

# UNDERSTANDING THE PROPHET JONAH

Note: Articles referred to herein are found at: [www.biblicalcalendarproof.com](http://www.biblicalcalendarproof.com)

The story of Jonah as portrayed in the Bible is looked on with a skeptical eye by most scholars of today. They think it is a collection of myths, put into a story that found its way into the Bible. Modern scholars are not the only ones to hold this belief.

Josephus, in his writing, expresses the same skepticism when making his concluding statement about the book of Jonah. "I have given this account of him as I have found it written." Josephus is saying that he cannot attest to the viability of the story; he just reports what is written.

The problem they have is they do not look at the book as an integral part of what is the whole, not connecting it to its historical roots. They then commit the error of not seeing it as a prophetic proof of the death and resurrection of Christ. Why is this done? It's because it does not match their tradition of a Friday crucifixion-Sunday resurrection. Looking more carefully at Jonah's life it becomes clear that this book does have a rightful place among the books of the Bible. There is no room for doubt as will be shown.

## BOOK OF JONAH CONFIRMED

The book of Jonah is not the only reference to this prophet. He is also found in II Kings 14, verse 25. "He (Jeroboam II) restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Mamath to the Sea of the Rrabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which he had spoken through his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gaph Hopher." Gaph Hopher is located in Zebulun, pointing to Jonah's tribe of origin. See Joshua 19:13. This is the same person of the book of Jonah, and is known because in both places the name of his father, Amittai is given.

At the beginning of Jeroboam's reign, spoken of in II Kings 14:25, God sends Jonah to King Jeroboam II to tell the king that God has appointed him to regain Israel's territory from the Assyrians. This is made plain in verse 26. "For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, and whether bond or free there was no help for Israel." Here it is made clear that Assyria,

with its capital of Nineveh, was the mortal enemy of Israel because they were who Jeroboam fought to regain Israel's territory. This reveals the reason for Jonah's ardent refusal to go to Nineveh to preach repentance to them. It was because they were the ones who Jeroboam fought to regain Israel's territory.

## **JONAH'S ASSIGNMENT**

Chapter 1 in verses 1 and 2 of Jonah says: "Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me. God has given Jonah the job of preaching repentance to Nineveh. He was given the task of telling them that because of their sins God would destroy their city. Because of their recent military defeat at the hands of Israel the threat of destruction became real to them, that they might also lose their own nation.

When Jonah pointed out the sins to the people they realized that it was necessary to repent and change their ways to avoid destruction. The king makes the proclamation. Jonah 3:8-9. "But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?" This is not the same situation found in Acts 2, where Peter points out the people's sin which resulted in repentance of those called by God, changing their way of living and opening to them eternal life. It is similar to the saving of those called by God from the coming destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD by having them leave Jerusalem and travel to Pella; a physical salvation.

The same point is made in Jonah 3:10 through Jonah 4:2. "Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it." Jonah 4:1. "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. So he prayed to the Lord, and said '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 loving kindness, one who relents from doing harm.'"

Jonah points out the reason for his fleeing from the job God gave him. Being a true prophet of God, he knew he would be successful; that the people would repent and the city saved. He was unaware of how God would use him to be successful, but he knew it would happen. This was not what Jonah wanted for the enemy of Israel. What he missed was that if Nineveh repented it would mean peace for Israel, which in turn would give Israel the opportunity to show their true intent to worship the God of their Fathers.

Jonah 1:3. "But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord."

Here Jonah is thinking like a man: "If I go to the farthest place I know from Nineveh, to Tarshish, a place on the far southwest corner of Spain on the other side of Gibraltar, then God

will not be able to send me to Nineveh. If Jonah had thought like the prophet he was he would have remembered Ps. 139:7-8. “Where can I go from your Spirit, or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven you are there, if I make my bed in hell, behold you are there.” Jonah was not thinking like a prophet.

## **JONAH A TYPE OF CHRIST**

Jonah 1:4-5. “But 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. Then the mariners were afraid, every man cried out to his god and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest part of the ship, and had lain down and was fast asleep.” When the mariners were tossing the cargo overboard the captain found Jonah asleep. Verse 3 of Jonah 1 states, “upon entering ‘and went down into it’, (Below deck and asleep).

