

Jonah

a Commentary

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A Word of Explanation

Bible Used:

The King James — henceforth highlighted in bold red (Electronic version).

Comparative Bibles:

American Standard (1901) — henceforth designated as ASV (Electronic version).

Young's Literal Translation — henceforth designated as YLT (Electronic version).

English Standard Version — henceforth designated as ESV (book).

Text which **appears in blue** indicates a quotation.

Text which **appears in Green** indicates a question.

Bold black Underlined letters, which do not appear to be a word, are the phonetic spelling of the Hebrew word.

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Outline

(Irvin Himmel's outline)

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What Is Known About Jonah

1. Where was Jonah's home?

Jonah's home was Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14:25), on the border of Zebulun, in what is considered Galilee. One might notice the prejudice of the Pharisees of Jesus' day in John 7:52, to those from Galilee.

2. When did Jonah serve as a prophet?

Jonah's service was rendered during the time of Jeroboam II, the son of Joash. The time frame here would have been somewhere around 780 to 760 B.C.

3. When was Nineveh established?

According to Coy Roper, archaeologists state that the city was established around 5,000 B.C. In about 700 B.C., Sennacherib made Nineveh the capital of the Assyrian Empire. The city was wiped off the map by a coalition of the Babylonians and Medes in 612 B.C.

4. What kind of people were the Assyrians?

They were known as an extremely cruel people in war. If a city resisted them in any way, they used the cruelest of means to torture the people after they conquered the city, and then boasted about it.

"Assyria used terror as a policy of state; it was perhaps the cruelest regime that history had known" (Roper, p. 39).

In the book of Nahum, GOD said the Assyrians were **"vile"** (1:14); a **"multitude of the whoredoms of the wellfavoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms"** (3:4); they had influenced many with their wickedness, **"for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually"** (3:19); Nineveh, the capital, was called **"the bloody city! It is all full of lies and robberies"** (3:1).

The Historicity of Jonah

This topic deals with whether or not Jonah is an historically accurate book. To the ancient Jews, the twelve books which today are called the Minor Prophets were one book, and Jonah was included in it. Further, it was not challenged throughout the generations as being historically inaccurate by the scholars — and thus, not inspired — until the liberal critics arrived on the scene in recent times, beginning around the nineteenth century. For a few moments, let one consider a couple of the points the critics make and then examine why a faithful Christian will defend every word of Jonah as being accurate and from the mouth of GOD.

First, one of the arguments made by critics is that a fish big enough to swallow Jonah could not have existed. It is obvious that these critics do not believe in GOD, because nothing is too hard for Him to do or create.

“Ah Lord GOD! behold, Thou hast made the heaven and the earth by Thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for Thee” (Jeremiah 32:17).

Is there any historical evidence of a fish’s swallowing a human being? On June 11, 2021, a lobster diver named Michael Packard was gathering lobsters off the ocean floor at Cape Cod in Hyannis when he was swallowed by a Sperm whale. When the whale resurfaced, about thirty to forty seconds later, it spit him out. As soon as they got him out of the water, he was taken to the Cape Cod Hospital. He had a lot of soft tissue damage and a broken leg, but otherwise was in good shape. This event was filmed and thus documented.

A second objection made by skeptics revolves

around the city of Nineveh. They claim that there could not have been a city of more than 120,000 people in that time period, as Jonah 4:11 claims. Oh, the joy and comfort the archaeologist's shovel often brings to Christians. National Geographic has a documentary of a dig at the site where Nineveh existed, and amazingly, when they used the new Lidar technology, the foundations of a vast city with its suburbs were revealed. Their conclusion was that a city of the size described in Jonah was entirely possible, and even much bigger.

Another, and more compelling, argument for the historical accuracy of Jonah and the record he left behind is found in the New Testament.

“Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from Thee. But He answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's (κητος — “a huge fish” (Strong)] belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here” (Matthew 12:38-42).

“A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And He left them, and departed” (Matthew 16:4).

It may easily be said that, if a person says he is a believer in Jesus, but does not believe in the historical

accuracy of the Bible, then that person is not a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Neither can one then be a true believer in Jesus or the GODHEAD. The testimony of Jesus firmly declares and settles any argument made against the reality of Jonah and the accuracy of the book he was guided to write. There are other arguments made by the skeptics against the book of Jonah which are detailed in commentaries by others (see Himmel and Roper).

Using Himmel's outline as the basis for the study of Jonah, let the study begin.

Jonah Chapter One The Parting Prophet's Predicament

Jonah 1:1-2 Jehovah commands Jonah to go to Nineveh.

“Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me.” (King James Version, henceforth shown by use of bold red letters)

“Now the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me.” (American Standard Version, henceforth designated by ASV)

“And there is a word of Jehovah unto Jonah son of Amittai, saying: Rise, go unto Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim against it that their wickedness hath come up before Me.” (Young's Literal Translation, henceforth designated by YLT)

“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call against it, for their evil has come up before Me.” (English Standard Version, henceforth designated by (ESV)

The exact phrase **“the word of the Lord came”** is found in ninety-two verses in the Old Testament; the exact phrase **“the Lord said”** is found in two hundred and twenty verses; while the exact phrase **“GOD said”** is found in forty-six verses. These are important statements of which GOD's servants should always be aware. These phrases declare that the Bible is from GOD. It is not a human creation. It is of divine origin.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of GOD, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of GOD may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2

Timothy 3:16-17).

GOD's word was not given by GOD to be a source of entertainment like well-written poetry or a novel. GOD's word was not designed to be a history book or a science book; yet, when it speaks historically or scientifically it has proven with time to be absolutely accurate. GOD's word was written to make fallen man better, to make him complete, to provide him with the instructions needed to make him acceptable to GOD. The Bible is a call from GOD for His fallen creation to come home to Him in purity.

GOD commanded Jonah to **“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city.”** GOD used the prophets as His spokesmen to deliver messages to his people. These messages are also applicable to all of mankind. There seems to be a sense of urgency regarding Nineveh, which is described as **“that great city.”** It will later be said that it was a city with one hundred and twenty thousand plus souls (Jonah 4:11). **But, what is meant by the term “great?”** The word **“great”** is a relative term, in that it can refer to size, power, influence, et cetera. This writer would suggest that it refers to all of the descriptions he has just listed.

What was Jonah supposed to do when he got to Nineveh? “cry against it.” Jonah was to speak out with a loud voice against this city. **What had they done which demanded such a voice against them? “for their wickedness is come up before Me”** The word **“wickedness”** is from **ra'ra'ah**, which BDB defined as *“bad, evil...bad, disagreeable, malignant...evil, distress, misery, injury, calamity...evil, misery, distress, injury.”* Consider then what the prophet Nahum wrote about Nineveh.

“The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum

the Elkoshite...There is *one* come out of thee, that imagineth evil against the LORD, a wicked counsellor...The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin. Behold, I *am* against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions: and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard. Woe to the bloody city! it *is* all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not...Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the wellfavoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts...*There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?*" (Nahum 1:1, 11; 2:12-13; 3:1, 4, 19).

Consider also the writings of their kings on the walls of Nineveh bragging about how terrible they had been to their enemies. Nineveh had treated other peoples with violence, cruelty, and mercilessness.

"...I slaughtered them, and with their blood I dyed the mountain like crimson wool...The heads of their warriors I cut off, and piled them in a heap...and their young men and maidens I burned in the fire...I slaughtered their inhabitants in great numbers – and the cities I burned with fire...From some I cut off their hands and their fingers, and from others their noses and their ears" (Colliers Encyclopedia, Vol. 2, p. 638, 1955).

Both the Bible and secular history show how extremely wicked the Assyrians were.

"their wickedness is come up before Me" Similar language is found in other passages. For instance, when Cain killed Abel, the Scriptures say **"the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground"** (Genesis 4:10). Further, when Sodom and Gomorrah became so wicked, **"the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their**

sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know” (Genesis 18:20-21, emphasis added). When sin becomes so great that GOD will not ignore it — **destruction will come**. As Himmel rightly stated, *“Wickedness going up invites divine judgment to come down”* (p. 682). The wickedness of the places mentioned above, including Nineveh, became so great that they filled and overflowed the cup of evil which caused GOD’s wrath to descend upon the guilty.

