can a group care more about animals than human beings. Only in America would a person be willing to hug a tree or a fish without care for fellow citizens. We need to get our priorities straight!

4:11 “Yet should I not have compassion for Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know between their right hand and their left, and much cattle?”

Now the Lord finishes by hitting home the larger picture. The plant didn't matter to Jonah. He had no hand in its birth or death. But the Lord is the creator of all the universe and everything in it. He made every single person in the city of Nineveh just as surely as He personally made every human being in Israel. And because He is so intimately involved in the creation of every human being, and because He so loves every human being to death, He indeed has the right to care about their eternal situation.

God does not pity us as some translations have, but He is compassionate toward us, like a mother toward the infant growing in her womb. God treats us with every possible care at all times! He loves us so tremendously that the little things don't matter to Him. Nineveh is a city great in number with over 120,000 people in it. This is earlier on in its development as well, so the city will grow from here, but this is a very large city for the time period.

But as much as God cares for the group of 120,000, He cares just as much on a personal basis for each person that makes up the 120,000. In the New Testament, there is a parable by Jesus to remind us of how intimately familiar and personal our God is with us. Jesus tells of the Shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep in search of just one sheep. And when he finds it, there is much rejoicing.

Jonah rejoiced much over a measly plant. But he was greatly angered, to an extreme, about the salvation of a people that he did not prefer or like, that he hated with all of his being. We will be surprised to see who we will find in Heaven! We make our own judgments but they are not ours to make. The people in Nineveh are like sheep without a shepherd. They crave and need God's guidance and discipline and salvation. That is why He sent Jonah, to tell them that if they did not change, He would wipe them out to keep them from sin.

The book ends on the climax of the question that we are to ponder for a while. We are to think hard about how much God really does care about every single person and individual out there in the world. There is no weighing of one over another. God loves all the people of the world despite their backgrounds. We need to become people who love those same people. We need to become people who lead those people to Him.

Many scholars think that we are missing part of the book because we are so used to a nice clean ending with a resolution and a new setting. But that is not what we receive here. What these scholars miss is that this whole story is about God getting what He wants, not us getting our way. He has a much broader understanding than we ever will. He is sovereign and we tend to play our part in spite of ourselves. The abrupt ending was designed as a literary device to leave us hanging and thinking and discussing the point of the book. It was put there by design by the author. It is thought-provoking. So let us think on these things.

The book finishes by talking about God's great care and desire not only for the human beings in the city but also for the animals. What does this have to do with anything? Well, God made the animals too. Now they can't be saved because they don't have a soul. But they are just as important as every other part of creation to God.

God is going to restore all things in His creation at the end of time, not just the human beings. We need to remember that God cares about the whole of creation, even in our special place in His creation. Let us care also for the things He cares about and treat them as God does. Let us be good to animals and the environment! God cares about these things as well! The Lord seeks the restoration of all things! So let us be about the Father's business.