

A STUDY GUIDE ON THE RUNNING PROPHET

JONAH & THE BIG FISH



A PUBLICATION OF RAY REYNOLDS RAP

BIBLE CLASS STUDY GUIDE

Workbook by Ray Reynolds, Ph.D.

A Bible Study on the Book of Jonah

Ray Reynolds Rap Publications

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A Bible Study on the Book of Jonah

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Jonah: Introduction

Author:

Jonah was the son of Amittai (**Jonah 1:1, II Kings 14:25**), however, the rest of his family is unknown to the reader. His name means “dove” in Hebrew. He came from the town of Gath-hepher in the tribe of Zebulun (**Joshua 19:10-13**) which was located about two miles northeast of the city of Nazareth. As a prophet of God he served Israel during the reign of Jereboam II.

The prophet Jonah is believed to be the author of this book, or at least someone who was well acquainted with him and his story (i.e. sons of the prophets). A strong argument is made for the prophet’s authorship because his personal thoughts are recorded in some depth in the second chapter. This would be difficult for a later author to retrieve, unless he had spoken to Jonah the words or written them down.

Date:

Jonah lived in the eighth century BC. Some have estimated between 793-753 BC (possibly 780 BC). However, most scholars agree that the date of the book has to fall between the reign of Jeroboam II (824 to 783 BC) and the fall of Nineveh (612 BC) which is described by Nahum. This also means that Jonah would have lived soon after the ministry of Elisha had concluded.

Theme:

The book seems to emphasize the grace, mercy, and forgiveness of a loving God. Jonah is the unwilling prophet who refused to take the good news of God to the wicked Ninevites. It is clear that he knew too well that God would be merciful to these people, so he ran away. Nineveh is northeast, but he takes off due west to Tarshish (Spain). These people, under Shalmaneser II, had defeated Ahab and forced Jehu to pay tribute to them and to their gods. Many of the people were imprisoned, sacrificed, or punished.

Clearly God had prepared a plan to save the Ninevite people from their sins (**Jonah 1:2**). Despite Jonah’s plans to thwart God’s will, the Lord continues preparing the way for salvation (**Jonah 1:2, 3:1-2**). The Lord prepared a great wind to disturb the voyage (**Jonah 1:4**). The Lord prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah for his own protection and travel (**Jonah 1:17**). The Lord prepared the hearts of the people to be receptive to Jonah’s message (**Jonah 3:5-9**). The Lord also prepared a gourd/vine/plant (**Jonah 4:6**), a worm (**Jonah 4:7**), and an east wind (**Jonah 4:8**) hoping to prepare the heart of his prophet.

Audience:

The intended audience is the people of Israel. Clearly Jonah was not the only Israelite who harbored ill feelings toward the enemies of the God's people. All of the people needed to hear this message, including the prophet who experienced it! Israel appears to be outwardly at the pinnacle of power and prosperity. Jeroboam II had a successful reign (**II Kings 14:25-28, Amos 6:14**). This position of comfort afforded God's people a unique position to eradicate all their enemies and isolate themselves at the top. However, this arrogance, which is seen in the prophet led to their downfall.

It is interesting that the people of God sought injustice, greed, and idolatry. They neglected the poor and decided to forsake their God. In fact, by the end of the century the Assyrian Empire would be the strongest military force ever known in the world overtaking and deporting the northern kingdom. However, until then, Jonah made a difference. As a result of Jonah's ministry to Assyria, the Assyrian captivity of Israel was postponed for about 130 years! God's mercy was shown to the individual (Jonah, a Jew), a group (the heathen sailors, Gentiles), and the heathen world power, Assyria (Gentiles).

Literary Notes:

The book of Jonah is prophetic work that is unlike any of the other prophets. The genre is historical literature. It is written from one man's point of view and his personal account of actual events he experienced. He describes his nation, his God, and his own feelings about these events. The book is surrounded by historical data: Jonah was a historical person, Nineveh was a historical city, the seaport of Joppa has historical significance, etc. There is no reason to doubt its historical value, no matter how fantastic the story may seem to the casual reader.

Contemporaries of the Prophet Jonah:

Besides Jonah, it is believed that Amos and Hosea prophesied during this time. Also previous to his work there were many sons of the prophets lead and directed by men like Elijah, Micaiah, Elisha, and other men of God. The prophetic ministry of Isaiah would follow these great prophets.

Key Verses:

Jonah 1:2-3, 1:4, 1:9, 1:17, 2:1, 2:10, 3:5-9, 3:10, 3:1-2, 4:3, 4:6-8, 4:9-11

Outline of the Book:

- I. Running From God (1:1-16)
- II. Running To God (1:17-2:10)
- III. Running With God (3:1-10)
- IV. Running Ahead of God (4:1-11)

A Bible Study on the Book of Jonah

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LESSON #1 = "Running From God"

Jonah 1:1-16

Introduction: The book of Jonah is a favorite to many students of the Bible. Most of us are familiar with the stories of his life because from childhood we have heard the story of Jonah and the big fish. I want to spend the next few lessons discussing the book of Jonah. I have entitled this series, "Jonah: The Running Prophet" because every time we see Jonah, he is running! There is a weeping prophet, so why not a running prophet? I am not sure who first inspired this theme for the book of Jonah, but it is not my own, and I would gladly give credit to the one who came up with this concept. The book of Jonah is one of the Minor Prophets, but "minor" has to do with its size and not content. Let's read our text and study together. . . .