Jonah 1:3 Jonah departs for Tarshish.

“But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.”

“But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah; and he went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of Jehovah.” (ASV)

“And Jonah riseth to flee to Tarshish from the face of Jehovah, and goeth down to Joppa, and findeth a ship going to Tarshish, and he giveth its fare, and goeth down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the face of Jehovah.” (YLT)

“But Jonah rose 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, away from the presence of the LORD.” (ESV)

Jonah had been told to go to Nineveh and preach

against the great evils of the people. Further, he was to warn them that GOD planned to destroy them for **“their wickedness”** (v. 2). *What was their wickedness?* It was the violation of GOD’s moral laws. Instead, Jonah decided not to go east to Nineveh, but to go in the opposite direction toward Tarshish. There is a dispute among scholars as to where Tarshish is. Some think it was *“Taressos in Spain, Carthage in North Africa, and Tyrseni in Italy”* (Roper, p. 52). The majority believe it was Taressos, as does this author.

Why did Jonah try to run away from his responsibility to GOD? Because somehow he believed he could flee **“from the presence of the LORD”** with impunity. But that is impossible because anywhere one might go — **GOD is there.**

“Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into Heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee” (Psalm 139:7-12).

Further, as will be commented on later, Jonah did not want Nineveh to be spared — they were the enemy and he wanted them destroyed

In his attempt to flee from GOD, he went to Joppa. In ancient times, Joppa was a major seaport on the Mediterranean Sea. Hiram shipped materials to Joppa (today it is Jaffa) for David’s proposed Temple (2 Chron. 2:16). Consider a lesson here. When Jonah decided to try to get away from GOD, fleeing to the West, he had to go **“down to Joppa”** and then **“down**

into” the ship. Anytime one decides to flee from GOD’s commands, there is only one way to go — **down!** But, why did Jonah want to get away from GOD in the first place? The answer will not be found until the last chapter of the book.

“Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that Thou art a gracious GOD, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil” (Jonah 4:2).

More will be said about this later in this commentary. Jonah paid the fare, boarded the ship, and thought everything was going as planned. But, he was in for an unpleasant surprise.

Jonah 1:4-10 A mighty tempest threatens the ship.

“But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy GOD, if so be that GOD will think upon us, that we perish not. And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou? And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the

GOD of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.”

“But Jehovah sent out a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god; and they cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it unto them. But Jonah was gone down into the innermost parts of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the ship-master came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy GOD, if so be that GOD will think upon us, that we perish not. And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; what is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou? And he said unto them, I am a Hebrew; and I fear Jehovah, the GOD of heaven, who hath made the sea and the dry land. Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, What is this that thou hast done? For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of Jehovah, because he had told them.” (ASV)

“And Jehovah hath cast a great wind on the sea, and there is a great tempest in the sea, and the ship hath reckoned to be broken; and the mariners are afraid, and cry each unto his god, and cast the goods that are in the ship into the sea, to make it light of them; and Jonah hath gone down unto the sides of the vessel, and he lieth down, and is fast asleep. And the chief of the company draweth near to him, and saith to him, What--to thee, O sleeper? rise, call unto thy GOD, it may be GOD doth bethink Himself of us, and we do not perish. And they say each unto his neighbour, Come, and we cast lots, and we know on whose account this evil is on us. And they cast lots, and the lot falleth on Jonah. And they say unto him, Declare to us, we pray thee, on what account this evil is on us? what is thine occupation, and whence comest thou? what is thy

country, seeing thou art not of this people? And he saith unto them, A Hebrew I am, and Jehovah, GOD of the heavens, I am reverencing, Who made the sea and the dry land. And the men fear a great fear, and say unto him, What is this thou hast done! for the men have known that from the face of Jehovah he is fleeing, for he hath told them.” (YLT)

“But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish. And they said to one another, Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you? And he said to them, I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the GOD of Heaven, Who made the sea and the dry land. Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, What is this that you have done? For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.” (ESV)

As the journey began, Jonah must have thought he had succeeded in getting away from GOD and the task he had been assigned. It is not known how long they sailed before GOD let Jonah know that he had failed. The text states that GOD **“sent out a mighty wind.”** The words **“sent out”** come from the Hebrew tu, which BDB defined as *“to hurl, cast.”* This writer imagines this almost as a military term, such as hurling a spear at the enemy. The result was the creation of a **“mighty tempest.”** The word **“tempest”** comes from saar searah, which Strong defined as *“a hurricane,”* and

BDB defined it as a *“tempest, storm, whirlwind.”* This storm was so violent that the sailors thought their ship was going to be torn apart.

There is an old saying that there are no atheists in fox holes. This writer would think that this would apply equally to sailors who are in a terrible storm at sea. The sea was raging, and the sailors were terrified, so they did two things. First, every man prayed to his **“god.”** Since **“every man”** implies a plurality, it could mean one of two things. The crew was made up of people from multiple nations, which nations had their own gods. Or, the crew could have been composed of men from one nation and were polytheistic, i.e., worshipped many different gods. If they were polytheistic, each man might have easily had a favorite god in his pantheon of gods. This is quite common in this kind of worship system. Second, the sailors **“cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea.”** When considering the meaning of **“wares” (keliy)**, the picture is that they were hurling (**tu**) everything that was not nailed down into the sea, including cargo. **Why would they throw such valuable things overboard? “to lighten it of them,”** i.e., to lighten the ship. **Why did they think lightening the ship might help them?** When the seas are raging in a storm, the waves are high. In such a situation, the waves would have been coming over the ship’s rails. By lightening the ship, it would ride higher on the waves and hopefully keep as much water out of the ship as possible. Consider two other things here: (1) they were doing everything humanly possible to keep from dying, and (2) they called on their gods to do what they could not do, i.e., cause the storm to stop.

What was Jonah doing during this terrifying time?
“Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship;

and he lay, and was fast asleep.” The word **“ship”** (**sephiynah**) is interesting, because it specifies a sea-going ship, i.e., one sealed with a deck (Strong). Coastal ships, those which did not venture into the deep parts of the sea, might not have a deck (something like a barge of the Mississippi River). The text is showing that Jonah had gone below deck and was sound asleep. One might wonder how he could be in such deep sleep at a time like this.

Himmel states that *“The ship master was the head of the crew, the chief of the rope pullers, or captain of the ship.”* Imagine yourself in his position. He was trying to do everything in his power to save the lives of his crew — **“that we perish not.”** And here was Jonah fast asleep, without seeming to have any care about what was happening to them. He must have, at the least, thought this was very strange. He urged Jonah to stand up and call upon **“his god”** for help in saving their lives.

Next, the sailors decided that this great danger had to be caused by someone on the ship, i.e., someone must have done something so evil as to anger the gods. It was common practice in ancient times for people to believe that ill health, catastrophes, bad “luck,” etc., was caused by someone’s having done something to anger the gods (sin).

“And as Jesus passed by, He saw a man which was blind from his birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of GOD should be made manifest in him” (John 9:1-3, emphasis added).

As seen in the above verses, even the apostles of Jesus thought that bad things happened to people because of sin, but Jesus corrected that misconception.

But since this was the crew's conception of things, they automatically, it seems, figured that someone had angered the god(s) against them. In this case, they were correct.

Regarding the **"casting of lots,"** it is not speaking about chance, like casting dice. Under the Mosaic system, GOD sanctioned the casting of lots.

"The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD" (Proverbs 16:33).

As one looks through the Scriptures, he sees many times when lots were used to make crucial decisions by GOD's people.

"And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat" (Leviticus 16:8).

"And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the LORD: and there Joshua divided the land unto the children of Israel according to their divisions" (Joshua 18:10).

"And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:26).

There are other examples from the Scriptures which might be noted, but these suffice to make the point. When the Law of Moses ended and the church began (Acts 2), the casting of lots was no longer used. When the lots were cast in this instance, GOD revealed that Jonah had brought this trouble upon them.

