

The PROPHETS of ISRAEL

Jonah

2 Kings 14:23-25

June 20, 2026

We start our brief journey through the Prophets of Israel with Jonah, because he is the only one mentioned in association with the Kings of Israel in 2nd Kings.

He served in Israel at roughly the same time as Hosea and Amos, but is not famous for his time there. He is famous because Yahweh asked to do ministry elsewhere.

Warning — Historical Content!!

During the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753), the Assyrian Empire was not yet the dominate nation she would become. It was emerging from a period of fragmentation and just beginning to reassert her strength.

The Assyrian King was Adad-nirari III (810/805-782 BC). He resided at Nineveh, but it has been suggested that he was more of a local ruler since Nineveh was not yet the official capital of Assyria – It would be Sennacherib (705-682) who made Nineveh Assyria's official capital.

It was Adad-nirari III who dealt Damascus a decisive blow, crippling Aramean power. After this victory, however, Assyria focused on consolidating power in the east and north allowing Jeroboam II to expand Israelite territory (2 Kings 14:25) and oversee her economic resurgence.

While it is impossible to know for sure if Adad-Nirari III was the king in Jonah's story, it is an historical fact that Adad-Nirari III introduced short-lived religious reforms which moved away from Polytheism to Monotheism.

Enter Jonah. Jonah lived in the territory of the tribe of Zebulun – in Israel. He was a real person, but interestingly, the book that bears his name does not identify its author. The story is written in the 3rd person – about Jonah – which means either someone else wrote the story or Jonah had more self-awareness than we thought.

On the surface the book of Jonah is the story of a man with considerable prejudices, but in reality, it's about God – his sovereignty, his heart toward people, his compassion and his ability to work through even the most unwilling missionary. God is the hero of the story.

I don't think Jonah woke up that morning expecting to hear a call from God. Instead, he was probably minding his own business - going about his day. Then it happened: "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me."

Nineveh was to the northeast, so Jonah went west - he was going to run faraway from God.... He went to Joppa, bought a ticket for Tarshish and found his cabin, "to go from the presence of Yahweh."

Do you really think that Jonah thought he could escape God's notice? "Oh no! I've misplaced Jonah and I cannot find him!"

Me either. No doubt he had read Psalm 139 (7-10) ---- Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. ---- but he was desperate – he did not want to go to Nineveh.

Unfortunately for Jonah, God had not misplaced him (he'd put an airtag in Jonah's shoe) and was ready to reveal himself....

Yahweh sent a storm so powerful it terrified seasoned sailors and threatened to break the ship apart.

The sailors prayed to their respective gods and threw as much cargo overboard as they could – no good.

And where was Jonah? Sacked out in his cabin – in a deep sleep. The captain found Jonah mid snore and yelled at him:
"How can you sleep at a time like this? Get up!"

This pagan captain and his crew had more spiritual insight than Jonah did. Everyone else was praying – Jonah needed to pray too. Did Jonah pray? The Bible doesn't tell us, but it does tell us that the sailors took matters into their own hands. They cast lots while Jonah remained tight-lipped. It was only after the lots fell on him that he fessed up.

Turning, they asked him, *"Who is responsible for this trouble? What do you do? Where are you from? What is your country? Who are your people?"*

Jonah responded, *"I am a Hebrew. I worship Yahweh, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land."*

As the storm worsened, the sailors asked, *"What have you done (They knew he was running away from Yahweh because he had told them) and what should we do so that the storm stops?"*

He replied, *"Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you."*

Well, that sounds noble enough.... *"I'm the cause of the problem, I should be sacrificed."*

But Jonah wasn't being noble. The best outcome in Jonah's mind was being dead and if the storm subsided and the sailor's survived = bonus.

But when Jonah said, *"Throw me overboard,"* **the sailors would not do it. Instead, they did their best to row back to land.**

The sea grew even more wild, so finally, they agreed to throw Jonah into the sea, but not before praying to Yahweh, *"We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, O LORD, have done as You have pleased."*

Then they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea. Immediately the storm stopped.

Suddenly the boat was filled with enthusiastic worshipers of the One True God. Despite Jonah's lack of evangelistic enthusiasm, those men had come to believe in the power of his God. Jonah did not pray to Yahweh – he did not sacrifice to Yahweh – he did not make vows to Yahweh, but the sailors did and in doing so behaved better than the prophet God had called.

While the sailors were praising God Jonah was bobbing in the Mediterranean hoping to die.

"Yahweh appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah and he was inside the fish for 3 days and 3 nights."