Discussion:

I. Jonah in the Middle of God's Plan (vs.1-3)

- A. Notice that "*the word of the Lord came to Jonah*" (v.1).
 - 1. This is Jonah's call, we can only wonder if it was his initial call or not.
 - 2. It is possible, but not likely, that this was the only prophesy God expected.
- B. The message was simple.
 - 1. The Lord told him "*Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me*" (v.2).
 - 2. These sound like very simple instructions, but Jonah took off running, not to Ninevah, but to Joppa to get on a ship headed for Tarshish (Spain). (v.3)
 - 3. If he had prophesied before this should have been a walk in the park.
 - 4. Did he not trust in God? Have you ever wondered why he ran?
- C. Why did he resist God? There are several reasons why
 - 1. Ninevah was the capital of Assyria, the arch rivals and enemies of Israel.
 - 2. They were cruel, blood thirsty people, the worst in the land.
 - History says they would peel peoples skin off and put them up on posts in the cities for all to see. They would stack hundreds of skulls outside the city gates. They would chain people around the neck and take them into slavery.
 - 3. If Jonah was familiar with other prophets he would have known that they were the one prophesied to bring Israel into captivity.
 - 4. The most important reason was that he hated these people and he did not want to give them God's message because he wanted to see them die.

II. *Jonah in the Middle of the Ship (vs.4-9)*

- A. Jonah thinks now that he has escaped, and is no longer in the presence of God.
 - 1. Little did he know that God was about to give him his first lesson on why you shouldn't run away from God.
 - 2. It says, "*the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up*" (v.4).
 - 3. Things got so bad that the men began to get scared and they began crying out to their gods and they "*threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load*" (v.5)
 - 4. Meanwhile, Jonah went down into the middle of the ship and went to sleep!
 - 5. The men upstairs were getting desperate so they woke Jonah up and they asked him to pray to his god so that they could be saved (v.6).
- B. Jonah goes upstairs with the mariners.
 - 1. The praying to their gods was not getting them anywhere, and since the storm blew up all of the sudden they began to wonder if this was someone's fault.
 - a. Remember that in this day people thought that all bad things happened because someone sinned.
 - b. In this case they were right.
 - 2. They decided to cast lots and see whose fault it was, and it fell on Jonah (v.7).
 - 3. Now they begin to wonder just who their paying passenger was, so they begin to ask him questions and they wanted answers.
 - a. They ask him, "*Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?*" (v.8).
 - b. Jonah tells them who he is, "*a Hebrew*", and who his God is, the One "*who made the sea and the dry land*" (v.9).
- C. Things seem to be bad now, but they do get worse.

III. *Jonah in the Middle of Confusion (vs.10-14)*

- A. When the men find out who Jonah really is they begin to get scared (v.10).
 - 1. Now the men asked him, "*Why have you done this?*", but he didn't respond.
 - 2. They "*knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord,*" because he told them.
 - 3. Now Jonah realizes what he has done, and he realizes that these men are now going to be punished along with him if he doesn't do something quickly.
- B. The men now begin looking for a way out, and since Jonah was a prophet, they thought that he knew his God well enough that he could do something about it (v.11).
 - 1. They asked, "*What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?*"
 - 2. Notice that "*the sea was growing more tempestuous.*"

3. The men were getting desperate.
 - a. Can you imagine being out in the middle of the sea, the waves crashing up against the ship, and you knowing you were going to die?
 - b. Can you imagine how you would feel if you were Jonah?
 - c. Would you choose to get off the boat or would you stay on board and hope that God would still the storm?

- C. Jonah realized that he would perish, and these men with him, if he stayed on board.
 1. Jonah decides that he needed to get off the boat.
 2. He says, *"Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me"* (v.12).
 3. The men ignored him and kept on rowing (v.13).
 4. They decided that they should pray to Jonah's God and they all began crying out and calling on His name.
 5. They said, *"We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You"* (v.14).
 6. If you were these sailors, would you throw him overboard?

IV. *Jonah in the Middle of the Sea (vs.15-16)*

- A. Finally, the men decide to throw Jonah overboard (v.15).
 1. They had tried rowing hard to return to the land (v.13).
 2. They even tried praying to God (v.14).
 3. In the end, they knew that the prophet was right, he had to get off the boat.
- B. Notice a few things about these men on the boat:
 1. They made every effort to save the boat and everyone on it, including Jonah.
 2. Even after the men find out that Jonah is to blame they still speak kindly.
 - These men were not rude, mean, or hateful towards Jonah.
 3. When Jonah asks to be thrown overboard they ignore him.
 - They didn't want to be guilty of drowning this man.
 4. They begin praying to God and using the formal name for God *"Yahweh."*
 - In most Bible's when this name for God is used it is in all caps. - *"LORD"*
 5. They specifically recognize Jonah's God as Lord (v.16).
 - This may be a secondary conversion story that is overlooked!
 6. When they do throw Jonah overboard they are sorry and pray for forgiveness.
 7. When the storm ceases they feared God, they made vows to Him, and they even began to offer sacrifices to Him.