Once they determined who the guilty party was, their questions poured forth. It might be noted that these questions appear to be designed to determine what "god" they should appease. Jonah began answering their questions by identifying himself as a Hebrew. The word **"Hebrew"** is a compound word from **br** meaning to cross over and **eber** meaning the Euphrates. It was

a common designation for the Israelites. The phrase **“I fear the LORD,”** signified that he was one who revered GOD, i.e., worshipped Him. One wonders how he could say this, since at that very moment he was disrespecting GOD by disobeying Him. He went on to describe GOD as the one Who had **“made the sea and the dry land.”** This phrase indicated that his GOD was powerful enough to create the storm they were enduring, because He had created all they saw.

Upon hearing the words of Jonah, the sailors became **“exceedingly afraid.”** They were already greatly afraid, but with this new information, it appears their fear grew even greater. They asked, **“Why hast thou done this?”** (*“What is this that thou hast done?”* — ASV). **How could you oppose the will of the GOD you serve? How could you bring this destruction upon us?** The last part of verse ten shows that verse nine does not reveal all that Jonah had said to these men.

Jonah 1:11-16 Jonah is cast into the sea.

“Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them. Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for Thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased Thee. So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea:

and the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.”

“Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea grew more and more tempestuous. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to get them back to the land; but they could not: for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Wherefore they cried unto Jehovah, and said, We beseech thee, O Jehovah, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood; for Thou, O Jehovah, hast done as it pleased thee. So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared Jehovah exceedingly; and they offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah, and made vows.” (ASV)

“And they say unto him, What do we do to thee that the sea may cease from us, for the sea is more and more tempestuous? And he saith unto them, Lift me up, and cast me into the sea, and the sea doth cease from you; for I know that on my account this great tempest is upon you. And the men row to turn back unto the dry land, and are not able, for the sea is more and more tempestuous against them. And they cry unto Jehovah, and say, We pray Thee, O Jehovah, let us not, we pray Thee, perish for this man's life, and do not lay on us innocent blood, for Thou, Jehovah, as Thou hast pleased, Thou hast done. And they lift up Jonah, and cast him into the sea, and the sea ceaseth from its raging; and the men fear Jehovah--a great fear, and sacrifice a sacrifice to Jehovah, and vow vows.” (YLT)

“Then they said to him, What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us? For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said unto them, Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you. Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous

against them. Therefore they cried out to the LORD, O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you. So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows." (ESV)

The sailors were convinced that Jonah was the problem. They understood that the storm was a direct result of Jonah's attempt to flee from his GOD. No doubt Jonah had also informed them that his work was that of a prophet. The sailors wanted to know what they could do to Jonah which would appease the wrath of the LORD. Note also that the storm is continuing to increase in violence by the moment.

Jonah told them to **"Take me up** (*"lift me up"* — YLT), **and cast** (*"hurl," tul*, BDB) **me forth into the sea."** The verb hurl (**"cast"**) is interesting, because it is the same word used in verses four and five — GOD *"hurled"* the wind at the sea. The sailors *"hurled"* the cargo over the side of the ship. These suggest, as noted previously, a violent action. Now, Jonah told them to lift him up and *"hurl"* him into the sea. *Why would Jonah tell them to hurl him into the sea? Was this a command which had been given by inspiration to him? He was a prophet of GOD. Was he still trying to avoid the task GOD had assigned him, i.e., going to Nineveh, through his death in the sea? Whatever his motive might be for giving this instruction, he promised the crew that, if they obeyed him the storm would cease. He could not have known the winds and storm would cease without divine knowledge.*

It is observed that Jonah did not try to deny his sin. He took full responsibility at this point. But an important

point is made here that one person's sin(s) might, and often do, have ill effects on others. Often people are heard to say, *"What I do is no one's business, because I am not hurting anyone."* That is not what GOD says, nor is it what is demonstrated in the present text. David's adultery and attempted cover up caused Uriah and those around him at the battle to be killed or wounded. Further, it brought David, and others, heartache, as wars followed him all of his reign, not to mention the heartache that fornication caused in his own family. It would seem by Jonah's words that he was not only willing to acknowledge his sin, but was also willing to accept the consequences of his sin, even if that meant drowning.

The reaction of the sailors is interesting. They are terrified thinking about losing their lives in this storm. They have been told by GOD's prophet how to stop the storm and save their lives. But verse thirteen shows a reluctance to throw Jonah overboard, in what they see as an act which will take Jonah's life to save theirs. This shows that they were not callous about the sanctity of human life. Instead of immediately hurling Jonah overboard, the text says **"the men rowed hard to bring it to the land."** The phrase **"rowed hard"** comes from **chathar**, which Strong defined as *"to force a (passage) as by burglary."* BDB said it means *"to dig, row."* They were by their own efforts trying to force a passage through the stormy sea by digging their oars into the water in order to keep from throwing Jonah to his death. But they were making no progress, because the storm was growing ever greater.

When the sailors finally acknowledged that they could not save themselves, they relented to GOD's command. They acted as many sinners do when they

initially are faced with the Gospel and their sins. They fight against doing what GOD tells them to do and only relent when they realize there is no hope for salvation without obedience to Him. They prayed to the LORD, **not** to their gods. **For what did they pray?** First, that they could be saved. Second, that they would not be held accountable for taking Jonah's life. What they perceived as taking human life by their actions was not at all what GOD planned for Jonah, but they would have had no knowledge of that. Third, they acknowledged the power that GOD has and that He does whatever He considers as just. They now believed that He had created the storm and that He could end it if He so chose. So they picked Jonah up and hurled him into the sea. **What were the results of doing what GOD said to do?** Their lives were saved: **"the sea ceased from her raging"** — immediately.

Verse sixteen shows another result of their obedience to GOD's decree regarding Jonah. **"Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows."** (1) They **"feared the LORD."** They showed GOD reverence mixed with godly fear. (2) They sacrificed to the LORD, not to their gods, in thanksgiving for His sparing them. (3) They **"made vows"** (promises). What those vows were is not revealed. But, if this writer were to guess, he would say one of those vows must have been to serve the LORD. Another might have been to give up their false gods, because it had been demonstrated to them that their gods were powerless to help them.

Jonah 1:17 A great fish swallows Jonah.

"Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to

swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”

“And Jehovah prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” (ASV)

“And Jehovah appointeth a great fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah is in the bowels of the fish three days and three nights.” (YLT)

“And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” (ESV)

Jehovah **“prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah.”** How GOD prepared this fish to swallow Jonah is not revealed. **Is it speaking of the great fish’s being at the right place at the right time? Did He create a great fish or sea monster specifically and especially for this purpose?** Children have been erroneously taught that the fish was a whale for generations, because it was mistranslated in the KJV. Neither the Hebrew word for fish (**dag dag**), nor the Greek word (κητος) in Matthew 12:40, which is rendered **“whale,”** means a whale. The original in both cases simply means **“fish.”** In Ezekiel 32:2 (KJV), the word translated **“whale,”** is **tanniyn tanniym**, which BDB says means **“dragon, serpent, sea monster.”** Whatever species of fish this was, it was great in size. Some, as has already been pointed out earlier in this study, have stated that there is no fish big enough to swallow a full-grown man. It was also pointed out that such a thing did happen in 2021 at Cape Cod, where a Sperm whale swallowed a man and spit him out, and it is on film.

The text goes on to say, **“Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”** Skeptics again

howl, *“No one could survive that length of time in a fish’s belly with the stomach acids and no air.”* Himmel answered this objection in a telling way.

“If the Almighty can arrange by natural means to preserve an infant in its mother’s womb for nine months, he can arrange by supernatural means to preserve a man in a fishes [sic] belly for three days and three nights.”

The point to be made is that skeptics do not want GOD in their lives, nor do they want Him to influence anyone. They do not want to believe there is a GOD Who is so powerful that He can do anything He wants, for whatever purpose He chooses. They do not want a book of absolute rules to follow. Further, as stated earlier, for those who believe in the Messiah (Jesus), what is recorded in Jonah is no problem. **Why?** Because Jesus endorsed the account of Jonah, i.e., He said it happened, and as a member of the GODHEAD — He cannot lie.

