

# Jonah: Old Testament New European Christadelphian Commentary

Duncan Heaster

Carelinks

PO Bo 152, Menai NSW 2234

AUSTRALIA



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First Printing: 2017

ISBN 978-0-244-03012-4

# PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. Charities such as Carelinks Ministries and the Christadelphian Advancement Trust endeavour to provide totally free copies worldwide according to resources and donations available to them. But there is a desire by many to go beyond those brief comments on each chapter, and delve deeper into the text. The New European Christadelphian commentary seeks to meet that need. As with all Divine things, beauty becomes the more apparent the closer we analyze. We can zoom in the scale of investigation to literally every letter of the words used by His Spirit. But that would require endless volumes. And academic analysis is no more nor less than that; we are to live by His word. This commentary seeks to achieve a balance between practical teaching on one hand, and a reasonable level of thorough consideration of the original text. On that side of things, you will observe in the commentary a common abbreviation: “s.w.”. This stands for “same word”; the same original Greek or Hebrew word translated [A] is used when translated [B]. This helps to slightly remove the mask of translation through which most

Bible readers have to relate to the original text.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But finally- don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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*Duncan Heaster*

dh@heaster.org



# JONAH CHAPTER 1

Jonah 1:1 *Now the word of Yahweh came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying-* "Jonah" means 'dove', and we recall the dove going out from the ark, not finding rest, returning, and then going out again to find rest away from her original sanctuary in the ark, after judgment had been poured out upon the *eretz* or land promised to Abraham (Gen. 8:8,9). This speaks of Jonah's two journeys to Nineveh; the first unfruitful, and the second fruitful. And again, water is a strong feature of the narrative, as it was in that of the flood. The dove like Jonah was saved from the water by grace.

"Amittai" means 'truth' or possibly even suggests 'the truth of Yahweh'. The final truth of the prophetic word is grace and not judgment, which is what Jonah was brought to learn. The narrative addresses the elitism which had crept into Israel, especially at the time of the restoration from Babylon. Although the book describes an event before then, at a time before Nineveh was overthrown, it was perhaps published, as it were, at that time.

Jonah 1:2 *Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city-* Quoting Gen. 10:12 about Nineveh. The archeological excavations have found an area of about 25 square kilometers all surrounded by a mighty wall. It took three days to go into the city (Jon. 3:3).

*And preach against it-* The idea is, to its face. Face to face contact is always the most effective way of witnessing, although we live in a world of social media and communication which tempts us to avoid doing this.

*For their wickedness has come up before Me-* There is no specific call to repentance. But Jonah ought to have deduced that he was not called to merely inform them that they were wicked and that God had noticed. Rather the idea was that because God had noticed and was therefore going to respond in judgment, they ought to do something- repent. The language is that used about how the wickedness of Sodom and the world before the flood came up before God (Gen. 6:5; 18:21). Jonah passed through water, which he describes as a flood (Jon. 2:3). He is presented therefore as having carried and experienced their judgment. He experienced 'death' by a flood, just as Noah's world did; and this was the experience which in essence was going to come upon Nineveh, seeing their wickedness had come before God as that of Noah's world had done. This depends the sense in which Jonah was a type of the Lord Jesus; He represented us, tasting death for every man, dying the death of the cross, the death of the criminal, the sinner. And yet after three days and nights, was resurrected from it.

*Jonah 1:3 But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish-* The idea is, a place far from the *eretz* promised to Abraham, beyond its borders. But if a boat of those times could sail on a single

voyage from Joppa to Tarshish, we can be sure that "Tarshish" has no reference to Britain. And there is no evidence that Palestine traded with Britain at that time or even knew it existed. Wherever it was, it was accessible by one voyage from Joppa. If it refers to the ancient city of Tartessus in Spain, then this was in precisely the opposite direction of Nineveh. In Jon. 4:2 Jonah states that he fled because he suspected that Yahweh would relent of His purpose to destroy Nineveh. He therefore represents the unspoken xenophobia which developed within Hebrew thinking after the restoration, a hypocritical dislike of Gentiles and assumption that ethnic Israel were the only people of God. We too can preach without any actual desire for the repentance of our audience, the exercise can often be a stroking of our own egos, in the name of 'witness', rather than a desire that some will actually respond.

*From the presence of Yahweh-* Jonah knew the theory from the well known Psalm 139:7: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, and whither shall I flee from thy presence?". But we can know Bible texts well, and yet act in a completely opposite way; see on :9. Perhaps he still laboured under the idea that God's presence was only in the *eretz* promised to Abraham, and he thought that by leaving that he could thereby flee from relationship with God. The *place* where Yahweh was revealed was understood as the face or presence of God (Gen. 4:4; 32:30). Or possibly the allusion is to how God's prophetic servants stood before His face / presence, and he

thought that by leaving the *eretz* he could resign from relationship with God and the call to prophetic service. But we cannot resign from God and our standing before Him. Judah had indeed been cast out from the presence of Yahweh (2 Kings 24:20; Jer. 23:39; 52:3), but Jonah was to learn that even when 'dead' in the seas of the Gentiles, he was not out of that presence ultimately. And this was the lesson for all Israel and Judah in their dispersion.