Here is found the first comparison to Christ. Mark 4:35-39. “On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, ‘Let us cross over to the other side.’ Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were with Him. And a great wind storm arose, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And awoke Him and said to Him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace, be still!’ and the wind ceased and there was a great calm.”

Note: Christ had to be awakened, just as Jonah did. The statement “do you not care?” is in effect the same thing the ship’s Captain said to Jonah in Chapter 1, verse 6. “So the captain came to him, and said to him, ‘What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.’” Both Christ and Jonah calmed the storm. Christ did it by speaking and Jonah by being cast into the sea.

## **WHY NINEVEH ACCEPTS JONAH**

God is telling Jonah to go to a pagan nation to warn them of their coming destruction. At this point an obvious question becomes evident. Why would a pagan nation pay any attention to a prophet of an enemy nation? It would be more to their liking to capture and jail him, or dispose of him altogether. How God manipulated Jonah after Jonah decided to run to another country gives the answer. For Jonah to be successful the people of Ninevah would have to accept him as a man to be revered. In addition, the story would need to be believed by those called of God in the New Testament.

## **JONAH AUTHENTICATED**

Christ Himself put validity to the Book of Jonah. The three days and three nights that Christ was dead in the grave is solidified by the three twelve hour days and the three twelve hour nights that Jonah was dead in the belly of the fish. This is made clear in the Hebrew and is defined by the three days and three nights in the English translation. The two are in agreement. A foundation must be established to make the Jonah account believable. Matt. 12:39. "But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.'" Christ places the reality of His messiahship on the truth that the Book of Jonah is the factual account of Jonah's death and resurrection. Jonah 2:3-6. "For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the sea, and the flood surrounded me; all your billows and your waves passed over me. Then I said 'I have been cast out of your sight, yet will I look again toward your holy temple. The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; the deep closed around me; weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me forever; yet you have brought up my life from the pit, oh Lord my God.'" This is an insert of what happened to Jonah just after he was cast into the sea by the crew of the boat, and is a picture of his death by drowning.

Two important points are made proving that Jonah actually died by drowning before the fish swallowed him. Jonah 2:6. "I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me forever; yet you have brought my life from the pit oh Lord my God." The word pit is Strong's #7845, and has the following meaning in the Theological Word Book of the Old Testament: "The translation grave, or decay of the grave, fits very well with most of these passages which do not refer to a pit dug for a trap." The King James translation is: "You brought my life from corruption." Being put into a grave means dead and decaying!

Now it is time to take a closer look at the two opposing views of Jonah's condition while in the belly of the great fish. If a fish swallows a man alive the man would perish in a very short time. It is obvious that to remain alive in the fish's belly would require a miracle. Remember, that in the belly of a fish there is no room for movement and there is no oxygen, only stomach acid, eating at Jonah for three days and three nights. "Yet hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, oh Lord my God." Jonah 2:6 – KJV.

As proposed by some, that Jonah was alive and talking to God during this time, means that Jonah would have the pain of his body being eaten away by the acid in the stomach of the fish. Would our merciful God put Jonah through this pain for three days and three nights? Or would God have Jonah dead, not having him go through the anguish of being enclosed in the belly of the fish for that length of time?

There is no medical record of an induced coma where the patient is denied oxygen and/or placed in a bath of acid. Clearly, for Jonah to survive would require God to perform a miracle. In addition, the Bible has no other account of God putting anyone through torture to try to change their mind on what He asked them to do. On the other hand, the Bible contains accounts of people being resurrected to human life from death.

One outstanding example is found in II Kings 13:21. "So it was, as they were burying a man, that suddenly they spied a band of raiders; and they put the man in the tomb of Elisha; and when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet."

Here a dead man was resurrected to show God's respect for Elisha. According to custom this man would have been dead for a few days before the burying would take place; already decomposing before being resurrected.

Some may think that if Jonah remained alive in the fish it would not have been a miracle, but as shown, Jonah could only remain alive if God miraculously caused it. Whatever one thinks - Jonah lived or died in the fish – it still requires the miraculous intervention of God. If Christ used Jonah as the proof of His own death and resurrection, remaining in the tomb three days and three nights, would God miraculously maintain Jonah's life, thus bringing into question what He was basing His entire messiahship on? God would have resurrected Jonah just as He resurrected Christ, making the analogy complete.