“For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (Matthew 12:40).

Jonah Chapter Two The Praying Prophet's Preservation

Jonah 2:1-9 Jonah prays to Jehovah out of the fish's belly.

“Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his GOD out of the fish's belly, And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and He heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou heardest my voice. For Thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all Thy billows and Thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my GOD. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.”

“Then Jonah prayed unto Jehovah his GOD out of the fish's belly. And he said, I called by reason of mine affliction unto Jehovah, And He answered me; Out of the belly of Sheol cried I, And Thou heardest my voice. For Thou didst cast me into the depth, in the heart of the seas, And the flood was round about me; All Thy waves and Thy billows passed over me. And I said, I am cast out from before Thine eyes; Yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul; The deep was round about me; The

weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; The earth with its bars closed upon me for ever: Yet hast Thou brought up my life from the pit, O Jehovah my GOD. When my soul fainted within me, I remembered Jehovah; And my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thy holy temple. They that regard lying vanities Forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that which I have vowed. Salvation is of Jehovah.” (ASV)

“And Jonah prayeth unto Jehovah his GOD from the bowels of the fish. And he saith: I called, because of my distress, to Jehovah, And He doth answer me, From the belly of Sheol I have cried, Thou hast heard my voice. When Thou dost cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, Then the flood doth compass me, All Thy breakers and Thy billows have passed over me. And I – I said: I have been cast out from before Thine eyes, (Yet I add to look unto Thy holy temple!) Compassed me have waters unto the soul, The deep doth compass me, The weed is bound to my head. To the cuttings of mountains I have come down, The earth, her bars are behind me to the age. And Thou bringest up from the pit my life, O Jehovah my GOD. In the feebleness within me of my soul Jehovah I have remembered, And come in unto Thee doth my prayer, Unto Thy holy temple. Those observing lying vanities their own mercy forsake. And I – with a voice of thanksgiving – I sacrifice to Thee, That which I have vowed I complete, Salvation is of Jehovah.” (YLT)

“Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his GOD from the belly of the fish, saying, I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and He answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice. For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me, and the flood surrounded me; all Your waves and Your billows passed over me. Then I said, I am driven away from Your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy Temple. The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head and the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed about me forever; yet You brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my GOD. When my

life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hopes of steadfast love. But with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; What I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!" (ESV)

The Scriptures state that one should **"Pray without ceasing"** (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This writer has often spoken of this as meaning the ability to pray at any time and under any circumstance. If there ever was a time when prayer was especially needed because one was between a rock and hard place — this was it! Jonah's prayer was both for salvation and thanksgiving for being saved from death. Jonah deserved death for his disobedience to GOD's will, and the fact is that each and every one who disobeys GOD deserves the same. Certainly, Jonah must have expected to die when the sailors cast him overboard. When Jonah found himself alive, i.e., he had not drowned as expected, he **"prayed unto the LORD his GOD out of the fish's belly."** The word **"LORD"** comes from **yehovah**. Without the added vowels, this word is unpronounceable. It is the proper name of the only GOD, which refers to Him as the **"self Existent or eternal"** One (Strong); **"the existing One"** (BDB). The phrase **"his GOD"** does not refer to one of many, nor that this was his favorite one, as the sailors with their pantheon of gods thought. It is a recognition that Jonah had accepted the fact that this was the only self-existing and eternal GOD.

Over the years, this author has heard people argue about what is the proper position in which prayer should be uttered. The position of prayer does not matter, but what matters is whether the heart is bowed in submission. However, he has never heard anyone argue about the place where prayer is uttered, as if

there could be a right place or a place where prayer would be impossible. The Scriptures name many places from which prayer was uttered.

“Jesus prayed in the wilderness (Luke 5:16), in a mountain (Matt. 14:23), in a garden (John 18:1; Luke 22:39-46), and on the cross (Luke 23:32-34)...Paul and Silas prayed in prison (Acts 16:25)” (Himmel, p. 699).

Jonah, when he realized that his life had been spared, prayed while in the fish’s belly.

“I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and He heard me” Affliction and distress caused Jonah to *“bow his knees in supplication and submission”* to the Lord. Surely it was understood that, if he remained in the belly of that great fish, he would die without GOD’s mercy and intervention. Note also that when Jonah cried out to Jehovah, Jehovah heard him. When this writer was a soldier in Vietnam, there were those who would never speak a kind word about GOD, who constantly did and said those things which were contrary to GOD’s will. In battle, however, when those men believed there was a good chance they would die, they often called out to GOD to save them. **Yet, how could such a one’s prayer be heard?** One cannot consistently live in rebellion to GOD and expect Him to listen to his prayers.

“He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination” (Proverbs 28:9).

Why did GOD hear Jonah’s prayer? Because he was not one who had previously shunned GOD’s law. He had been an obedient prophet, i.e., one who allowed GOD to teach through his spoken words. Jonah was not perfect. He committed sin at times, and he had just sinned by trying to avoid his responsibility by *“attempting”* to run away from GOD. When such a one as he repents, GOD is willing to listen. When Jonah

turned from his wickedness, GOD listened to him and aided him.

“The LORD is far from the wicked: but He heareth the prayer of the righteous” (Proverbs 15:29).

“For Thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas;” Was it not the sailors who had cast Jonah into the Sea? Why then did Jonah say that GOD was the One who cast him into the sea? Because GOD through Jonah had directed their action. GOD had caused the great storm and the churning sea because of Jonah’s sins. He wanted Jonah off of that ship and on his way to deliver His message of impending destruction to Nineveh. To that end, Jonah had to learn that he could not escape from the presence of the Lord, he could not escape GOD’s purpose for him. Jonah had placed himself in the position where his life could have been taken from him. Near-death experiences often cause mankind to look at life in a different way. This experience truly caused Jonah to understand what he had done, with the realization that it was not too late to turn back to GOD. After all, he was still alive, though in the belly of the fish.

“Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight;” The words **“cast out”** come from the Hebrew **garash**, which Strong said means *“to drive out.”* BDB stated that it means *“to drive out, expel, cast out, drive away, divorce, put away, thrust away.”* It is the same word used to describe GOD’s driving Adam and Eve out of the garden, **thrusting** them from His presence (Gen. 3:24). In his sinful rebellion, GOD had expelled Jonah from His presence. But Jonah realized that GOD would allow him to return to an intimate relationship with Him through repentance.

“yet I will look again toward Thy Holy Temple.”

There are those who believe this is speaking of turning toward Jerusalem, i.e., the Temple in Jerusalem, to pray. This writer does not believe that is what is being described here. It was common for the Jews to lift their eyes to the throne of GOD as they prayed.

“Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou that dwellest in the heavens” (Psalm 123:1).

“The LORD is in His Holy Temple, the LORD'S Throne is in Heaven: His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men” (Psalm 11:4).

This writer believes Jonah was looking toward GOD, because he understood that he was near death on this occasion and that he had alienated himself from GOD's presence and loving kindness. He longed instead to be close to GOD once again. The LORD heard Jonah's penitent prayer, just as He hears the penitent prayers of His children today.

In verses five and six, Jonah continued to describe the ordeal of being hurled from the ship and the danger of drowning. He described going into the depths to the point that weeds (probably seaweed) wrapped around his head. Note the downward spiral that Jonah's refusal to obey GOD led him into. First, he **went down** to Joppa (1:3); second, he **went down** into the depth of the ship (1:5); third, he **went down** to the depths of the sea (2:6). He was at the bottom. He was at death's door, and it was there that he realized his need for GOD. Only GOD could save him at this point. It is often the case that a person has to reach “rock bottom” before he seeks help. In recounting what should have been his death, he acknowledged that it was GOD Who saved him — **“yet hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my GOD.”**

“When my soul fainted within me I remembered

the LORD” When all hope had left him, Jonah remembered GOD. It is easier to forget the Lord than most people realize, even temporarily. *When a godly person commits a sin, has he not forgotten GOD, forgotten His law, i.e., for the moment he engaged in that sin?* It is incumbent upon man to remember GOD, to keep Him always before his mind’s eye so that he does not sin against GOD.

“remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring” (Numbers 15:39, emphasis added).

Like David, one should seek the favor of the LORD all his days.

“Remember me, O LORD, with the favour that thou bearest unto Thy people: O visit me with Thy salvation” (Psalm 106:4).

“my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine Holy Temple” This passage reminds one of Jonah’s words in verse two of this chapter.

“I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and He heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.”

Verse two and this context should remind one that GOD is there and that He is ready to hear his prayers of repentance. Further, just as in the case of Jonah, GOD’s people ought to feel the deepest gratitude that GOD is always there and willing to help His people in times of suffering. Just like Jonah’s prayer, one’s prayer today can reach **“into Thine Holy Temple,”** i.e., the very throne room of GOD in Heaven. How thankful one should be that he can reach out to GOD and know that He will hear him.

“Jehovah is in His Holy Temple; Jehovah, His throne is in Heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men. Jehovah trieth the righteous; But the wicked and him that loveth

violence His soul hateth. Upon the wicked He will rain snares; Fire and brimstone and burning wind shall be the portion of their cup. For Jehovah is righteous; He loveth righteousness: The upright shall behold His face” (Psalm 11:4-7 — ASV).

Jonah now turned his attention to mentioning that which cannot provide salvation. **“They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.”** The term **“observe”** comes from **shamar**, which is translated by BDB as *“to keep, guard, observe, give heed.”* What these people were keeping, guarding and giving heed to were **“lying vanities.”** In other passages, it is easy to see that **“lying vanities”** often refers to idolatry, i.e., false gods which anger GOD.

“They have moved Me to jealousy with *that which is not GOD*; they have provoked Me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with *those which are not a people*; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation” (Deuteronomy 32:21).

“I have hated them that regard lying vanities: but I trust in the LORD” (Psalm 31:6).

“Are there *any* among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? *art not Thou He, O LORD our GOD?* therefore we will wait upon Thee: for Thou hast made all these *things*” (Jeremiah 14:22).

It is foolishness to follow a man, or a thing made by man, especially one portrayed as a god, which cannot deliver what is promised or desired and which provides one with no hope.

Those who worship that which is not GOD **“forsake their own mercy.”** To **“forsake”** (**azab**) something is to *“relinquish”* that thing (Strong); *“to leave, loose, forsake”* it (BDB). *What do those who serve a god which is not GOD forsake? “mercy”* They forsake the kindness and faithfulness which only the GOD of

heaven and earth can supply them.

In verse nine, Jonah made a vow that he will not be like those who serve idols, **“lying vanities.”** Instead, he will make his **“sacrifice”** to GOD. The word **“sacrifice”** comes from **zabach**, which is defined by Strong as *“to slaughter an animal (usually in sacrifice).”* BDB said that it means *“to slaughter, kill, sacrifice, slaughter for sacrifice.”* Jonah said that he would worship GOD. Further, his sacrifice would be made with **“thanksgiving.”** The word **“thanksgiving”** comes from **todah**, which Strong said means *“adoration,”* and BDB said it means *“confession, praise, thanksgiving.”* Jonah will render to GOD the adoration which GOD deserves because he knows that GOD can and will fulfill His promises to the faithful.

Further, Jonah said he **“will pay that that I have vowed.”** A **“vow”** is a promise, and all promises made by man are binding, whether it be to a fellow human being or to GOD. It is not known all that is involved in Jonah’s vow, but one thing is for sure — it includes the sacrifice(s) of thanksgiving he promised.

Jonah now ended his prayer inside the great fish with an emphatic statement — **“Salvation is of the LORD!”** There is no other source for salvation! Man cannot save himself by anything he creates or any plan that his feeble mind can conjure up. Without GOD, all man has is the hopelessness of this world, with nothing to look forward to except eternal agony. But with GOD a man has everything of true importance.

Jonah was a changed man. He went from one who was disobedient, to one who had experienced a salvation that only GOD could give.

“The LORD is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my GOD, and I will prepare Him an

habitation; my father's GOD, and I will exalt Him" (Exodus 15:2).

"The GOD of my rock; in Him will I trust: He is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; Thou savest me from violence" 2 Samuel 22:3).

"Sing unto the LORD, all the earth; shew forth from day to day His salvation" (1 Chronicles 16:23).

These are but a few of the passages which speak of salvation from GOD. Let one rejoice over the mercy and faithfulness of our majestic GOD.

Jonah 2:10 The fish vomits out Jonah upon dry ground.

"And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land."

"And Jehovah spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." (ASV)

"And Jehovah saith to the fish, and it vomiteth out Jonah on the dry land." (YLT)

"And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land." (ESV)

Since GOD created all things, it simply stands to reason that He alone has the right to command, and when He does, His creation is expected to obey. Of all GOD's creation, only man has the audacity to disobey GOD. In Jonah, one sees GOD telling the wind to create a great storm, telling the wind to cease and the seas to be calm. He produced a great fish and told it to be ready to swallow Jonah, and then He ordered it to **"vomit"** Jonah out on dry ground. **"Vomit"** comes from the stomach; thus, Jonah was in the great fish's

belly. Is it not sad to consider that that part of His creation which was the crowning jewel of His creative power (mankind) is the only part of that creation which dares to disobey GOD to his own hurt? Only one part of GOD's creation was given free will to choose his own course of action. How sad that the majority of mankind chooses to reject the all-powerful One, the only One Who can give him salvation.

Though one might from curiosity wonder where Jonah was spit out, GOD does not say. It might have been back at Joppa or somewhere along the Mediterranean Coast as near to Nineveh as possible. It simply is not one's business, or GOD would have told him.

Jonah Chapter Three The Preaching Prophet's Power

Jonah 3:1-2 Jehovah again commands Jonah to go to Nineveh.

“And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.”

“And the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.” (ASV)

“And there is a word of Jehovah unto Jonah a second time, saying, Rise, go unto Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim unto it the proclamation that I am speaking unto thee;” (YLT)

“When the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” (ESV)

Consider the patience GOD showed toward Jonah in speaking to him the second time. Also, notice that GOD's command did not change in the least.

“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me” (Jonah 1:2).

Jonah may have changed, but Nineveh was still that wicked city. Jonah was saved from death, and Nineveh needed to be saved from death, both physical and spiritual.

“the word of the LORD came to Jonah” GOD communicated with Jonah with words. It is well understood that, in the ages when miracles were used by GOD, He communicated with man in a number of ways.

“GOD, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, Whom He hath

appointed heir of all things, by Whom also He made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

At times, He spoke directly to His prophets, as He did with Jonah. At other times, he spoke by visions, dreams, et cetera. But when GOD communicated with man, through whatever means He chose, man knew it was not simply a dream, hallucination, vision, et cetera. Today, GOD does not use any miraculous means to communicate with man — He communicates today only by His written word.

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3, emphasis added).

Jonah was told to do the same thing he had earlier been told to do, i.e., **“go unto Nineveh, that great city.”** It is emphasized four times in these four short chapters that Nineveh was a **“great city”** (Jonah 1:2; 3:2-3; 4:11). Further, in Jonah 4:11, it is revealed that Nineveh was a city of **“more than sixscore thousand (120,000) persons.”** In the nineteenth century, critics decided that no city of that size could have existed in the time when Jonah lived. New technology (Lidar — see introduction to Jonah) has shown that they did not know what they were talking about and the Bible has once again been shown to be accurate (As it always is when adequate information is obtained.).

What was Jonah to do when he arrived at that great city? “preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee” GOD said, Jonah address, i.e., call out to (**“preach”** – **qara**), the Ninevites. Tell them what I told you to proclaim (**“preaching”** – **qeriyah**). Too many times, people avoid teaching what GOD wants people to know, i.e., His words. They are often found proclaiming their

opinions and cute stories instead of “**GOD says**” from holy writ. Today, it is no different from Jonah’s day. GOD still wants godly preaching, i.e., His word and **only** His word taught, a thus saith the Lord. This writer wholeheartedly believes Himmel to be correct when he said, “*Jesus did not send the apostles to preach politics, human philosophies, personal opinions, social issues, economics, intriguing theories, or amusing tales*” (p. 712)! Jesus sent them out to proclaim GOD’s needed words of salvation to all.