- C. These pagans were teaching Jonah!
1. We often think bad things about these men, but they were really good people!
 2. These men were quick to convert when they knew they were going to perish.
 3. God was trying to teach Jonah through these sailors that He loves all people and He wants all men to obey Him.
 4. These men were likely from Nineveh and God was showing Him that these people were not all bad.
 5. Apparently, this was not good enough for the Lord, so the Lord begins to prepare a fish for Jonah, and we will talk more about that in the next lesson.

Conclusion: So in this lesson we see Jonah, the running prophet, running from God. He tried to run from God's presence. God is not like the pagan gods of Jonah's day. In Jonah's day the people could run from their gods, but you can never run from the presence of the living God. I wonder if you have ever tried to run from the presence of God. Have you ever refused to do God's will?

There will be a day when you wish you would have obeyed God! Jonah had a second chance to do God's will now, and you do too. Today is the day you should turn your life over to God and stop running. Let go of your burdens and let God bless you. There are always tremendous benefits to doing God's will, but the greatest is eternal life. Are you ready to start running with God instead of running away from Him?

A Bible Study on the Book of Jonah

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LESSON #2 = "Running To God"

Jonah 1:17-2:10

Introduction: The book of Jonah is a favorite to many students of the Bible. Most of us are familiar with the stories of his life because from childhood we have heard the story of Jonah and the big fish. I want to spend the next few lessons discussing the book of Jonah. I have entitled this series, "Jonah: The Running Prophet" because every time we see Jonah, he is running! There is a weeping prophet, so why not a running prophet?

In the last lesson we noticed that Jonah was running from God. We noticed that no matter how hard he tried he could not run from the face of God. We noticed that he boarded a ship that was headed for Tarshish. While on the boat a storm started brewing, and the only way for the men on the boat to be spared was if Jonah ended up in the water. God taught Jonah an important lesson about His love for all people and that you cannot avoid doing what God wants you to do. Let's read our text for today and continue our study together. . . .

Discussion:

I. Jonah is Swallowed by the Great Fish (1:17)

- A. Notice that it says He "prepared" this great fish for Jonah.
 - 1. This word is used again in **Jonah 4:6-8**.
 - a. Jewish scholars felt that the word prepared (manah) meant that God created this particular fish at creation and kept it in reserve until the day of Jonah when it fulfilled its particular mission.
 - b. As it occurs in the text, and in Jonah 4, the word means "to appoint, ordain, prepare, or order."
 - c. It seems to reflect a military officer assigning one a soldier to a task.
 - d. In other words, the idea is one of commission rather than creation.
 - 2. The fish, then, was might not be one that was created especially for a task.
 - 3. Instead, it could be one already in existence and commissioned for a specific mission, which was the preservation of God's prophet.
 - 4. Everything in creation obeys God, so why not Jonah?
 - 5. Why are humans always the most rebellious of all of God's creations?
- B. What about the great fish?
 - 1. The question has frequently been raised as to what kind of a fish this was.
 - a. The Hebrew text merely says that it was a great fish (dag gadoul).
 - b. Jesus, in referring to this incident, says that it was a sea monster (He uses the Greek word "keutos," **Matthew 12:40**).

- c. Jesus' references of this event should put to rest any question of its historicity, however, many argue that this was just a story, or a parable.
 - 2. This fish has commonly been thought of as being a whale.
 - a. Some men have pointed out that a whale's physical structure would not permit the swallowing of a man.
 - b. One sea captain testifies that the cavity in the throat of the sperm whale is large enough to hold a life boat full of men.
 - 3. Other commentators have suggested that the fish was a dogfish, which has a stomach so large that once the body of a man in armor was found in it.
 - a. Still others suggest that the fish was a shark.
 - b. Some sharks grow to a weight of 10K pounds and to a length 30-45 feet.
 - c. On rare occasions, full-grown horses have been found in their stomachs.
 - 4. The Smithsonian Institution has on record an incident in which one fish swallowed another fish that weighed fifteen hundred pounds.
 - 5. The precise identity of the fish is not important, but what is important is that it happened and God was in control.
 - a. Apparently, God has a number of fish that are capable of this feat.
 - b. The important fact is that God is in control of this creature, and His creature obeys Him and serves His purposes.
- C. The text records that Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.
- 1. This seems to be absolutely amazing!
 - a. There are three suggestions as to how this was accomplished:
 - (1) This calculation was made by the sailors.
 - (2) It represents Jonah's estimation of the elapsed time.
 - (3) It is the actual amount of time Jonah spent in the great fish.
 - b. The last view seems most likely when you recall that the form of this prophecy is historical and occurs in the third person.
 - 2. Jonah certainly knew the day in which he was thrown into the water and the day in which he was vomited up on the dry land.
 - 3. Those were three days he will never forget, and probably the longest days of his life up until that point.
 - a. Imagine how you would feel if you were in a smelly fish's stomach.
 - b. In the next lesson I will tell you about a man who endured this.
 - 4. What would you do if you were in the stomach of a fish? Pray?