To stand in the presence of someone is often used in the sense of acting as one's official minister (Gen. 41:46; Deut. 1:38; 10:8; 1 Sam. 16:21f.; 1 Kings 17:1; 18:15; 2 Kings 3:14, etc.) To flee from His presence was therefore "to refuse to serve Him in this office" (Theodore Laetsch, *The Minor Prophets* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 222). But there is no way we can resign from our calling to be witnesses. We are now with the Lord, and we cannot just resign from His purpose and calling. Jonah intended to flee to Tarshish, the very end of the known world; going the very opposite direction to Nineveh. And we too need to be impressed by the reality of the fact that we can never resign from the Father and Son; we are in their grip. We cannot just 'pass' on the piercing issues of commitment day by day.

*He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going down to Tarshish; so he paid its fare, and went down into it, in*

*order to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh-* We notice the triple emphasis upon his 'going down', away from God. The term is used again in :5. See on Jon. 2:6.

Jonah 1:4 *But Yahweh sent out a great wind on the sea and there was a mighty storm on the sea, so that the ship was likely to break up-* God created a great wind, perhaps through an Angel being sent out (Ps. 104:4) with which He brought Jonah and his fellows to their knees. God later creates another great wind with which to teach Jonah something else (Jonah 4:8). Jonah ought to have perceived the same hand of the same God at work with him. Divine work and control of creation is quite a theme in Jonah- the wind, the great fish, the vine / gourd, the tiny maggot which ate it, and prepares the way for the conclusion at the end of the book, that God cares for animals too (Jon. 4:11). The extent and scope of Divine involvement in our world was something Jonah as well as Israel in captivity needed to learn. He was not only involved with the Israelite people on the territory of their land, but with all men worldwide, and even with vegetation and animals great and small. Jonah surely knew all this from the Psalms, but as noted on :3 he acted contrary to the basic Bible verses he knew and sung. This is our problem too; the implications of just one verse of the Bible or a Bible-based hymn can turn our worldview right around, if we let them.

*Jonah 1:5 Then the sailors were afraid, and every man cried to his god-* The implication was that Jonah was amongst Gentiles (see on :9), the very people he despised as unworthy of his witness. But through the whole incident of the storm, he was made to realize that he was to witness to Gentiles, indeed he had to. And this failure, like ours, prepared him for his greater witness to Gentile Nineveh.

*They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten the ship-* Circumstances repeat within the experience of God's servants; repeating examples of Biblical characters, and also those of God's children known and contemporary to us. It is the same Divine hand at work. Paul during his shipwreck experienced something similar, Acts 27:18,19 being very similar to the LXX here in Jonah; and again, it was a suffering *en route* to make a witness to the Gentiles. Paul would have been encouraged to go forward, insofar as he perceived the similarities with Jonah. We need to keep asking ourselves what Bible character has trodden our path before us, that through the comfort of the scriptures we might have hope, even if we cannot attach exact meaning to event in this life.

*But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship-* We noticed the triple emphasis upon his 'going down' in :3,

away from God. And now he goes even deeper down, and he will go even deeper, taken to the depths of the ocean by the fish. He ought to have come to repentance there, but it appears he didn't; and so Jonah had to go into the great fish and be up hard against its rib cage, a grander form of the sides of the ship. At least later, he would have perceived the similarities. Our tribulations often repeat, that we might learn the lessons we ought to have previously learnt from similar but less extreme situations.

*And he was laying down, deeply asleep-* Surely he wasn't asleep, but was giving that impression. Here we have one of many examples of where the Bible records things from the viewpoint of how they appeared to men, even if that appearance was incorrect. The language of demons is another example. We think of the Lord Jesus likewise asleep during a storm; and see how Jonah was being set up as a type of Messiah.

*Jonah 1:6 So the captain came to him and said to him, What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call on your God! Maybe your God will look to us so that we won't perish-* Jonah was the only one who didn't apparently pray to his God, even though he is presented as the only one on board who had a relationship with the true God. He would have reflected that despite this, he had not used that relationship as he might have done, in order to save both himself and Gentiles. The Gentiles were more zealous for their gods than Jonah was.

The captain himself made the effort to come down to Jonah to ask him to pray. Perhaps Jonah thought that Yahweh was only approachable from within the *eretz* promised to Abraham, and stubbornly refused to entertain the possibility that God could be prayed to from anywhere. This was a lesson which the captives in Babylon and Assyria had to learn, and so the book of Jonah addresses that question. Or maybe Jonah had given up with a God of so much grace. We note that "Your God" is *ha Elohim*, as if to imply that the captain was driven to the suspicion that there was only one true God, *the* God; and it was the God of Israel, the God of this rebellious Hebrew passenger. As with Jonah, God worked with those pagans to elicit from them a true recognition of Himself.

Jonah 1:7 *They all said to each other, Come, let's cast lots, that we may know who is responsible for this evil that is on us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah-* Jonah had the opportunity to repent in front of them all; but he doesn't. So the lot fell upon Jonah to elicit repentance from him. We too could avoid so many problems, for ourselves and others, if we repented earlier, rather than circumstance arising which forces us to public repentance.

Jonah 1:8 *Then they asked him, Tell us, please, for whose cause this evil is on us. What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country? Of what people are you?-* This was to elicit from Jonah a statement of his own

biography, which was used by God to elicit true repentance. It is no bad thing for us all to mentally prepare such a biography, that we might realize who we are before God.

*Jonah 1:9 He said to them, I am a Hebrew, and I fear Yahweh the God of heaven-* "Hebrew" was a term always used either by or to foreigners. Again we are given the impression that he was on a Gentile ship; see on :5. The implication could be that he feared Yahweh's judgment. For in :10 we read that Jonah told them that he was fleeing from Yahweh's call. So he could hardly claim that he was truly fearing Yahweh when he had been so disobedient to Him.