Jonah 3:3-4 Jonah preaches to Nineveh.

“So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”

“So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of Jehovah. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city, of three days' journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” (ASV)

“and Jonah riseth, and he goeth unto Nineveh, according to the word of Jehovah. And Nineveh hath been a great city before GOD, a journey of three days. And Jonah beginneth to go in to the city a journey of one day, and proclaimeth, and saith, Yet forty days--and Nineveh is overturned.” (YLT)

“So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (ESV)

“So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh,

according to the word of the LORD.” When GOD speaks to the spiritually minded, there are only two things to be done. (1) Do as Isaiah the prophet did — **“Then said I, Here am I; send me”** (Isaiah 6:8). (2) Get up and do what GOD said to do. After his experience in the great fish, Jonah was not about to try to flee the opposite way this time. He arose and went to Nineveh. The reader can probably recall a number of times when GOD told someone to obey Him in some matter or mission, and he simply arose and went (cf. Gen. 22:1-3; 1 Kings 17:8-9; Ezekiel 3:22-23). **What does it take for quick obedience to take place? Respect for GOD’s authority.**

“Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey.” What does the phrase **“exceedingly great city”** mean? Some believe it refers to a city where many gods were found, based on the original word’s meaning for **“exceedingly”** (**elohiym**). Some believe it refers to its greatness as a capital city and its power. Others, this writer included, believe it refers to the size of the city, based on the phrase **“of three days’ journey.”** One should also note the numerical size of the city given in Jonah 4:11. Of course, modern critics used to be quick to jump on that number. They said that it was impossible for a city of that size to exist in those times. But as mentioned in the introductory remarks, because of modern tools (Lidar), Nineveh has drawn more archaeologists who have proved that the city could have easily held 120,000 (and more) people. It has always amazed this author that people in this time often say this and that could not have been in those days. **Why do people deny GOD’s word, when the only basis of their assertions is that do not think it was possible?** One

should consider the truths which the archaeologists' tools have continued to uncover with regard to the engineering abilities these ancient peoples had. "Modern" man cannot understand how they could have accomplished such feats (like the ancient "computer" found in the Mediterranean Sea), simply because of conceited prejudice toward GOD and His word. Modern man likes to think of the ancient ones as being rather dumb and backwards, whereas he prides himself as being highly intelligent. Thus, they will come up with all kinds of fantasy's like aliens building the pyramids or Mayan temples, simply because they cannot conceive of such buildings be so precisely built without modern tools. Maybe, they simply do not want to acknowledge that these ancient engineers were smarter than themselves.

Nothing is said about how Jonah got to Nineveh. The text simply jumps ahead and states what he did when he got there. **"And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey."** As he **"began"** entering the city, he **"began"** his preaching. Then **"he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."** This writer believes that the simple message seen here is not all that Jonah preached. Surely He spoke to them about GOD. Surely he spoke of GOD's great and tender mercy. Maybe he even spoke to them about his own disobedience and the terror it caused him. Jonah cried out to, he addressed (**qara**), the people with GOD's message of punishment which would take place in **"forty days."** There are a number of incidents recorded in Scripture which took place after forty days, such as, the temptation of Jesus after He **"had fasted forty days and forty nights"** (Matt. 4:1-11). When one takes the time to examine

these forty day events, he often sees that they involved a time of examination or trial. In the case of the Ninevites this seems to be a time for them to digest the information given, examine themselves and repent.

“Nineveh shall be overthrown” The word **“overthrown”** is from **haphak**, which Strong said means *“to turn about or over.”* BDB stated that it is *“to turn, overthrow, overturn.”* Baker/Carpenter said it is *“a verb meaning to turn around, to change, to throw down, to overturn, to pervert, to destroy, to be turned against, to turn here and there, to wander”* (p. 270). Interestingly, this word (**haphak**) is the same word used in Genesis 19:25 regarding the destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah and the cities of the plain. This would indicate to this author that GOD may have decided to destroy Nineveh in the same manner.

Jonah 3:5-9 Nineveh responds to Jonah’s preaching.

“So the people of Nineveh believed GOD, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered *him* with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto GOD: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that *is* in their hands. Who can tell *if* GOD will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?”

“And the people of Nineveh believed GOD; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. And the tidings reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he made proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water; but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast, and let them cry mightily unto GOD: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knoweth whether GOD will not turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?” (ASV)

“And the men of Nineveh believe in GOD, and proclaim a fast, and put on sackcloth, from their greatest even unto their least, seeing the word doth come unto the king of Nineveh, and he riseth from his throne, and removeth his honourable robe from off him, and spreadeth out sackcloth, and sitteth on the ashes, and he crieth and saith in Nineveh by a decree of the king and his great ones, saying, Man and beast, herd and flock--let them not taste anything, let them not feed, even water let them not drink; and cover themselves with sackcloth let man and beast, and let them call unto GOD mightily, and let them turn back each from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knoweth? He doth turn back, and GOD hath repented, and hath turned back from the heat of His anger, and we do not perish.” (YLT)

“And the people of Nineveh believed GOD. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, by the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to GOD. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? GOD may turn and relent from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” (ESV)

The result of Jonah's preaching was that **"the people of Nineveh believed GOD."** What a contrast were the reaction of the exceedingly evil and cruel people of Nineveh to the people who heard Jesus preach. There is not a single indication in the text that a miracle was done among the Ninevites, as was done by Jesus among the Israelites. Yet, when the Ninevites heard GOD's word from Jonah's lips, they believed it. **If** they were told by Jonah about being swallowed by the great fish and the events surrounding such, they (unlike Festus) believed GOD's word. Festus was told about a resurrection and called whoever believed in such to be crazy (Acts 26:24). Since the age of miracles ceased, multiplied millions have been blessed, because they believed without physically seeing a miracle or Jesus.

"Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29, emphasis added).

The people of Nineveh believed GOD through Jonah and trusted that what He said was going to happen.

What did their belief cause them to do? First, they proclaimed a **"fast."** Their fasting was a show of their belief and recognition of suffering to come. However, as will be seen by the very words of GOD, their fasting was not an outward show. Again, it was a recognition of the truth which Jonah had taught. Second, they **"put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them."** Among the ancients, sackcloth was often worn as a sign of mourning and/or self-abasement. **Of what was sackcloth made?**

"cloth made of black goats' hair, coarse, rough, and thick, used for sacks, and also worn by mourners" (Easton's Bible Dictionary).

"cloth used in making sacks or bags, a coarse fabric, of a dark

color, made of goat's hair, and resembling the ellicium of the Romans. It was used also for making the rough garments used by mourners, which were in extreme cases worn next to the skin" (Smith's Bible Dictionary).

It is noticed that this was not done by a few or a select group. They were all mourning in recognition of their evil deeds and the fact that GOD had taken notice of them. They, unlike many today, believed that GOD meant what He said. From the greatest to the least they believed and showed works of repentance (Acts 26:20; Luke 3:14). This was not just a show, but from deep within their hearts, they showed their change of thinking (repentance) by their deeds.

Note who led them in repentance — the king (v. 6). When a nation's leaders are corrupt, many of their people will also be corrupt. But a nation's leader also has the influence which can lead his nation to repentance and godliness. Such was the case here. It would be over one hundred years before Nineveh would return to her old ways and be destroyed.

Not only did the king leave his throne, but he also took his royal robe off, put on sackcloth, fasted, and sat in ashes. He proclaimed that all of the people should do as he had done. He directed that the animals of Nineveh were not to eat or drink as well. If GOD destroyed Nineveh as He had done to Sodom and the cities of the plain, even the animals would have been destroyed. It is not known how long they fasted, but such a decree would cause great suffering for man and beast.

