

GOD CAN SAVE ANYONE
PREACHING THROUGH THE BIBLE: JONAH
Jonah 2:9; 4:2,11

I. INTRODUCTION

A. BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, is extremely wicked. God intends to destroy it but decides to give it one last chance to repent. He tells Jonah to go and preach to the Ninevites. Jonah resents God's mercy for Nineveh and flees in the opposite direction to escape God's presence. God puts Jonah's life in jeopardy but miraculously saves him and gives him a chance to repent. Jonah responds to God's second call and preaches in Nineveh. The people repent, but this angers Jonah, who takes refuge on the outskirts of the city. God comforts Jonah with the shade of a plant He causes to bloom overnight, but then He sends a worm to destroy it. When Jonah complains, God chastises him for caring more about the plant than the people of Nineveh, declaring that God has the prerogative to care for and save whomever He chooses.

B. TITLE

1. HEBREW

- *Yonah* = "dove"

2. SEPTUAGINT

- *Iovας*

3. LATIN

- *Jonas*

C. PLACE HEBREW BIBLE

1. PART OF 15 LATTER PROPHETS—TRUE 'PROPHETIC' BOOKS OF THE OT
2. FIFTH OF THE MINOR PROPHETS

D. AUTHORSHIP

1. IMPLIED AUTHOR—IS JONAH

- 1:1**—*The word of the Lord came to Jonah . . .*

2. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

- a. Son of Amittai—**1:1**
- b. More information given in—**II Kgs 14:25**
 1. Prophesied during reign of **Jeroboam II** of Israel

2. Jonah was from Gath Hopher
 - a. Located 3 miles north of Nazareth—in Galilee
 - b. His being a Galilean contradicts misinformed claim by Pharisees in Jesus' day

Jn 7:52—*Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.*

3. AUTHORSHIP DISPUTED

- a. Jonah's authorship is not *explicitly* stated in **1:1**
 - The narrative account is in the third person—*about* Jonah
- b. Some scholars say it is post-exilic mythical story
 1. Its universalistic message—countered strong nationalism of Ezra and Nehemiah
 2. The point: returning Jews should be more tolerant
 - Should be more inclusive of Samaritans
 - Should not divorce their foreign wives
 3. Use of Aramaic words in text suggest a later date
 4. Emphasis on past tense—*Nineveh was an exceedingly great city*—**3:3**
 - ▲ Suggesting it was written *after* its fall in 612 BC

4. ARGUMENTS FOR JONAH'S AUTHORSHIP AND EARLIER DATING

- a. Third person—was often used by biblical writers
- b. Several **other OT passages** present this **universal message**
 - **Gen 12:3**—Abram will be a blessing to all families of the earth
 - **Lev 19:33-34**—Jews were to treat strangers fairly
 - **Is 2:2**—all nations will stream into the mountain of the Lord's house
 - **Is 66:19-20**—all nations will come and pay tribute to the Lord
 - **Joel 2:28-32**—God will pour out His Spirit on *all* humankind
 - **Several prophets**—proclaimed God's sovereignty and judgment over all nations
- c. Aramaic words
 1. Were used in early and late OT books
 2. They are found in other non-biblical texts as early as 1500 BC
- d. It is not an account of Nineveh as a past and non-existent city
 1. Literal text of **3:3**—**contains no verb**—*Nineveh* ~~was~~ *an exceedingly great city*

- Tense is implied by context of Jonah's action
 - Jonah arose and went—past tense—to Nineveh
 - *When* he arrived—in the past—it was a great city
2. Past tense relates to Jonah's action—it is not an editorial comment about Nineveh no longer existing
- e. Biblical historicity of Jonah as a real person
1. Identified as a prophet—during the reign of Jeroboam II—**II Kgs 14**
 2. **Jesus** treated Jonah as a real person living while Nineveh existed—**Mt 12:39-41**

E. HISTORICAL SETTING

1. ISRAEL

- Under Jeroboam II—was experiencing renewed political and economic prosperity
- See background for Amos—[later contemporary of Jonah]