*Who has made the sea and the dry land-* The Gentiles thought there were separate gods of the sea and of the dry land. Jonah in his extremity is brought to realize and teach that Yahweh is the only true God, God of both sea and dry land. But he had fled from the presence of Yahweh, thinking that Yahweh was only really active and present in the land of Israel. Now he was being driven to realize that God was also the God of the sea, symbolic as it clearly is in scripture of the Gentile nations. Jonah came to this realization quite naturally; we marvel at the way God taught him so much so quickly, or rather, brought Jonah to realize the truth in reality of that which he theoretically knew. See on :3.

*Jonah 1:10 Then were the men extremely afraid and said to*

*him, What is this that you have done?*- This can be read not as a question, but an exclamation: "What ever have you done!". They realized the extreme sinfulness of what Jonah had done, more than he did. The wind and waves all around them were clearly sent from God, and were witness enough to the seriousness of the sin of denying others salvation. We must ask whether implicitly or explicitly we have done the same. For it is a serious matter. Who can be baptized or fellowshiped is a question we must ask ourselves; and it's no good assuming that we are innocent of our part in barring others from these things just because we are mere members of a church or group who does this.

*For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of Yahweh, because he had told them-* He may have done so whilst explaining to them why he feared God's judgment upon him (:9). Or perhaps he had earlier jokingly but in truth told them that he was a prophet of Yahweh who was running away from Him, seeing Jonah considered that He only operated in the land of Israel. And now they were all being taught how wrong that was.

*Jonah 1:11 Then they said to him, What shall we do to you, that the sea may be calm to us? For the sea grew more and more stormy-* They realized that their salvation depended upon Jonah; note the contrast between "you" and "us". This

was to set Jonah up to appreciate that he and his mission really could be used by God to save Gentiles. It was clear that destruction was imminent and not a moment could be wasted, or else that destruction was going to take away the lives of the sailors unless Jonah was proactive. This was to prepare Jonah for his work with Nineveh; in a sense, their salvation depended upon him being proactive.

Jonah 1:12 *He said to them, Take me up-* The Hebrew means ‘to lift up’ in the sense of exaltation; the very idea used by the Lord to describe His exaltation and ‘lifting up’ on the cross. The language of Jonah suffering in the fish and drowning in “great waters” is full of allusions to Messianic Psalms which point forward to the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus- and His saving out of it in resurrection.

*And throw me into the sea. Then the sea will be calm for you; for I know that because of me this great storm is on you-* Jonah reasoned that Yahweh sought to kill him in judgment, and he didn't see the point in the Gentiles perishing along with him. This was a natural conclusion on his part; he was being brought to the position where he did in fact care whether Gentiles perished or not. God's patient efforts to educate Jonah were amazing; and He tries likewise with us, working through our failures to teach the lessons. Jonah recognizes that his judgment is just; being drowned in the sea of nations but miraculously preserved by grace makes Jonah a representative of sinful Israel, who would finally accept

the justice of their punishments (Lev. 26:41,43). And yet at the same time, Jonah is clearly typical of the Lord Jesus, who died so that a great company of Gentiles might be saved (Jn. 11:50). The Lord's death was as if He was drowning in the stormy sea (Ps. 69:1,2). His three days in the grave was clearly represented by Jonah's time inside the fish. The Lord represented sinful Israel, and yet at the same time, His death brought both them and the Gentiles to salvation. Jonah opens up to us the real import of the Lord's representative sacrifice, dying as the representative of God's sinful people, and yet thereby their saviour.

Jonah 1:13 *Nevertheless the men rowed hard to get them back to the land-* Literally, they 'broke through', i.e. the waves. Jonah would have later reflected on their humanity, not wishing for one Hebrew to perish. This is in stark contrast to his indifference as to the perishing of multiple thousands of Gentiles, and the book of Jonah concludes by recording Jonah being rebuked for this. And who wrote the book of Jonah? Presumably, Jonah himself, under Divine inspiration. The way he concludes it is therefore his own recognition of how his inhumanity and indifference was worse than that of the Gentiles whom he had so despised. The book is really his own confession of utter guilt, having come to repentance and marvel at God's grace by the time he wrote it.

*But they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them-* The men deeply believed Jonah's story, and were driven by his suggestion to pray to Yahweh (:14). "Tempestuous" implies a whirlwind, of the type associated with the cherubim in Ezekiel's visions. Jonah and the sailors were really witnessing a theophany, so powerful that they could only be saved from it by accepting Yahweh as God and [in Jonah's case] repenting.

*Jonah 1:14 Therefore they cried to Yahweh and said, We beg you Yahweh, we beg you, don't let us die for the sake of this man's life, and don't lay on us innocent blood; for you, Yahweh, have done as it pleased You-* As Jonah heard these Gentiles praying to Yahweh rather than their own gods, he must have realized that his failure had led them to Yahweh; and that Gentiles were quite capable of turning away from their gods to whom they had fruitlessly been praying just a short time before.