Further, the king said, **“let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto GOD.”** The amazing thing is not that man and beast were covered with sackcloth. The amazing thing was that he commanded man and beast to **“cry mightily”**

unto GOD.” When one sees what he previously said, that neither man nor beast was to eat or drink during the time of this fast, one may indeed begin to get a picture of what was happening. Those who have lived or worked on a farm have often heard the cries of animals when they were hungry. Note that they were admonished by the king to cry to GOD **“mightily.”** First, it is noted that, unlike the master of Jonah’s ship, the king did not say to cry to their individual god(s). He said to cry to GOD. **How were they to cry? “Mightily”** The word **“mightily”** (**chozqah**) means with **“force, might, strength, violence.”** It reminds one of how Jesus said one is to love GOD.

“And thou shalt love the Lord thy GOD with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31).

For what were they to cry to GOD? Obviously for their lives, which would require not GOD’s justice, but His mercy.

The king’s command also called for everyone to **“turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.”** Their **“evil way”** deals with their actions toward others, i.e., the evil, distress, misery and injury they caused others. The word **“violence”** refers to wrongs, cruelty and injustices they had rendered to others. It should be remembered that the Ninevites were known for their fierceness and brutality against other nations. It is evident that they understood that just saying they were sorry for their previous evil actions was enough. They understood that they must change their lives from lives of evil actions to actions of righteousness, right doing not by

their own standard, but according to GOD's standard.

The king proposed that, if they truly turned away from their evil ways and violence, perhaps GOD would **"repent"** (change His mind) about their destruction. Note that he referred to GOD's anger as being **"fierce"** (**charon charon**). BDB stated that this word is *"always used of God's anger"* and means *"anger, heat, burning (of anger)."* For one to **"perish"** is to be destroyed, to be killed. One is often told that the fear of punishment will not deter people from doing evil, but this text is a refutation of that false philosophy.

Jonah 3:10 GOD relents from threatened evil.

"And GOD saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and GOD repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not."

"And GOD saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and GOD repented of the evil which He said He would do unto them; and He did it not." (ASV)

"And GOD seeth their works, that they have turned back from their evil way, and GOD repenteth of the evil that He spake of doing to them, and He hath not done it." (YLT)

"When GOD saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, GOD relented of the disaster that He has said He would do to them, and he did not do it." (ESV)

The phrase **"GOD saw their works"** is a fundamental declaration of the deity of GOD.

"The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3).

"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13).

With regard to the Ninevites, what did GOD see? **“their works”** GOD saw their actions, their deeds. Their actions proved that their repentance was not simply words. Their commitment to change their ways was real, it was seen in their actions. **“Bring forth therefore fruits meet (*worthy of* – ASV) for repentance”** (Matthew 3:8). There have always been those who say that a person’s repentance was not real because he, in time, committed the same sin again. But GOD has shone in this text that their repentance was real, even though in later years they went back to their old ways. Further, Jesus testified that they repented.

“The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here” (Luke 11:32).

What did GOD do when they repented? **“GOD repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did *it not*”** Why did GOD change His mind (**“repented”**)? Because they changed their minds about the evil and cruelty of which they had been guilty. This would also imply that they changed their minds about GOD. GOD did not change His mind about His decree of impending judgment because He made a mistake. He changed His mind because of His love, mercy and compassion because they changed.

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13, emphasis added).

“The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy” (Psalm 145:8, emphasis added).

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man

his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our GOD, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7).

“For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (Romans 9:15).

Jonah Chapter Four “The Pouting Prophets Petulance”

Jonah 4:1-3 In anger Jonah prays that he might die. “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray Thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that Thou art a gracious GOD, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for *it is* better for me to die than to live.”

“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed unto Jehovah, and said, I pray thee, O Jehovah, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I hastened to flee unto Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious GOD, and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Jehovah, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.” (ASV)

“And it is grievous unto Jonah – a great evil – and he is displeased at it; and he prayeth unto Jehovah, and he saith, I pray Thee, O Jehovah, is not this my word while I was in mine own land--therefore I was beforehand to flee to Tarshish--that I have known that Thou art a GOD, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in kindness, and repenting of evil? And now, O Jehovah, take, I pray Thee, my soul from me, for better is my death than my life.” (YLT)

“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the LORD and said, O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious GOD and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O LORD, please take

my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” (ESV)

GOD turned away from the destruction He had planned for Nineveh because the people turned away from their evil deeds. Further, in doing so, they had shown their new trust in GOD to the point of obeying Him. One would think that Jonah would have been happy that these formerly cruel and abusive people had turned from their evil ways. Instead, he trembled and quivered (**yara**) with furious anger. **With whom was he angry?** GOD. One might wonder why this was the case. **Was it because the Jewish mind-set was that no one was worthy of GOD’s grace and mercy beside themselves? Was it because the Assyrians were Israel’s enemies and had so often caused them grief? Or, was it because GOD did not destroy the Assyrians, i.e., do what Jonah wanted Him to do?** This author believes all three of these attitudes were in play.

In verse two, Jonah gave voice to his unjustified anger in prayer to GOD. First, he asked GOD a question, which basically stated was, *“Did I not tell you so.”* Apparently, Jonah had been in Israel when GOD gave him instructions to go to Nineveh (**“my own country”**). Further, he correctly told GOD what kind of GOD He was, i.e., that he was a GOD of grace, mercy and forgiveness; as well as a GOD of vengeance and justice. He basically said that he knew, if he preached to the people of Nineveh and they repented, that GOD would turn His wrath away from them. Jonah did not want GOD to turn His wrath from them. He wanted them to be destroyed. If they had been, he would probably have jumped with joy. Here was a man who, not long before this, had been shown great love, mercy, kindness and grace; yet, he wanted these same things

withheld from Israel's longtime enemies. When these attributes of GOD were shown toward him, he had acknowledged thankfulness to GOD. Now he was filled with bitterness, because GOD had shown forgiveness and mercy to Jonah's enemies.

In his wretched anger he pleaded with GOD to take his life. He would rather die than view a saved Nineveh. This author remembers an audience of preachers at least a third of whom became angry with him when he reminded them that Osama bin Laden had a soul and that his soul was just as valuable as any there that day. These preachers wanted vengeance for 9/11. Like Jonah, they did not love the enemies of their country. Like Jonah, they wanted these enemies to be destroyed — not saved. Like Jonah, if they did not change their hatred into love; they could not expect GOD to say well done thou good and faithful servant at the judgment day. Note what Jesus said about one's enemies.

“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:44-45).

Why are GOD's people to love their enemies, to bless those who curse them, do good to those who hate them, and pray for those who persecute them? **“That ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven”** One cannot be GOD's child and desire destruction and evil upon other human beings. He must constantly remind himself that when evil thoughts toward others are seeping into his mind, that such thoughts are not from GOD, that such thoughts do not mirror the thoughts and words of Jesus on the cross —

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Jonah 4:4 Jehovah responds to Jonah’s anger.

“Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?”

“And Jehovah said, Doest thou well to be angry?” (ASV)

“And Jehovah saith, Is doing good displeasing to thee?” (YLT)

“And the LORD said, Do you do well to be angry? (ESV)

GOD asked Jonah a very pointed and blunt question, not because He did not know the answer, but because Jonah needed to evaluate his position. Jonah needed to step back from his anger which was clouding proper thinking. GOD often asked penetrating questions of His servants, one of which is well known to Bible students: GOD said, **“Adam...Where art thou?”** GOD knew exactly where Adam was. His question was designed to cause Adam to consider why he was where he was, i.e., the guilt which caused him to try to hide in the first place.

GOD asked Jonah, **“Doest thou well to be angry?”** The phrase **“Doest thou well”** comes from **yatab**, which BDB said means *“to be good, be pleasing, be well, be glad.”* This writer believes the best translation of GOD’s question here is found in the NKJV — *“Is it right for you to be angry?”* The question then is **To whom was Jonah’s anger directed?** He was not angry with the people of Nineveh, nor at himself — he was angry with GOD. GOD wanted Jonah to stop and think about all he knew about GOD’s nature. He wanted him to stop and think about the mercy He had shown Jonah. He wanted Jonah to realize the love He had shown toward Jonah and the Ninevites in sparing

them from certain death. Jonah's anger was not good nor pleasing to GOD. It did not create joy or happiness for Jonah. Further, it accomplished nothing except sin on Jonah's account.