II. *Jonah is Praying in the Great Fish (2:1-9)*

- A. The circumstances of the prayer (2:1)
 - 1. Notice it says, "*Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly.*"
 - 2. Jonah is moved to pray to God from the stomach of the fish.
 - 3. God has finally put His prophet in the place where he would seek His face and submit himself to Him.

4. God has brought His prophet to the point where he can do nothing other than to submit to the will of God in prayer..... How would you feel? Thankful!?

B. The content of the prayer (2:2-9)

1. The content of what Jonah prayed from the stomach of the fish is recorded, though it obviously was written at a time following his release from the fish.
2. Before looking at these specific passages in detail, three questions need to be considered: (1) Did Jonah die?, (2) Why is there no request for deliverance in this prayer?, and (3) Why is there a close parallel between the wording of this prayer and some of the psalms?

a. Concerning the first question, whether Jonah actually died, scholars are actually divided on this issue:

(1) Some that say that he did die and others say that he did not die.

(a) Seven lines of proof are offered to support the view that Jonah died in the big fish.

(b) They are as follows:

(1) Christ used Jonah as a sign of His death and resurrection (**Matthew 12:40**). They say that the parallel would be incomplete if Jonah had not actually died.

(2) The time in which Jonah prayed—if he remained alive throughout his imprisonment in the fish’s stomach, then he prayed on the second or third day. If he died, then he probably prayed in the early moments of his difficulty. He probably had three to five minutes to pray in the fish’s belly before death.

(3) Jonah cries out of the belly of Sheol (v.2). This term has the primary meaning of being a grave (**Genesis 42:38, Psalm 88:3**) therefore he considered the fish to be his grave.

(4) The expression “floods surrounded me” (v.3) describes a man who is drowning, not living.

(5) The expression “I have been cast out of Your sight” (v.4) only has adequate meaning if it indicates physical death.

(6) The expression “the weeds were wrapped about my head” (v.5) better describes a dead man than one who simply is temporarily living in a fish.

(7) The word “corruption” (v.6) describes death and perfectly parallels Jonah’s circumstances with Christ’s. Those who hold this view say that the emphasis of this prayer and incident is Jonah’s resurrection, not the fish or Jonah’s preservation.

(2) Most commentators hold the view that Jonah did not die during these three days in the fish's stomach.

(a) There are four lines of evidence that are given to support this position.

(b) They are as follows:

(1) The expression "the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah" (1:17) implies the fish's mission is to preserve Jonah alive, not to be the agent of death.

(2) The term "belly of hell or Sheol" (v.2) is used by David in speaking of the bands of death when, in experience, he did not die (**Psalm 18:5, 30:3**).

(3) The language of Christ in Matthew 12:40 does not require Jonah's death and resurrection. Christ's emphasis is upon the time element involved, not in the death involved.

(4) The sequence of the narrative implies continuous living: (a) a prepared fish (1:17); (b) Jonah in the fish's stomach three days and nights (1:17); (c) Then Jonah prayed (2:1-9); and (d) God spoke to the fish and Jonah was delivered (2:10).

(3) While it is obvious that all scholars do not agree, the view that Jonah was preserved physically throughout the entire three days is simpler and I believe it is accurate.

(4) Nowhere in the text is it specifically stated that he did die.

b. Concerning the second question, why there is no request for deliverance in this prayer, two possible suggestions have been offered:

(1) First this account of the prayer was written after the deliverance, therefore no request was necessary to record.

(2) Second, when Jonah was swallowed by the fish, he found that he was preserved alive in its stomach and regarded this as a pledge of his future deliverance.... this is why he prays to God.

(3) This latter view seems more accurate because the prophet never doubted the fact of his deliverance

c. Concerning the third question, why there is a close affinity between this prayer and the psalms:

(1) We need to remember how well-versed he was in the Scripture.

(2) It would be normal for him to call to mind other servants of God who had found themselves in similarly hopeless situations and had looked to God for deliverance.

3. Jonah's prayer is poetic in form and has three main movements, and each begins with a statement of his impossible situation and an expression of his faith in spite of these impossible circumstances.
 - a. The first movement is seen in verses 2-4.
 - (1) *"Out of the belly of Sheol I cried . . ."* (v.2).
 - (2) But it says *"He answered me"* (v.2).
 - b. The second movement is seen in verses 5-6.
 - (1) *"The waters surrounded me, even to my soul. . ."* (v.5).
 - (2) But it says *"You have brought me up . . ."* (v.6).
 - c. The third movement is seen in verses 7-9.
 - (1) *"My soul fainted within me. . ."* (v.7).
 - (2) But he remembers *"Salvation is of the Lord"* (v.9).
- C. The contact of the prayer (2:10)
 1. Obviously Jonah made contact with His prayer.
 2. God heard him and delivered him.
 3. This leads us to our last point. . .