2. NINEVEH

- a. Capital of Assyrian Empire
 - Assyrians was on the rise—soon dominated Middle East during 8-7th centuries BC
 - Assyrian army was reputed for its cruelty against enemies they defeated
- b. Reputedly, the largest city in the world at that time
- c. At junction of Tigris and Khosr Rivers in northern Iraq
 - About 500 miles from Israel
 - It was located on the 'left bank' (looking down-river)
 - Near modern Mosul—across the Tigris on the he 'right bank'
- d. Nineveh itself was legendary for its wickedness

F. DATE

1. DATE—OF EVENTS IN THE BOOK

- a. During the reign of Jeroboam II (Israel) —**II Kgs 14:25**
 - Co-regent with father Jehoash—**793-782**
 - Sole ruler—**782-753 BC**
- b. Israel
 - Experiencing economic and political prosperity—see background of Amos

c. Assyria and Nineveh

1. **Earlier** in Jeroboam II's reign—ruled by expansionistic king
 - King Adad-nirari III (811-783)
2. **Later** in Jeroboam II's reign—ruled by less expansionistic kings
 - Shalmeneser IV (783-773)
 - Ashur-dan III (773-755)
 - Ashur-nirari V (755-745)
3. **After** Jeroboam II
 - a. Renewed expansion
 - ▲ Tiglath Pileser III (745-727)—subdued Israel-Aram rebellion—**II Kgs 15-16**
 - b. Final conquest of Israel
 - ▲ Shalmaneser V (727-722)—**II Kgs 17-18**

d. Likely dating of Jonah

1. During the reign of **Ashur-dan III (773-755)**
2. Several catastrophes or omens occurred during his reign
 - Plagues—765 and 759 BC
 - Solar eclipse—763 BC
 - Large earthquake—about 760 C

e. Jonah's historical place among the prophets

1. **After** Elisha → Obadiah (Judah/Edom) → Joel (Judah)
2. Older **contemporary** of Amos (Israel)
3. **Before** → Hosea (Israel) → Isaiah (Judah) and Micah (Judah)

2. DATE OF WRITING

- a. NO *CERTAIN* INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF DATE OF WRITING
- b. BUT IF WRITTEN BY JONAH—IT HAD TO BE EARLY TO MID—8TH CENTURY

G. STYLE AND GENRE

1. STYLE—NARRATIVE

2. GENRE

- a. Scholars debate whether it is narrative history—or a fictional parable

- b. But biblical evidence points to it being narrative history
 - 1. Jesus referred to Jonah as a historical person—[Mt 12:39-41](#)
 - 2. [I Kgs 14:25](#)—identifies Jonah as a prophet and tells when he lived

H. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

1. THE SIGN OF JONAH—[Mt 12:39-41](#)

- a. Jesus rebuked the Scribes and Pharisees—for always seeking ‘signs’
- b. Then used this ‘sign’ to teach two things
 - 1. Like Jonah—the Son of Man would be in the earth three days and nights
 - 2. He was *even greater* than Jonah
- c. Abbreviated parallel passage = [Lk 11:30](#)
 - Just as Jonah was a *sign to the Ninevites*—the Son of Man was a sign to them

2. THE UNIVERSAL MESSAGE OF SALVATION

- It reinforces this message—expressed in several OT passages (see above)

3. JONAH IS UNIQUE

- a. The only prophet sent directly to the Gentiles
- b. The only prophet who refused to obey God—at first
- c. Focus is more on the prophet and overall meaning—than his preached message
 - The sermon = just five Hebrew words
 - [3:4](#)—*Yet—forty—days—and Nineveh—will be overthrown*

I. THEMES

1. GOD’S PROVIDENTIAL POWER OVER NATURE

- He sent the storm—[1:4](#)
- He sent the fish to rescue Jonah—[1:17](#)
- He commanded the fish to deliver Johan—[2:10](#)
- He sent the plant for Jonah—[4:6](#)
- He sent the worm—[4:7](#)
- He sent the scorching east wind—[4:8](#)