"Is it right to be angry because GOD is merciful toward people that one wishes to see punished?" (Himmel, p. 732).

Jonah 4:5 Jonah waits to see what will happen to Nineveh.

"So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city."

"Then Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city." (ASV)

"And Jonah goeth forth from the city, and sitteth on the east of the city, and maketh to himself there a booth, and sitteth under it in the shade, till that he seeth what is in the city." (YLT)

"Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city." (ESV)

The passage under consideration here seems to imply that Jonah wanted to see if GOD would really spare Nineveh. Or, it could suggest that he still had hopes they would be destroyed. As he had walked through the city preaching to them, he had seen their repentance being demonstrated. No doubt they, like the Psalmist, prayed for GOD's mercy.

"I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against Thee" (Psalm 41:4).

"Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our GOD is merciful" (Psalm 116:5).

Jonah needed to learn to show mercy, to have mercy, toward others.

“Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful”
(Luke 6:36).

Why did Jonah sit on the **“east side of the city?”**

Because the Tigris River was on the west side. Again, the Bible provides details which can be verified. **What did he do there?** He built a booth (**sukkah**), i.e., a temporary shelter from the hot sun. This should remind the Bible student that the Israelites had a feast which was to remind them that they had been captives in the past. It is called the Feast of Tabernacles. During this feast, they were to abandon their homes temporarily and build these booths, living in them for seven days. This originally reminded them of their captivity in Egypt and of their wilderness wandering upon GOD’s rescuing them from that bondage.

“And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month: And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as *it is* written. So the people went forth, and brought *them*, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of GOD, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of GOD. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner” (Nehemiah 8:14-18).

One cannot help but wonder if Jonah ever learned to show grace and mercy toward those he considered enemies.

Jonah 4:6-11 God teaches Jonah about pity.

“And the LORD GOD prepared a gourd, and made *it* to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But GOD prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that GOD prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, *It is* better for me to die than to live. And GOD said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, *even* unto death. Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and *also* much cattle?”

“And Jehovah GOD prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to deliver him from his evil case. So Jonah was exceeding glad because of the gourd. But GOD prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd, that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun arose, that GOD prepared a sultry east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and requested for himself that he might die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. And GOD said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said,

I do well to be angry, even unto death. And Jehovah said, Thou hast had regard for the gourd, for which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I have regard for Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" (ASV)

"And Jehovah GOD appointeth a gourd, and causeth it to come up over Jonah, to be a shade over his head, to give deliverance to him from his affliction, and Jonah rejoiceth because of the gourd with great joy. And GOD appointeth a worm at the going up of the dawn on the morrow, and it smiteth the gourd, and it drieth up. And it cometh to pass, about the rising of the sun, that GOD appointeth a cutting east wind, and the sun smiteth on the head of Jonah, and he wrappeth himself up, and asketh his soul to die, and saith, Better is my death than my life. And GOD saith unto Jonah: Is doing good displeasing to thee, because of the gourd? and he saith, To do good is displeasing to me – unto death. And Jehovah saith, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for which thou didst not labour, neither didst thou nourish it, which a son of a night was, and a son of a night perished, and I – have not I pity on Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than twelve myriads of human beings, who have not known between their right hand and their left--and much cattle!" (YLT)

"Now the LORD GOD appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But when dawn came up the next day, GOD appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. When the sun rose, GOD appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, It is better for me to die than to live. But GOD said to Jonah, Do you well to be angry for the plant? And he said, Yes I do well to be angry, angry enough to die. And the LORD said, you pity the plant for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than

120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" (ESV)

Just as GOD had **"prepared a great fish"** (kind unknown) to swallow Jonah, so now He **"prepared a gourd"** (kind unknown) to give Jonah relief from the sun. Just as GOD had directed the fish to save Jonah's life, so He directed the plant (gourd) to grow up over Jonah to provide him with shade. The booth Jonah made for himself was probably made from branches, loosely woven together to make this dwelling place. It would have provided a certain amount of shade. Just as the LORD made a fish big enough for the purpose of saving Jonah, this plant would have been big enough to provide shaded relief for him. The plant was made **"to deliver him from his grief."** The word **"grief"** comes from **ra'ra'ah**, which BDB translated as *"evil, distress, misery, injury, calamity."* Consider who caused Jonah's distress, misery and injury. Jonah caused all of his problems! Likewise, many of the problems man faces in this life, both physical and spiritual, are caused by each individual. The shade provided was much needed and appreciated by Jonah, making him joyful (**"exceedingly glad"**). **But**, Jonah needed to be taught a lesson!

Just as GOD **"prepared"** a special fish and a special plant, now He **"prepared a worm"** to accomplish what He desired. Some might say that GOD was toying with, and even cruel to, Jonah. But GOD was teaching Jonah a lesson he needed by using objects and discomfort to emphasize that lesson. The word **"worm"** (**tola' tole'ah tola'ath tola'ath**) is not used in this text as the *"wiggly"* little creature often put on a fishing hook. Here it is used to refer to some kind

of insect which feeds on plants. *“Whether it was a grub, vine-weevil, caterpillar, or cutworm is uncertain”* (Himmel, p. 7).

Just as GOD had created a great storm to teach Jonah, He now caused a **“vehement east wind”** to blow upon him. In the East, this wind is known as sirocco, which *“can cause fatigue and depression”* (Roper, p. 97) and also death. This very hot wind was blowing, and the sun was beating down on Jonah’s head, which caused him to lose his strength (**“faint”**). Jonah is pictured as *“frustrated, depressed, preoccupied with self, disappointed, and angry”* without a cause (Himmel, p. 736).

“But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire” (Matthew 5:22, emphasis added).

Jonah’s idea of justice was not the same as GOD’s. To him, justice was destroying this enemy of Israel, whether the Ninevites repented or not. He needed to learn to think like GOD, Who was willing to forgive and be happy when His creation behaved as dictated by Him. There are people just like Jonah today, who only care about their own comfort and blessing, who chaff at the physical and spiritual blessings received by others.

“Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth” (Proverbs 24:17).

“I will be glad and rejoice in Thy mercy: for Thou hast considered my trouble; Thou hast known my soul in adversities” (Psalm 31:7).

“Let all those that seek Thee rejoice and be glad in Thee: let such as love Thy salvation say continually, The LORD

be magnified" (Psalm 40:16).

Jonah's wallowing in self-pity and depression caused him to wish for himself, **"to die"** — depression. He said it was better **"to die than to live."** He reasoned that, if GOD would not do what he (puny man) wanted done, it was better not to exist. Elijah felt the same kind of depression (1 Kings 19:10).

GOD now addressed Jonah's self-pity and depression by asking him a simple question — **"Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?"** This question should have caused Jonah to stop, reflect and repent. Instead of that, he quickly stated, **"I do well to be angry, even unto death."** Consider here the ASV's translation of this verse.

"But God said to Jonah, Do you do well to be angry for the plant? And he said, Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die."

Jonah got angry because the plant he did not grow was destroyed — but he would rejoice if GOD destroyed over 120,000 souls that had repented. He reminds this author of a spoiled child he once knew, who — if he could not get his way — took his baseball and went home (when in the neighborhood there had only one baseball among the children). It would have been pure justice if GOD had taken Jonah's unforgiving, selfish and unmerciful life.

Why could not Jonah understand and accept GOD's mercy and pity? Was he so bloodthirsty that he thought GOD's mercy only belonged to those whom Jonah loved?

"...to the end of the book, God was seeking to persuade Jonah to see sinners as He sees them: as people who needed to be saved, and at whose salvation His own people should rejoice"
(Roper, p. 99).

LORD, help Thy servants think and act as Thou dost,

so that they may have that happy home with Thee in eternity!

One cannot help but wonder what happened to Jonah. Did he correct his merciless attitude, repent and rejoice for the salvation of all who will be saved?

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