The Bible does not tell us how Jonah responded when the great fish appeared, but from inside the fish he prayed: *"In my distress I called to Yahweh, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry. You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God. "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from Yahweh."*

It is clear from Jonah's psalm of thanksgiving, that he understood God's grace and saving power and he was grateful for God's deliverance, but as we will see in the 2nd half of the story, he will struggle to live out that understanding.

On the 3rd day the fish spit Jonah out. What do you suppose he did? Got a shower? Checked on flights to the new world? Hoped that Yahweh had gotten the whole "Nineveh thing" out of his system, or, better yet, had chosen someone else?

Jonah 3:2 - *Now the word of Yahweh came to Jonah the 2nd time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you."*

Jonah's disobedience had not canceled God's Call.

Well clearly there was no point in arguing, so Jonah headed for Nineveh. The Bible does not say this, this my own thought process - even though Jonah went, I don't think he was particularly excited to go. He obeyed, yes, but grudgingly. He went, but only because he knew he couldn't outrun God. His obedience did not change his attitude. He fulfilled the letter but not the spirit of the command ---- 400 miles later, Jonah arrived at the gates of Nineveh.

Jonah began to go through the city, crying out as he went, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

It took Jonah 3 days to preach the world's shortest sermon.

Jonah 3:5-9 - *Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw his burning anger so that we will not perish."*

Billy Graham never had that kind of success.

The greatest revival in history happened because of a one-sentence sermon preached by the world's worst evangelist.

Jonah 3:10 - *When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.*

Exactly! Jonah was not just upset, he was angry and, in his anger, he prayed, "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. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."

How quickly Jonah had been to acknowledge God's grace and mercy and compassion at his own salvation, but this was not a prayer of thanksgiving, it was a prayer accusing God of extending that same grace, mercy and compassion to people Jonah believed didn't deserve it. In a book full of comparisons, this is the most profound.

Jonah's problem was not a lack of proper theological understanding; it was his unwillingness to put into practice what he knew to be true. He finally confessed that he disobeyed because he understood the character of God (quoting Exodus 34:6-7) The problem was that the grace, mercy, patients and compassion God offered Israel, he was now offering to foreigners. Jonah knew enough about God to predict this outcome, but not enough compassion to rejoice over it. God did exactly what Jonah thought he would do – and he was mad!!!

Jonah's request that God kill him emphasizes what we already know – whether disobeying God or obeying him, he would rather die than see Nineveh be saved.

"Do you have good reason to be angry?" **Jonah did not respond, but his actions speak volumes.**

The comparisons continue...

- While the inhabitants of Nineveh were repenting in sackcloth and ashes – hoping that they would be spared, Jonah made a shelter outside the city hoping for their destruction.

- While Jonah sat waiting, God made a plant grow to provide shade. Jonah was very grateful that God had extended such “Chesed” to him, yet remained unwilling to extend the same “Chesed” to Nineveh.

The next day God sent a worm and the plant withered and died, then he sent a scorching east wind. The sun beat down on Jonah and he grew faint. He wanted to die and said so, *"It would be better for me to die than to live."*

Jonah is now angry about 2 things = the salvation of Nineveh and the death of his shade plant.

Yahweh said to Jonah, *"Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?"*

This time Jonah responded, but it was more the response of a child who did not get his way, *"I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die."*

Yahweh responded, *"You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"*

Jonah was a prophet in Israel. He witnessed daily a people who had voluntarily entered into a covenant relationship with God yet, knowingly and intentionally chose idolatry – and God’s continued response of grace, compassion and patience toward them.

By contrast, the people of Nineveh didn’t know what they were doing. They were lost, but didn’t know it, so, the story of Jonah ends with a simple question, *"Should I not be concerned about that great city?"*

The intent is not to leave the reader hanging, but to challenge the reader to consider the question and answer it for themselves. Is God concerned about his followers only? Does he extent grace to all or to only a few?

These days, we don’t have to look very far to see that Christians spend a whole lot more time condemning people than introducing them to the grace, compassion and patients of God. Christians don’t extent “Chesed” very well. Oh sure, we are perfectly happy to be on the receiving end of God’s grace, but we are reluctant to pass it on – doing so only through gritted teeth. We are grace hoarders....

Good thing God is not like us. God looks at EVERY HUMAN through glasses tinted with grace.

Psalms 103:8 – *"Yahweh is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love."*

Isaiah 42:6-7 – *"I, Yahweh, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness."*

Isaiah 55:6-7 – *"Seek Yahweh while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to Yahweh and He will have compassion on him. And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."*

1 John 4:9-10 – *"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."*

Until Next Time.....