2. GOD’S MERCY—IS LONG-SUFFERING

- a. Giving a ‘second chance’—not only to Nineveh—but also to Jonah
- b. Just as he had given Israel ‘second chances’ **repeatedly**
- c. God’s mercy
 - 1. Reflects His deep understanding of our human nature and limitations
 - For example—His patience with the Ninevites’ ignorance
 - 4:11**—*120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand*
 - 2. Could speak of His mercy on behalf of children
 - **4:11**—could be referring to children young enough not to know the difference between right and left
- 3. GOD’S PREROGATIVE—HE SHOWS MERCY TO WHOMEVER HE DESIRES
 - Ex 33:19**—*I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show compassion on whom I show compassion.*
- 4. SALVATION IS FROM THE LORD—[NOT FROM HUMANS]—**2:2**
- 5. THE UNIVERSAL PROVISION OF SALVATION—FOR ALL NATIONS
- 6. PERVERSITY OF THE HUMAN HEART—EVEN AMONG GOD’S PEOPLE
 - Jonah’s resentment about Assyrians and rebellion against God

J. OUTLINE

- 1. INTRODUCTION—**1:1**
- 2. JOB’S DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD’S FIRST CALL—**1:2-3**
- 3. GOD’S PUNISHMENT AND RESCUE OF JOB—**1:4-17**
- 4. JOB’S REPENTANCE AND GOD’S DELIVERANCE—**chapter 2**
- 5. JOB’S OBEDIENCE TO GOD’S SECOND CALL—**3:1-4**
- 6. NINEVEH’S REPENTANCE AND GOD’S FORGIVENESS—**3:5-10**
- 7. JONAH’S ANGRY PRAYER—AND GOD’S RESPONSE—**4:1-4**
- 8. GOD’S PROVIDES FOR JOB AND TESTS HIM—**4:5-8**
- 9. GOD REBUKES AND TEACHES JOB—**4:9-10**

II. BIBLICAL TEXT

2:7-9—7 While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple. 8 Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness, 9 but I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the Lord.

3:13; 4:1-2—3:13 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it. 2:1 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord and said, “Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.”

4: 10-11—10 Then the Lord said, “You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. 11 Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?”

III. EXPOSITION

A. WHAT WERE JONAH’S REAL PROBLEMS?

1. HIS PRIDE

- a. He was a Jew—one of God’s chosen people
 - Why should he help pagans who did not acknowledge Jehovah?
- b. He served the one true God
 - Jehovah was superior to the Assyrian gods
- c. He felt superior to the ‘wicked’ Ninevites
 - God’s law—demanded better ethical behavior from His people
- d. The results
 1. He **resented** God’s show of mercy for Nineveh
 2. Resentment—led to **rebellion** against God
 3. Irony—his rebelled was against the very God who gave Jonah his identity
- e. Key points
 1. Human pride always tries to subvert God’s will
 2. Patriotism should not come before the kingdom of God

2. HIS DISOBEDIENCE CAUSED HIM FEAR GOD

- a. There is no evidence Jonah feared the Assyrians

- b. Instead—He feared the Lord—see **1:9**
 - Not just in good way—in reverence and worship
 - But—his rebellion caused him to **fear for his life**
- c. His fear made him foolishly try to escape God’s presence
 - 1:3**—he was going to Tarshish—*from the presence of the Lord*
 - 1:10**—he told the sailors—*he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord*
- d. He got his wish
 - 2:4**—*So I said, “I have been expelled from your sight.”*
- e. **Key points**
 - 1. Sin alienates us from God
 - Causes *us* to separate ourselves from God—build barriers between us and Him
 - 2. But we cannot run from God forever!

B. SALVATION IS FROM THE LORD

1. FIRST—GOD WAS IDENTIFIED IMPERSONALLY

- a. As the covenant God of Israel—the ‘Lord’ = Jehovah—**1:1, 3, 4**
- b. Jonah saw the ‘Lord’ as
 - 1. A severe and demanding judge—from whom he must flee
 - 2. The God of Israel—who was *capable* of saving—even Nineveh
- c. Then—in Jonah’s testimony to the sailors—**1:9**
 - 1. The description of God was expanded to—the ‘Lord God’
 - 2. Jehovah was also—the God of all creation
 - 3. But this was still impersonal

2. JONAH’S PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH GOD AS SAVIOR

- a. Began with God rescuing Jonah—by a ‘great fish’—d from the sea—**1:17**
- b. Jonah responded with *personal* prayer
 - 1. To *his* God
 - 2:1**—*Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish*
 - 2. Intensely personal language of the prayer—**vv2-9**