When Jonah heard the men of Nineveh praying that they 'might not perish', he should've thought back to how the men in the boat to Tarshish prayed the very same words. The men in the ship prayed earnestly that they 'might not perish', both in the storm and for the sake of Jonah's life (1:6,14). The men of Nineveh prayed to God that they too 'might not perish' (Jon. 3:9)- the record uses the same Hebrew word in both cases. Jonah should've learnt his lesson; the men in the ship didn't perish because of his self-sacrifice- and the

implication could be that they turned to Israel's God as a result of the whole dreadful experience. And Jonah's self-sacrificial preaching, just as painful for him as voluntarily suggesting he be thrown to his death, was eliciting in Jonah the same response from those he was preaching to. But he couldn't maintain the intensity of the self-sacrificial life of witness; he gave up and got angry that they were responding, and, it seems, stopped preaching once he had entered into the city and the response had started. Take another lesson from this; we would likely have been inspired to continue preaching by such a good response. But for Jonah, the response was what discouraged him. What is encouraging for one in the work of witness is a great discouragement for another.

Jonah 1:15 *So they took up Jonah, and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased its raging-* This continues the similarity with the Lord asleep in the storm and then the storm suddenly ending (Lk. 8:24), confirming Jonah as a type of the Lord Jesus, even in his rebellion. The sea "stood still" (Heb.), recalling the miracle at the Red Sea. The Gentile sailors were bidden realize that they too could participate in such a great deliverance, through identity with the people of God.

Jonah 1:16 *Then the men feared Yahweh exceedingly; and they offered a sacrifice to Yahweh and made vows-* They

sacrificed and animal whilst onboard, and made vows which would have been fulfilled when they got to land. Those vows were surely to accept Yahweh as their God. Perhaps as Jonah hit the waters and the storm ceased, the last thing he heard in the sudden silence was their vowing to make Yahweh their God. And this was why from within the fish he also made vows and promised that he would keep them and also offer sacrifice when back on dry land (Jon. 2:9).

*Jonah 1:17 Yahweh prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah-* As noted on :4, this continues the theme of God being actively at work not just with Israelites outside the land of Israel, not just with Gentiles, but also with animals, the natural creation and vegetation like the vine / gourd.

*And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights-* The Lord quoted this as being typical of His time in the grave (see on Mt. 12:40). Likewise we have noted that Jonah's being asleep in the boat and then the storm ceasing was also typical of the Lord. But Jonah made no active effort in these matters; the events happened to him. Just as he brought Gentiles to believe in Yahweh and worked to save them (:12) without making any conscious effort. All this was to show him God's grace; he was saved and used by grace, and this was intended to prepare him for the next stage of his life, which was the journey to Nineveh in order to offer them

God's grace based upon his own experience of that grace. We can also see phases in our own lives, for which we are educated by experience through our previous failures.

As Jonah was three days in the fish and then came up out of it to preach to the Gentiles, so the Lord would be three days in the grave and then would rise- as a sign to the Jews. But how was His resurrection a sign to them, seeing they never saw His risen body? Yet the Lord's reasoning demands that His resurrection be a sign to them, just as tangible as the re-appearance of the drowned Jonah. But, the Jews never saw Him after the resurrection...? The resolution must be that in the preaching of the risen Jesus by those in Him, it was as if the Jews saw Him, risen and standing as a sign before them, every bit as real as the Jonah who emerged from the fish after three days.

Matthew's Gospel, which refers to this as a type of the Lord's time in the grave, doesn't seem to teach a literal 72 hours for Jesus in the grave. But a 'day' can mean 'part of a day'- as in 1 Kings 20:29; Esther 4:16-5:1. The term is surely used to highlight the connection with Jonah's experience.

## JONAH CHAPTER 2

Jonah 2:1 *Then Jonah prayed to Yahweh his God out of the great fish's belly-* Did Jonah die? It could be argued that he was cast into the sea, drowned, and his body went to the bottom of the sea. But there, he was swallowed by the "great fish", and revived within the fish's belly. And from there he prayed to God, reflecting upon his death experience. This would then heighten the connection with the Lord's death and resurrection. To pray to God on reviving inside the fish was surely natural and inevitable for any man. But as noted on Jon. 1, Jonah was led almost involuntarily to realize the error of his previous positions. He could pray to God from outside the land / *eretz* promised to Abraham, and far from the temple or any organized religious apparatus.

Jonah 2:2 *He said, I called because of my affliction to Yahweh and He answered me-* "Affliction" translates the same word used of Israel's afflictions for disobedience (Dt. 31:17; Neh. 9:27; Is. 37:3) and the time of Jacob's trouble (Gen. 35:3); Jonah was the representative of sinful Israel, bearing their punishment at the same time as he represented the sinless Lord Jesus in His time of dying. In this sense, the Lord Jesus was afflicted in all their affliction / condemnation for sin (Is. 63:9 s.w.). Here we have profound insight into the representative nature of the Lord's death; He died sinless, and yet intensely identified with the sinful people of God and their condemnation. Jonah's prayer in Jon. 2 is shot through

with allusions to various Psalms; here to Ps. 120:1. God's word was in his heart, but only through Divine teaching and affliction due to his own sinfulness... could he come to know it as true for him personally. And this is a path we too pass through.

*Out of the belly of Sheol I cried. You heard my voice-* Here we learn clearly that *sheol* refers not to a place of fire and torment for the wicked, but to a covered place, the grave. And as noted on :1, it would support the idea that Jonah did actually die by drowning, and the belly of the fish became his tomb. The Hebrew words for "cried" and "heard" differ by only one rather similar letter; a subtle difference. Our cry in prayer and God's hearing are intimately connected. He is not truly not far from every one of us.

Jonah 2:3 *For You threw me into the depths, into the heart of the seas-* Jonah perceived God's hand in what others did to him, and that is an abiding lesson to take with us in life's path. He alludes to Ps. 88:6. The same word is used of God casting His people out of their land (Dt. 29:28), out of His presence (2 Kings 24:20; Jer. 52:3)- just as Jonah felt he had been (see on :4).