The following verses, 7 through 9 are a recount of Jonah praying from the belly of the fish just before the fish vomited Jonah onto the shore. Jonah 2:10. "So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land." To buttress this account are Christ's own words in Matthew 12, verse 40. "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." This means that just as Jonah was, so Christ would be. The comparison is undeniable; either both were dead or both were alive. There cannot be one living and one dead. This put a definite time on the period that Christ spent in the tomb, three days and three nights. Read the article [THE FRIDAY CRUCIFIXION MYTH](#), which makes it clear that Christ was dead in the tomb, just as Jonah was dead in the belly of the great fish.

This is God's first and most important reason for allowing Jonah to have this harrowing experience of a drowning man. The second reason was that God wanted to establish Jonah as a person that the Ninivites would believe and respect. Remember, the great fish that swallowed Jonah came to the shore of the country of Nineveh, and deposited him on land. Jonah 1:17. "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." God did not create a special fish.

The word "prepared" in Strong's is #4487 and has the following meaning taken from the Word Book of the Old Testament on page 513. "The idea appoint or ordain is usually in the intensive stems. Twice in Daniel (1:5, 10) and four times in Jonah (1:17, 4:6-8) intimates things – Daniel's food, Jonah's fish, the gourd, worm, and hot wind – are under the control of God." It was an existing fish that God appointed to swallow Jonah.

Consider why God put Jonah through the unbelievable experience of being swallowed by a fish if He did not want the great fish seen disgorging a live man. Without witnesses this event would be lost to history. God's reason was to make an impression on those who witnessed this unbelievable event. They then would have had a great desire to relate this experience to anyone who would listen to them. When this thought is coupled with the knowledge that one of the deities of Nineveh represented the fish, a man coming from the fish's mouth would have been treated like a god, and his words would be believed. This is confirmed in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume 3, page 2148. Quote. "The native name appears as Ninua or Nina, written with the character for 'water enclosure' with that for fish inside, implying a connection between Nina and the sem num 'fish.' The Babylonia Nina was a place where fish were very abundant, and Istar or Nina, the goddess of the city was associated with Nin-mah, Merodach(s) spouse, as goddess of reproduction." End Quote.

Remember, a great storm caused Jonah's demise. Ocean storms bring up refuse along with usable things that are deposited on the shore. Things like what the sailors cast overboard to lighten their ship. It is normal after a storm for people to go to the shore to scavenge what they can use. This is when they would see the spectacle of Jonah coming out of the mouth of the great fish. The eye witness testimony was a necessity if Jonah's preaching was to be effective. The deity of a fish god the Ninivites believed in gave God's prophet a special standing with the people, making Jonah's word reality to them.

Through this elaborate set of events God gave the Ninivites an opportunity to look at their conduct and decide what kind of people they were. This could only be done by a credible source that verbally would convince them why destruction was inevitable. It had to be a verbal teaching of the laws that governs human conduct. Jonah 4:11. "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." Here is another Bible statement that scholars have a problem believing. They believe adults are children who cannot discern their right hand from their left.

Strong's number for person is 120 and has the following definition. "This word for man has to do with man being in God's image, the crown of creation. It should be distinguished from ish (man as opposite of woman). Or as man is distinguished in his manliness," These are adults, not children.

It was not a spiritual conversion, but a physical conversion, limited to the physical aspects of life. What they received if they repented and changed was the physical benefits of following principles of the law regarding man's conduct with his fellowman. By establishing a strong family unit, having its roots in not killing, not committing adultery, not stealing, and not bearing false witness they would automatically receive the physical benefits, allowing God to have the empathy to remove the penalty of the destruction of Nineveh.

Paul points this out in Rom. 2:14-15. ".....for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things of the law, these, although not having the law are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing them or excusing them."

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSYRIA**

An interesting prophecy of the people of Assyria (Ninivites) is found in Isaiah 19:24. "In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria – a blessing in the midst of the land." "In that day" is speaking about the millennial reign of Christ, pointing to these nations proclivity of easily understanding and then living by the true principles of God's way of life. At that time they will be setting the example for the rest of the world to follow.

An important purpose of Jonah was to give the people of Israel a time of peace. The people of Nineveh, by learning and following God's principles, would not have the heart to prosecute a

war against Israel, giving Israel a time to see if they would return to the true God. They did not! The nation of Israel was destroyed by being taken into captivity by the nation that made a change for the better in their lives, which Israel refused to do. In the short time of 72 years they were taken into captivity by the nation that Jonah was sent to save from destruction. See page 15 and 16 of the TIMELINE for the kings of Israel and the dates of their reigns.