III. Jonah is Spared From the Great Fish (2:10)

- A. *"So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land"* (v.10)
 1. The faith that Jonah has shown throughout this prayer is outstanding.
 - a. How many of you would have panicked and died as fish food?
 - b. But Jonah prayed and he knew that God had delivered him.
 - c. In fact, he knew it already because this is a prayer of deliverance.
 2. This prayer does not seem to be a prayer of deliverance from the fish, but a prayer of thanksgiving for deliverance from the fish.
- B. We need to remember that God can perform an act of deliverance when we pray.
- C. It is also important to notice that, once again, the fish, in contrast to his unwilling and disobedient passenger, obeys God and vomits Jonah up upon the dry land.
 1. It is not stated precisely where the prophet was cast on shore.
 2. It was probably somewhere on the coast of Palestine near the place where he departed *"from the presence of the Lord"* (1:3).

Conclusion: In this lesson we considered three points: Jonah was swallowed by the great fish, he was praying in the great fish, and he was spared from the great fish. How have you reacted to God's call? Running away from Him or to Him? Stop running away and repent today, because God is waiting! Let go of your burdens and let God bless you. There are always tremendous benefits to doing God's will, but the greatest is eternal life. Are you ready to start running with God?

A Bible Study on the Book of Jonah

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LESSON #3 = "Running With God"

Jonah 3:1-10

Introduction: The book of Jonah is a favorite to many students of the Bible. Most of us are familiar with the stories of his life because from childhood we have heard the story of Jonah and the big fish. I want to spend the next few lessons discussing the book of Jonah. I have entitled this series, "Jonah: The Running Prophet" because every time we see Jonah, he is running! There is a weeping prophet, so why not a running prophet?

In the two lessons we noticed that Jonah was running from God and then running to God. Now, as Jonah has been vomited out on dry land, our story resumes. In order to set the tone for this part of the lesson, I want to share a story..... There was a story told in the mid 90's about a man that was swallowed by a whale for nearly a week (Yes, there is enough oxygen to survive!). Some fishermen caught the whale and pulled it up on the ship. When they cut it open the man rolled out its belly. The stomach acids of the whale bleached his hair and his skin. Can you imagine this stinky, smelly man, walking into your hometown? It is possible that they could have heard about this incident before he arrived? This is the way we need to picture Jonah as we continue our story. Let's read our text for today and continue our study together. . . .

Discussion:

I. *Jonah Responded (3:1-4)*

- A. Against the backdrop of Jonah's punishment for his disobedience and repentance, the Lord in His grace and mercy speaks to him a "*second time*" (v.1).
 - 1. Despite his previous unfaithfulness, Jonah is given a second opportunity to carry out his work for Jehovah.
 - 2. This clearly shows the grace and longsuffering that God has toward us.
- B. The command given to Jonah in 3:2 is essentially the same as the one given him in 1:2.
 - 1. The only except is that there is an emphasis on the idea of preaching.
 - 2. This time Jonah is obedient and he responds to God's Calling.
- C. Jonah went to "*Nineveh, the great city*" (v.2).
 - 1. Verse 3 records the obedience of the prophet.
 - 2. It says he went immediately to Nineveh in obedience to the word of God.

3. Nineveh is described as an exceedingly great city of three day's journey.
 - a. Scholars offer differing suggestions as to what this means.
 - b. We do know that it was about 120,000 in population at this time, and that it was about 60 miles wide.
 - c. Therefore, it could simply mean the outskirts of the city were included in this figure, or it just took Jonah that long to get there.
 4. Nevertheless, Jonah followed God.
- D. When he entered this city he preached his sermon (v.4).
1. We know now that Jonah conforms with God's commission.
 2. He says, *"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"*
 - a. We believe the theme of Jonah's sermon is recorded in verse 4.
 - b. It is doubtful that this is all he said to them.... But it is possible that the message was brief (i.e. exhaustion, frustration, and acceptance).
 - c. He probably preached extensively about God's displeasure at the wickedness of the people of Nineveh and elaborated on their need to repent, turn to God, and the Creator of heaven and earth.
 3. Imagine how these people would feel, knowing that they would die.
 4. Jonah had done His part (A preacher but not a minister).