*The water was all around me. All Your waves and Your breakers passed over me-* This confirms the suggestion made on :1, that Jonah was not instantly swallowed by the fish. The pictures in children's Bibles are nearly all wrong: of a

grinning whale waiting eagerly to catch the body thrown by the sailors from the boat. Jonah was surrounded by waves and went down "into the heart of the seas". The Psalms allusions are to Ps. 42:7; 69:1,2,14,15, and Ps. 69 is clearly a foretaste of the Lord's feelings on the cross. He felt there as condemned sinners like Jonah felt in the time of their condemnation. He never sinned, and was personally unworthy of condemnation. But that doesn't mean that He doesn't know how sinners feel now, as they are condemned in real time for their sins by the court of Heaven; nor how the condemned will feel at the last day. Judges pass down sentences which they have never experienced; but the Lord has experienced the feelings of condemned men, whilst being morally innocent. In this we see His complete identity with sinful man.

The AV has "floods". Jonah experienced death by flooding; as noted on Jon. 1:2, he thereby bore the condemnation due to Nineveh (Jon. 1:2 cp. Gen. 6:5), and could therefore give Nineveh a real hope of repentance and salvation thanks to his experience.

Jonah 2:4 *I said*- The language and ideas are similar to those of Hezekiah (Is. 38:11), who felt he was condemned to death. Jonah in the fish is now recalling his last conscious thoughts before his lungs filled with water for the last time (see on :1). So his later thoughts in this chapter are the wonder of a

man saved from condemnation by utter grace.

*'I have been banished from Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple'* - This is absolutely the language of God's exiled people, recalling the statement in Solomon's prayer that wherever they were scattered for their sins, they could always look again towards the temple and pray (1 Kings 8:38). Jonah was clearly representative of Israel. He had chosen to go out of God's presence (Jon. 1:3), and so he was being confirmed in that desire. He was being made to realize how terrible it was to in fact resign from God and His presence. His personal sin, however, must not be overlooked; for it was that which called forth all this judgment. It was not the sin of idolatry nor lukewarm response to Yahweh, but rather that of intolerance, pride and avoiding the call to witness. All of which things we at times have been guilty of and are continually tested with.

Jonah 2:5 *The waters surrounded me, even to the soul-* Alluding to Ps. 40:12; 69:1, both of which Psalms are quoted in the New Testament about the Lord's death. See on :3.

*The deep was around me-* The word used for sin and its judgment compassing around the condemned (Ps. 18:4; 40:12; 116:3).

*The weeds were wrapped around my head-* Confirming the

suggestion in :1 that Jonah drowned and his body sunk to the bottom of the ocean. Perhaps he found himself inside the fish with seaweed wrapped around his body, as if they were his grave clothes and the burial napkin around his head. But "wrapped" is literally 'to bind around' and is the word usually used for healing and restoration- which was to come about through death and resurrection.

Jonah 2:6 *I went down*- The same word used of his going down to Joppa, down into the ship, and further down into the very hold of the ship (see on Jon. 1:3,5). He was brought down as low as could be, to be exalted in due time. This is indeed the path we shall all pass through; it's a race to the bottom.

Ps. 55:23 speaks of the wicked, those who had 'broken the covenant' which Jonah was so proud to be part of, being 'brought down' into "destruction"; and these very same two Hebrew words occur together in Jonah 2:6. They also occur together in Ez. 28:8, speaking of how the Gentile king of Tyre was to be 'brought down' to "the pit". This would have been the sort of prophecy which nationalistic Jonah would have loved to hear; but now he recognized that he was essentially like a wicked Gentile, and had shared their condemnation- but been graciously saved from it. The preaching of Jonah is surely our example.

*To the bottoms of the mountains; the earth barred me in forever: yet have You brought up my life from the pit, Yahweh my God-* This clearly states that Jonah died and was only then swallowed by the fish; see on :1. And he went to the very bottom of the ocean, into the deepest ravine on the seabed, and had the impression of the permanence of death, barred in forever, alluding to Job 17:16. This was how low down he had to be brought, such was his pride, and such was the significance of the work Yahweh wished to do with him; see on Jon. 1:3. "From the pit" is AV "from corruption", deepening the similarities with the Lord's resurrection (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27,31). Ps. 71:20 is also in view, where the Psalmist is brought out of "affliction" (s.w. :2), out of the pit to new life.

*Jonah 2:7 When my soul ebbed away within me-* Jonah recalled the feelings of death (Ps. 42:6; 73:26; 142:3). The language is suggestive of how a person in the final minutes of palliative care ebbs back and forth until they cease breathing and the heart stops. It is the word used of the ebbing away of Judah's life in the Babylonian invasion (Lam. 2:12,19); again we see Jonah presented as representative of God's people under condemnation. The way he describes those feelings make him a parade example of resurrection. Jonah's life "ebbed away" inside the fish- and a very similar word is used about his experience as he sat under the gourd (Jonah 4:8). In the fish, Jonah prayed that God would save his life,

and was heard. But when he was made to feel the same again, he instead prayed God to take away his life. Perhaps this shows that even when we respond well to circumstances, those same circumstances may repeat in order to test us as to whether we will continue to make that right response.