- a. 23 times—he uses the personal pronouns—I—me—my
- b. 9 times—he appeals directly to God in the second person—You and Your
- c. Jonah was aware of two things
 - 1. God had rescued him from the deep
 - 2. God was not finished—Jonah still needed to be delivered—[from the fish]
- d. Resulted in repentance—submission—and profession
 - 1. **Repentance**—he remembered the Lord—**2:7**
 - 2. **Submission**—to obey God—to sacrifice to God—and fulfil his vow—**2:9**
 - 3. **Profession**—acknowledged God as Savior—**2:9**

3. Key points

- a. Salvation comes from the Lord
 - 1. He **alone** is the source of salvation
 - Only He is able to deliver us from peril
 - We must look to Him alone for deliverance
 - 2. God's will is **sovereign**
 - He chooses to deliver—or not to deliver
 - We cannot dictate or manipulate our own deliverance
- b. There is a big difference between knowing *about* God—and knowing Him personally
- c. God uses crises to bring us closer to Him—to rely on Him
- d. We are all in need of the Savior
 - 1. At first—Jonah thought God's purpose was to save Nineveh
 - 2. But then—Jonah realized—he himself was in need of salvation
- e. Salvation—is an ongoing process—of God continuously delivering us

C. GOD'S IS PATIENT WITH OUR PERVERSE HUMAN NATURE

1. JONAH SINCERELY REPENTED AND SUBMITTED TO GOD

- And God delivered him safely upon dry land

2. WHEN GOD GAVE JONAH A SECOND CHANCE—HE OBEYED

- Jonah went and preached to the Ninevites—who repented and were saved

3. BUT JONAH'S HEART WAS NOT CHANGED

- He repented and relented—but only to a degree
- He still resented—was angry—and self-pitying

4. KEY POINTS

- a. Our human nature is inherently fallen—and imperfect

Jer 17:9—*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?*

- b. Yet God *still* loves us—He still wants to save and restore us

Eph 2:4-5—*But God, being rich in mercy because of His great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)*

- c. Just because we are saved—we are not instantly and wholly transformed
- d. Self-pity does not justify being angry with God

- 1. Twice Jonah asked God to take his life

- After Nineveh was saved—but God’s mercy
- After the shade plant died and he suffered in the heat

- 2. Both times God responded

4:4, 9—*Do you have good reason to be angry?*

- e. Personal failure and imperfection—do not disqualify us for future service to God!

D. GOD WISHES TO SHOW MERCY TO EVERYONE

1. HE IS BOTH LORD—AND GOD

- a. In Jonah—God is described as both ‘Lord’ (**Jehovah**) and ‘God’ (**Elohim**)
- b. Jehovah—26 times
- c. Elohim—14 times

2. JONAH’S USE OF THE NAME—‘GOD’ (ELOHIM)

- a. Shows that Jehovah is not just a cultic god—but Sovereign Creator

1:9—*I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land*

- b. Shows Jehovah’s special care for Jonah

- 1. Jonah refers to Him as ‘God’ in his prayer for deliverance—**chapter 2**
- 2. Creator ‘God’ sends the plant to comfort Jonah—**chapter 4**

- c. Shows God’s care for those beyond Israel

- As Creator ‘God’ *alone*—He delivered Nineveh—**chapter 3**

3. WHAT GOD’S MERCY FOR NINEVEH DEMONSTRATED

- a. Nobody is unredeemable—nobody is beyond His compassion
 - If God cared for the wickedest people of that day
 - He cares for all wicked people anytime, anywhere
- b. God cares for all His creation
 - In addition to the people—He also cared for the animals—**4:11**
- c. God is able to bring *great* revival—whenever and wherever He desires
 - **Nineveh!**—the last place anyone expected spiritual revival
 - 120,000 population—was a huge city in that day
 - But 120,000 ‘**men**’ (**adam**)—could represent a much larger number
 - Or—if this were 120,000 **children**—who did not know the difference between left and right—the total population might have been 600,000
- d. God expects us to care for all persons
 1. Regardless of their background—nationality, race, gender
 2. Even more so than for our own petty interests
 - If Jonah could show ‘compassion’ for his plant—**4:10**
 - How much more should God show ‘compassion’ for living beings—**4:11**
- e. God’s will show mercy to whomever He desires

Ex 33:19—*I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.*