## **JONAH THE PERSON**

Now it is time to take a closer look at the person of Jonah and how God used him. Jonah makes a statement to God in Jonah 4:1-2. “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.”

Even after his horrendous experience and his successful preaching to the Ninivites this was his frame of mind – bitterness. Verse 2, “So he prayed to the Lord, and said, ‘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 loving kindness, one who relents from doing harm.’” This is a striking statement which reveals Jonah’s depth of knowledge of the Bible, and that God has a deep care for men. It is especially true when men have been deprived of being taught the rudiment of learning. God has pity on them.

As already pointed out, it was the storm and the death of three days and three nights in the tomb, and then being resurrected that compares with three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish which Jonah experienced before being resurrected which shows a human type that reflected the Messiah’s sacrifice for the world. This made Jonah a type of Christ.

Jonah knew, from the beginning, that if he went to Nineveh they would repent and not be destroyed, so that when he saw that his plan to escape to Tarshish was stopped by the great storm of God’s making, he was willing to sacrifice his own life to save the men on the ship. Jonah 1:12. “And he said to them, ‘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.’” Not only were those on the boat saved, but he thought it would save those of his own nation of Israel.

Jonah’s thinking was, “If I am dead I cannot save Nineveh.” He was willing to give his life for the nation of Israel, protecting them from their enemy, Nineveh. An important thing to recognize is that a similar statement is found in the New Testament. John 11:49-50. “And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.’” This scripture puts another stamp of reality on Jonah’s sacrifice. The difference is that Christ was willing to sacrifice His life for the world; Jonah for the nation. This means that Caiaphas knew and understood the prophecy of Daniel 9, which predicted the sacrifice of a man for that exact year – 30 AD. Read the article [THE DESTRUCTION OF SOLOMON’S TEMPLE DATED](#).

Rather than thinking of Jonah as someone of questionable character, he actually had a strong character, but the weakness of a stubborn loyalty to his native land, Israel, similar to how we find ourselves today. Jonah knew the sins of his own countrymen. Ignoring those sins he looked at the military might of Nineveh as the real threat.

## PRESENT DAY THINKING

Similarly we see the threat of Iran, Russia and China as being a big problem for the United States and the other democratic nations where God has placed the center of the Christian world. It is these nations that sent the Bible throughout the world. Like Israel of old there is no understanding of the much deeper problem being faced. The people do not see the need for self-discipline of righteous character and are willing to trade their freedom for false security offered by their governments. Unlike Nineveh, the satisfaction of life has been traded away, unable to see where the real protection is given to society by God's principles. The importance of the family has been set aside and the commandments of God done away with; not lying, stealing or committing adultery and more. Disaster waits!

Looking more deeply at the story of Jonah, it becomes clear why Christ used it, placing it as the only identifying sign of His Messiahship, putting His stamp of authenticity on it. He also let His people know that God the Father is tenacious about the development of each one's character. God put Jonah through a horrendous experience to correct Jonah's thinking. Jonah's change of mind did not come until God made a final point in Jonah 4:11. God knows our weaknesses even when we don't. As with Jonah, God will take us through trials (some life threatening) to correct our thinking.

The Book of Jonah also reveals that no matter how bad people may be, God is willing to look past their reprehensible conduct if they are willing to repent. Repent means, not to be sorry to be caught, but sorry that their conduct caused pain and suffering for others as well as to themselves.

Look at the present state of affairs in the countries that possess God's truth, and think about the possibility that there could be repentance like in Nineveh and they would be restored to God's grace. The difference is that these countries are the possessor and distributor of God's truth – the Bible - but do not recognize the true value of this book and its principles of life. Plainly they are trading God's principles for the temporary pleasure of possessions. There are a few who recognize the importance of following the Bible and its tenants, bringing them to the truth of the resurrection to eternal life.

Don Roth  
2022-8-04

*Note: The information given here is not original, but the work of many inspired men. Hopefully this is put together in a way that causes one to think deeply about the Book of Jonah, which the world despises. In fact this book is truth and carries an important truth, connecting the Old Testament to the New Testament.*