*I remembered Yahweh. My prayer came in to You, into Your holy temple-* David also felt that his prayers came into God's holy temple even before that temple was built (Ps. 11:4; 18:6). Jonah was brought to realize that the true temple presence of God was in Heaven and not in a stone building in Jerusalem. It is only desperation which leads us to these kinds of perceptions; that God is so real, that He is outside of organized religion. Israel too were afflicted as Jonah but the prayer of the faithful came into God (Ps. 102:1 s.w. Jon. 2:2 "affliction").

*Jonah 2:8 Those who regard lying vanities forsake their own mercy-* This is a profound truth; true grace ["mercy" is *hesed*] and salvation is only found in Yahweh the God of Israel. To forsake Him is to forsake our own access to mercy and grace. Jonah was surely reflecting upon how the sailors had begged their idols and gods for salvation, and not found it. Only Yahweh had provided such saving grace, both to them and to Jonah. This reflection was surely to motivate Jonah to now go and try to persuade the Ninevites of Yahweh's grace. Jonah is constantly quoting from the Psalms, and here he may have in mind Ps. 31:6: "I have hated them

that regard lying vanities". But now Jonah doesn't hate the idolaters personally, but rather perceives the tragedy of the fact that they are rejecting their own access to Yahweh's grace. Yahweh is all about mercy, or grace; again, Ps. 59:17 "the God of my mercy" is in mind. But we preclude His grace if we trust in the lying vanities of this world.

*Jonah 2:9 But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving, I will pay that which I have vowed-* Jonah is repeating the words of the sailors (Jon. 1:16), whom he has just been thinking about in :8. But he is also repeating the words of Ps. 3:8; 116:17,18. He comes to realize that those Gentile sailors had in their desperation come to the spirit of Yahweh's inspired words, and to the very songs which were at the core of the Jewish religion. He came to realize that he could not from that location within a fish offer a sacrifice, and so all he could do was offer the sacrifice of praise. He was being taught that beyond ritual and organized religion, there is the real relationship with God in the Spirit. That praise is the essential sacrifice is recognized throughout the Bible (Ps. 54:6; Heb. 13:15); it was the essence of the new covenant (Jer. 33:11), which Jonah was [like Israel in captivity] being prodded towards.

Presumably his vow was to be obedient to his commission of preaching to Nineveh. And yet despite the intensity of his

sincerity whilst within the fish, we find that when it comes to it, he doesn't perform the vow at all well in that he loses the spirit of grace. We too, one moment, can be awed by our experience of grace and desire to give our very souls in order to share that grace with others; but then the old pride, bitterness and prejudices so easily return.

There are a number of Old Testament examples of preaching the word after becoming aware of the depth of one's own sins. Consider Jonah preaching the second time, with the marks in his body after three days in the whale, admitting his rebellion against Yahweh, pleading with them to respond to His word. Reflect how when his head was wrapped around with seaweed, at the bottom of the sea at the absolute end of mortal life, he made a vow to God, which he then fulfilled, presumably in going back to preach to Nineveh (Jonah 2:9). His response to having confessed his sins and daring to believe in God's forgiveness, turning again towards His temple even from underwater, was to resolve to preach to others if he was spared his life. And this he did, although as with so many of us, the pureness of his initial evangelical zeal soon flaked. Or consider Manasseh, 2 Chron. 33:16; Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. 19:3 cp. 18:31; 19:2; Josiah, 2 Chron. 34:29,32; Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 3:29; 4:2...

*Salvation belongs to Yahweh-* 'Jesus' in Hebrew is Yahoshua, the salvation of Yah. Jonah was brought to understand the essence of salvation in Jesus.

Jonah 2:10 *Yahweh spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah on the dry land-* Again we see God in harmony with nature and in personal communion with it. He created the vine for shelter, the tiny worm which ate it, the great fish, and the storm. And uses absolutely all things to reveal His grace. To be vomited out is the language used of Israel being vomited out of their land (Lev. 18:25,28; 20:22). Even in the moment of his salvation, Jonah was identified with sinful Israel in their condemnation, and was thereby the pattern for their salvation, and a clear prediction of the Lord's saving experiences.

The 'resurrected' Jonah was a type of the Lord- and he was a 'sign' to the Ninevites presumably in that he still bore in his body the marks of a man who had been three days within a fish. It could be that the fish beached itself, and vomited Jonah out of its stomach in its death throes (this is how beached whales meet their end). In this case, the fish would have drawn the attention of the local population, as would have the man with bleached hair and strange skin who walked away from it. We too as witnesses of Christ will have something about us that is unintentionally striking in the eyes of those with whom we mix. There was no human chance that Jonah would be listened to when he came to preach judgment against Nineveh. Some guy standing on the edge of town, saying 'You're all gonna be destroyed'. People would have laughed, ignored him, or told him to shut up. But there was something about him that was gripping and

arresting. He was living proof that the judgment of God is real, and that His mercy is just as real. Presumably Jonah must have said far more than "Nineveh is going to be destroyed".

It is a worthwhile speculation that for Jonah to be a sign to the Ninevites by reason of being three days in the whale (Mt. 12:38-40), he must have borne in his body the marks of his experience for all to see, as our Lord did. Being inside the fish for that period may have made his flesh change colour or bear some other physical mark so that he could be a sign to them of what had happened. Doubtless he recounted his story to them- so that they were encouraged by the fact of God's love to the resurrected Jonah to repent and likewise throw themselves on God's mercy. In all this we see Jonah as a type of Christ. They would have looked upon that man as we look upon Jesus, to see the love of God manifested in him; they responded by repenting in sackcloth, casting off their materialism, and living in a way that showed their complete belief that "the judge stands before the door". What is our response to Jonah / Jesus?