II. *The People of Nineveh Repented (3:5-9)*

- A. These verses record the response that Jonah's message received.
1. It says, *"So the people of Nineveh believed God"* (v.5).
 2. The people of Nineveh were ready for Jonah's evangelistic message.
- B. They proclaimed a fast, put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes.
1. The English word sackcloth is derived from the Hebrew word "sak," which signifies a coarse cloth, dark in color, that was usually made of goat's hair.
 2. It was customarily worn by mourners (**II Samuel 3:31, II Kings 19:1-2**) and goes back as far as the patriarchal age (**Genesis 37:34, Job 16:15**).
 3. This was a sign of their humbleness.
- C. It says "from the greatest of them to the least of them" they repented (v.6).
1. We should notice that all classes of Ninevites were involved in this repentance.
 2. When the matter came to king's attention, even he wrapped himself in sackcloth and sat down on ashes as a sign of deep mourning (**Job 2:8**).
 3. The king also "proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh" a decree (v.7).
- D. Verses 7 to 9 record the fact that the king and his nobles, who had been the nation's leaders in its wickedness, now become the nation's leaders in its repentance.
1. These verses set forth the way the repentance is to effect everyone.
 2. The repentance of king and the people is also shared by their animals (vs.7-8).

3. There are many opinions as to why this is stated.
4. The best explanation is that their beasts had shared in the evil effects of their sin, and the king felt that they also needed deliverance.
5. This was not uncommon (**Genesis 3:17, Romans 8:19-23, II Peter 3:13**).
6. Symbolically the king decrees that these animals must share in man's repentance in order to share in the benefits of that repentance, which is escaping the wrath of God (v.9).

- E. The king's decree was not humorous or superficial.
1. The king himself set the personal example, and the edict was backed by him.
 2. Verse 9 expresses faith on the part of the king and the Ninevites.
 3. They had no evidence on which to base their faith or to hope for relief, except for the fact that God had sent Jonah to warn them instead of destroying them.
 4. Their faith did not disappoint them.

III. God Relented (3:10)

- A. Here we have God's evaluation of the Ninevites' faith.
1. Their faith was indeed genuine, and so were "*their works*"! (v.10)
 2. Their faith was strong enough to persuade God not to destroy them.
- B. The expression "God relented" should not be misunderstood.
1. God did not change in His intentions toward the Ninevites.
 2. They changed in their attitude toward Him, and on the basis of that change, God could deal with them in grace, rather than in harsh judgment as their failure to repent would have required.
 3. The old King James translates this word as repent on several occasions, but that would seem to be a bad translation of the word.
- C. The language indicates the view of God from man's viewpoint.
1. The message had come that God intended to destroy them, and this was true.
 2. But they repented, and God now can deal with them in grace.
 3. This appears to be a change in God from the viewpoint of man, who is unaware of his own change, and we know from the verses following in the next chapter that Jonah was truly in awe at this change.
- D. This was good news to Nineveh, but bad news to Jonah.
1. How would you respond if this sermon was preached to you?
 2. How would you respond if you had preached this sermon to people you hated?
 3. How do you think Jonah will respond?

Conclusion: In this lesson, we have noticed that Jonah responded, the people repented, and God relented. There is a simple message in this story. First of all, God loves us and offers everyone salvation (**John 3:16**). Second, if we have been disobedient he offers us an opportunity to repent and make things right (**Acts 17:30**). Finally, if you repent, and sincerely follow Him, he will save you! Are you ready to obey the will of God?

Today is the day you should turn your life over to God and stop running. Let go of your burdens and let God bless you. There are always tremendous benefits to doing God's will, but the greatest is the eternal life we can have in Him. Are you ready to start running to God and with God instead of running away from Him? Let God save you, because you cannot save yourself!!!

A Bible Study on the Book of Jonah

Ray Reynolds Rap Publications

LESSON #4 = "Running Ahead of God"

Jonah 4:1-11

Introduction: The book of Jonah is a favorite to many students of the Bible. Most of us are familiar with the stories of his life because from childhood we have heard the story of Jonah and the big fish. I want to spend the next few lessons discussing the book of Jonah. I have entitled this series, "Jonah: The Running Prophet" because every time we see Jonah, he is running! There is a weeping prophet, so why not a running prophet?

In the previous lessons we noticed that Jonah was running from God, then running to God, and finally running with God, but Jonah's story is far from over. When the sermon has concluded, and the responses have been tallied, Jonah is NOT happy. Instead we find Jonah very angry at God! Remember that he did what God commanded him to do, despite the fact that he disagreed with God. He may have figured that since he responded, now God would decide to destroy the city of Nineveh. However, the Ninevites not only repented, they were sincere, and the king ordered them to fast so that God would spare them. Indeed, God did spare them and He *"relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it"* (3:10). Good news for Nineveh, and bad news for Jonah. Let's read our text for today and conclude our study together. . . .

Discussion:

I. Jonah is Displeased (vs.1-4)

- A. Our text begins by saying *"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry"* (v.1).
 - 1. This is one of those chapters that proves to us that these divisions were made by man, and it is obvious that it goes with the previous verse.
 - 2. Notice that instead of being pleased with what happened, and praising God for His grace to Nineveh and for the success of his ministry, Jonah was displeased exceedingly and very angry with what God had done (v.1).
 - 3. He lost control of himself and gave way to violent expression.
 - 4. There are only a few reasons as to why he could have been angry.
 - a. It is possible that he feared for his reputation as a prophet.
 - b. Although, His basic problem stemmed from his personal hatred of Nineveh and the Ninevites.
 - 5. He was probably hoping that they would laugh at the warning and perish.
 - 6. He is still afflicted with a hatred of all non-Jews, especially Assyrians.
 - a. This is why he ran in the first place.
 - b. This is also why God corrects him as He does (v.11).