## JONAH CHAPTER 3

Jonah 3:1 *The word of Yahweh came to Jonah the second time saying-* God's patience is amazing. Jonah failed the first time and was given a second chance, but his failure was used to prepare him. Jonah has several parallels to Elijah, who likewise struggled with spiritual elitism and judgmentalism. He too was sent a second time with his commission to Israel (1 Kings 19:4). Jonah quotes Elijah's words in Jon. 4:3. Perhaps the apostles likewise received a second commission to preach to the Gentiles after resisting that given to them just before the Lord's ascension.

The boat was not far from land- for the sailors tried to row the boat to land. Jonah would have come ashore somewhere on the coasts of Israel. We are left to imagine him walking away up the beach from the dying fish, naked, disfigured by the acids of the fish's belly, determined to pay his vows of sharing God's grace with others, getting some clothes, gathering some money, and making his way on camel to Nineveh. In this he is our pattern. In the parable of the two sons, the Lord divides us into two groups- those who respond to a calling to 'go' by saying they will, but don't go; and those who refuse to go but afterwards go. This is clearly an allusion to Jonah. But Jonah is thus made typical of each and every one of us.

Jonah 3:2 *Arise, go to Nineveh-* Earlier, Jonah had been told the same; but he 'arose' and got a ship to Tarshish (Jon.

1:2,3). He had been bidden by the captain to "arise" and relate with his God (Jon. 1:6). Circumstances repeat in our lives in order to help us do correctly what we were asked to do by God the first time. See on :6.

*That great city, and preach to it the message that I give you-* The size of the city is mentioned because Jonah was intended to see the tragedy of so many people being lost. And the book of Jonah concludes with this same point (Jon. 4:11). The tragedy of lost humanity ought to impress itself deeply upon us, as we see the lights of a city beneath us from an airplane, or as we see crowds streaming past us on a street. We wonder whether "the message" given was indeed simply limited to what is recorded in :4: "In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!". Perhaps there was also a call to repentance, which Jonah didn't mention because he wanted to see Nineveh destroyed.

*Jonah 3:3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of Yahweh-* This time he was obedient, when previously he had been told to arise and go to Nineveh, and had arisen and went to Tarshish (Jon. 1:2,3).

*Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey across-* The Old Testament reflects that God has a heart for all humanity- not just Israel. Nineveh was a great city *to God*, and it grieved Him that it might have to be destroyed (Jonah 3:3)- He even was sensitive to the plight of

the animals there. The sensitive heart of God becomes all the more sensitive to us, His chosen people. The archeological excavations have found an area of about 100 square kilometers all surrounded by a mighty wall. It was indeed a great city, comprised of three or four smaller towns (Jon. 1:2). It was large enough to contain 120,000 young children (Jon. 4:11), suggesting a city of over half a million, with a high population density.

*Jonah 3:4 Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey-* The record seems to stress his reluctance and disobedience. He only started preaching after he had walked for one day within the city, when it took three days to walk across the city; despite the high population density discovered by archaeologists and required by the large figure given for children (see on Jon. 4:11).

*And he cried out and said-* He initially refused to “cry” the message of repentance to Nineveh; he wanted to be an incognito prophet. But an incognito prophet is a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron. So the Lord brought about a situation in which he desperately “cried” to God; and then told him to go and “cry” to Nineveh. The very same Hebrew words are used about his crying to God and his crying / proclamation to Nineveh (Jonah 1:2; 2:2; 3:2,4). Jonah was forced by circumstance to share his relationship with God with the world around him which he despised. The Lord wants to use us as His candle, and He will arrange situations in life to enable this. The family at Bethany may have been an example

of this. The Jews had commanded “that if any man knew where he was, he should shew it” (Jn. 11:57). And “Jesus *therefore*... came to Bethany” (Jn. 12:1 RV). He purposefully attracted attention to His connection with the Bethany home. And so it was that “much people of the Jews learned that he was there”(Jn. 12:9), and the context makes it clear that this was a source of witness to them (Jn. 12:10,11). The Lord sought to expose their secret discipleship, to take the bucket off their candle. And He will do likewise with us. Jonah is of course the great example.

*In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!*- I suggested on :2 that Jonah may have purposefully omitted any call to repentance. He wanted the city to be destroyed.

"Overthrown" recalls the triple emphasis using the same word that Sodom was "overthrown" (Gen. 19:21,25,29). But Abraham had interceded that it might not be, and we are left to conclude from the record in Gen. 18 that if Abraham had had more spiritual vision, he could have asked God to spare the city for even the sake of one. And God would have heard. But Jonah is exactly the opposite; he didn't intercede for the city, and instead wished its overthrow.

It took Jonah three days to walk through Nineveh (3:3). On the first day in the city, he told them that in 40 days God would destroy them; it follows that by the time he was in the middle of the city he was telling them that they had 37 days left. So too the Jews had between 37 and 40 years notice of the destruction of Jerusalem.