- B. Jonah expresses his complaint to God (v.2).
1. He acknowledging that his view has not changed from what it was originally and that his view of the Assyrians is drastically different from God's.
 2. He prayed to the Lord, and says, *"Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm"* (v.2).
 - a. The prophet admits that he feels God is wrong for what he is doing.
- How many times have you done this to God?
 - b. On the same hand he recognizes God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abundant in lovingkindness, and relents from doing harm.
 - c. This proves to us that the reason he didn't want to go to Ninevah is because he wanted them to perish.
 3. This is possibly the greatest passage in all of this book.
 - a. Not only did God show grace to His people, but He showed it towards all people, every nation.
 - b. This is one verse that proves God's love for all nations.
 4. Would you want your enemies to be saved?
 - a. Think about that for just a minute.
- Jihadists, Muslim extremists, Castro, the neighbor that is mean to you, etc.
 - b. What if God always did what we wanted him to do?
- He would not be God!!!
 5. If you were a Ninevite would you want to receive salvation?
 6. What is the difference between a Ninevite and you?
 7. What purpose is this story if we don't make personal application?
- C. Jonah continues his prayer and says, *"Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"* (v.3)
1. The expression of despair reaches its height here where the prophet requests for God to take his life.
 2. This shows the extent and intensity of Jonah's hatred toward the Assyrians.
 3. To him, his life seemed to lose its meaning when he was robbed of the possibility of vengeance upon them.
 4. Jonah would rather die than change his unforgiving spirit.
 5. We must remember that a worldly mind will always resist the Spirit of God.
 6. **Romans 8:7-8** says, *"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God."*
 7. We need to be attuned to God's will and not our own. - **Matthew 6:33**

- D. The whole situation is put into focus by God's question (v.4).
 - 1. The Lord said, "*Is it right for you to be angry?*"
 - 2. It is a rhetorical question and, of course, the answer is, No.
 - 3. Jonah really has no good reason to be angry, and the rhetorical question, then, is a form of gentle reproof.
 - 4. Also, God is reminding him that unholy attitudes must be changed.

II. *Jonah is Delighted (vs.5-6)*

- A. So now we see that "*Jonah went out of the city*" (v.5).
 - 1. His encounter with God must have taken place inside the city.
 - a. He had seen this repentance with his own two eyes.
 - b. Imagine delivering this message to your enemies and then watching them repent and be forgiven.
 - 2. We really have no idea how much this must have hurt Jonah.
 - a. He may have had friends and family killed by these people.
 - b. He may have even fought against these people.
 - c. No doubt, he saw the dead bodies of their victims, the Jews.
 - 3. Jonah could not stand this site for another minute.
 - 4. He may have waited the forty days, but this is unlikely.
- B. When Jonah went out from the city and "*he made himself a shelter*" (v.5).
 - 1. As he sat under this shelter he watched until he could "*see what would become of the city*" (v.5).
 - a. Most translations (KJV, NKJV, NCV, ASV, NASV, NIV, CEV, NLT) describe it as a shelter, but the RSV says it was a "*booth*," but it was more like a tent.
 - b. It was probably nothing fancy, just some sticks and a sheet.
 - c. It was obviously not enough for good shade.
 - 2. He waited to see if God would change His decision to have mercy on Nineveh.
 - a. This may have been his waiting for 40 days.
 - b. Although, we are given no amount of time for this stay.
 - 3. He did this on the east side of this city.
 - a. Remember that the east is where the sun rises.
 - b. This would have been the best view first thing in the morning to see if God had destroyed the city the night before.
 - c. Now Jonah is trying to stay optimistic.
 - 4. As bad as Jonah wanted to go home, he wanted to wait and see the fruits of his labor, hoping they would be in vain.
- C. It says, "*God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah*" (v.6).
 - 1. What was this plant? - ASV, NASV, RSV
 - a. Some have suggested this to be a castor oil plant.
 - b. Other translations say "*vine*" (NIV, CEV), gourd (KJV), and a leafy plant (NLT), but one thing that we know is that it was not a tree.

2. Even though Jonah is angry at God (vs.1-4), God still cares for him.
 - a. God demonstrates His concern by preparing this plant (Heb *qémqayomun*) to grow up to provide shade for Jonah's head.
 - b. The exact identity of this plant is not important.
 - c. The important thing is that it grew up rapidly, and once again nature served its Creator's purpose exactly.
3. Jonah was *"very grateful for the plant"* (v.6).
 - a. Jonah was happy for the provision of the plant, though he apparently does not recognize it as having come from the hand of God.
 - b. We are often the same way when God provides for us.

III. Jonah is Discouraged (vs.7-8)

- A. Now we see that *"as the morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm"* (v.7).
 1. This reveals that the plant was designed to serve God's purpose, and not just for Jonah's comfort.
 2. Notice again that God prepared.
 - a. He has prepared a fish, then a plant, and now a worm.
 - b. Once again one of God's creations answers His Creator's call and performs His service.
 3. This time God calls on the worm (Heb *toḥla>at*). - Nearly all translations
 4. The worm's mission is simply to attack the fast-growing plant so that it withers and Jonah is deprived of his shade.
- B. Then we are told that *"God prepared a vehement east wind"* (v.8).
 1. Another servant in God's arsenal of nature answers His call.
 2. This time another wind, a vehement east wind, is called by God.
 - a. This is a reference to the *"sirocco wind."*
 - b. Its heat and its dust were well known in this day, and still today.
 3. Usually the wind would be a good thing on a hot day, but it made Jonah miserable.
- C. As the sun was beating down on Jonah he grew faint.
 1. He *"wished death for himself,"* and said, *"It is better for me to die than to live"* (v.8).
 2. The wind comes not for the purpose of drying up the plant or for tearing down the shelter that Jonah has built, but simply to intensify Jonah's misery.
 3. It is effective in its mission, and Jonah once again wishes for death.
- D. The prophet is a pathetic sight!
 1. Here we see him sitting, feeling sorry for himself.
 2. He is not praying for Nineveh or himself.
 3. He is not resting to gather his strength to continue his ministry.
 4. Instead he is in complete dejection and self-pity.
 5. He is extremely discouraged.

IV. *Jonah is Ready For Death (v.9)*

- A. God sees Jonah's condition.
 - 1. God asks, *"Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"* (v.9).
 - 2. Once again God in His faithfulness comes to the prophet with a mild rebuke in the form of a rhetorical question (v.9). - In v.4 Jonah ignore this question!
 - 3. God asks whether or not the prophet's anger over the plant's destruction was justifiable, and of course, the answer is no.
- B. Jonah replies by saying, *"It is right for me to be angry, even to death!"* (v.9).
 - 1. Jonah, in complete self-pity and total disregard of the Ninevites, declares that he angry is just, but he is trying to argue with God.
 - 2. The phrase *"even to death"* indicates that Jonah's anger had reached even to the very bottom of his soul, and that he despaired even for his life.

V. *Jonah is in Dismay (vs.10-11)*

- A. The Lord says, *"You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night"* (v.10).
 - 1. Why do men always question God?
 - a. Why do we get upset when our will is not accomplished?
 - b. Why do we balk when we see God's grace to others, but are more than willing to accept it ourselves?
 - c. Jonah really needed to hear the parable of man who owned the vineyard that Jesus talks about in **Matthew 20**.
 - 2. These questions are very similar to the ones God asks Job.
 - a. Read the last few chapters of Job and see what God said to Job.
 - b. Job was nearly speechless, as Jonah is here.
 - 3. We cannot challenge God, we cannot question God, and we cannot test God.
- B. In these last two verses God sharpens His rebuke of the prophet by drawing a contrast between the fast-growing plant and the city of Nineveh.
 - 1. Jonah was concerned over a temporary plant.
 - 2. This was a plant without a soul.
 - 3. He had no concern over the great city of Nineveh.
 - 4. This city had a population of more than 120,000 souls (v.11).
- C. God asks, *"And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?"* (v.11).
 - 1. The phrase *"one hundred and twenty thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left"* is interpreted in various ways (v.11).
 - 2. The simplest understanding is to take this as referring to the number of children in the complex of cities that made up Nineveh.

3. Chapter three shows that the total population could not have been incapable of discerning what is morally right.
 - a. Remember that they fasted, put on sackcloth and ashes, prayed and repented of their wrong.
 - b. They may have been evil and sinful and disobedient, but wasn't Jonah disobedient when he refused to follow God?
4. Therefore, this designation seems to speak of a distinct group of people, the children who will be spared from destruction.
 - a. While Jonah was thinking about the rebellious adults, God was thinking of the precious children.
 - b. In hatred to destroy those with sin, he had forgotten those without it.
5. In addition, God cares for the animals, even though they are incapable of moral discernment, like this group of children.
6. Even animals and children benefit when leaders and adults are in a right relationship with God.
7. God even cares for those who are unable to appreciate or understand His care.

Conclusion: The prophecy of Jonah closes as it began, with the words of God. We would be discouraged if we did not realize that the existence of this prophecy indicates that the prophet was brought to repentance again and restored to his fellowship with God. If that would not have happened he would not have left this prophecy for us to benefit from. The message of Jonah rings out loud and clear. God cares everyone. . . . even for the heathen!

God will go to extremes to get His message to them. Even when the messenger would be deliberately disobedient, God would use other creations to correct His messenger and affect His purpose for this world! Consider the Great Commission of **Matthew 28:19-20** and **Mark 16:15-16**. Have you been obedient to the will of God? Are you running with God or ahead of God?