Jonah 3:5 *The people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from their greatest even to their least-* It is often commented that Nineveh was ultimately destroyed, and therefore their repentance was insincere. Perhaps so, but God was very sensitive to any repentance and respected it, even if the intensity of repentance was not continued. However, the Lord states clearly that there will be men of Nineveh who arise in judgment at the last day and are accepted into God's Kingdom, along with the Queen of Sheba, whereas the Jews of the Lord's day will be rejected (Mt. 12:41). What knowledge did the Ninevites and the queen of Sheba have? The queen of Sheba had the knowledge of Yahweh's moral requirements as taught in Solomon's Proverbs. It's unclear how much correct theology she was taught; and if correct theology is so critically important, we would expect to hear of Solomon teaching it to her, before reading that she shall arise at the last day and be saved. We don't read of her going back to her country clutching scrolls of the law of Moses. Maybe she was illiterate. But we read of her awed at the moral appeal of Yahweh worship. Likewise the men of Nineveh heard only a brief message from Jonah- that Yahweh was going to destroy them. We would expect to read of Jonah eagerly expounding true theology to them and giving them scrolls of the writings of Moses and the prophets; but we don't, and we get the impression he had no interest in sharing Israelite theology with Gentiles anyway. But those men, many

of them illiterate and with no access to the written word of Yahweh, shall arise in salvation at the last day. It was the moral appeal of Yahweh and their sense of His claim upon them which made them responsible to His judgment and thereby capable of salvation seeing they accepted that claim. This sets the level of knowledge required for responsibility to judgment, and for salvation, far lower than where many have set it.

*Jonah 3:6 The news reached the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne-* We noted on :2 that the word "arise" runs like a theme throughout the book of Jonah. Jonah had been told to "arise" in response to God's word and had not done so (Jon. 1:2,3). The king of Nineveh arose in response to that same Divine word. The idea is to present the Gentiles as more responsive to God's word than even His own prophet, let alone His own people. And the book of Jonah was presumably written by Jonah; in his spiritual maturity, he reflects upon all this, and perceives, and narrates, the paucity of his own response.

*Took off his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes-* Sackcloth and ashes are Biblically associated with repentance. We wonder why the king did this. Why listen to some wandering Jewish preacher guy who just rocked up with a message of doom, which we can infer he didn't preach very enthusiastically and with no specific call to repentance? The same question arises as to why John the

Baptist, who "did no miracle", could get large numbers of Jews to repent. I suggest it was the personality and experience of the preacher which gave credibility to the message. It has been claimed there was an eclipse of the sun around this time, but that passes, and so it was the personality of Jonah, carefully developed by God, which led to Nineveh's repentance. And so it is today; technique and carrots will not elicit real, lasting repentance. So much depends upon personal contact with a preacher who is a credible example; and Jonah, perhaps with bleached skin from his time inside the whale, was proof enough of the reality of Divine judgment as well as Divine grace.

*Jonah 3:7 He made a proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor animal, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water-* The sensitivity of God towards animals which the book of Jonah stresses was reflected in that of the king. The king took seriously the threat of total destruction; he realized that God had in view to destroy the entire city with all that was in it (see on Jon. 4:11). And he therefore wished absolutely everyone and everything within the city, even animals, to reflect repentance. "Proclamation" is the same word translated "cry" in Jon. 1:5, where the Gentile sailors 'cried' to their gods and then ended up crying to Yahweh. The Gentile sailors and the Gentile Ninevites are clearly presented in parallel; Jonah

ought to have learnt from the final repentance of the sailors that the Ninevites would likewise respond. His desire for them *not* to respond is therefore all the more obnoxious. The Hebrew for "decree" is literally 'taste'; it is the same word used for how nobody was to "taste" anything. The idea is that the king perceived or tasted the reality of judgment, and he ordered his people to have the same taste or perception. It could be that the city was saved because of the personal repentance of the king, and his preaching of that.

*Jonah 3:8 But let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and animal, and let them cry mightily to God. Yes, let them turn each one from his evil way-* There is a sense of mutuality and rapport built up between the preacher and the hearer in all successful preaching. Jonah "cried" to Nineveh (Jonah 1:2; 3:2,4) and they "cried" to God in response to his 'crying' to them- the same Hebrew words are used (Jonah 3:5,8). As Jonah cried to God from the belly of the fish, so the Ninevites were inspired- presumably by what he related to them of his own life- to cry mightily to God for undeserved deliverance.

The language here is exactly that of Jeremiah in appealing for Judah to turn from their evil ways and cry to God in repentance in order to avert the planned destruction by Babylon (Jer. 25:5; 36:3,7). Again, Gentile repentance is being held up in contrast to Jewish disobedience. This is quite a theme in Jonah. One function of the book of Jonah is

to appeal for God's people to repent, to take an example from the Ninevites. And this is how the Lord uses the book, in appealing for the Israel of His day to repent and avert the planned destruction of AD70. Perhaps Jonah was prophesying after some judgments upon Israel or Judah which the Assyrians were aware of; they perceived the similarities between themselves and God's judged people, and repented. This would have been in line with God's intentions regarding judging His people; that the Gentiles would see it and fear Him because of it. See on :9.

*And from the violence that is in his hands-* Violence was what Nineveh was ultimately destroyed for (Nah. 2:11,12; 3:1). It was a characteristic of Assyria, as the prophets often mention. They were asked to repent of their lead personal characteristic which they were proud of. To repent of that which has become our own very self definition is so hard; but this is the radical call of God's word.

Jonah 3:9 *Who knows-* God may change His intended judgments; He frames or plans judgment, but may change from that plan (Jer. 18:11). But we can in no way presume upon this, it is only of His grace; the same phrase is used in this context in 2 Sam. 12:22; Joel 2:14.

*Whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger-* God does change. It is as simple as that. He is only unchanging in that His grace to the sons of Jacob remains a permanent feature of His character (Mal. 3:6). A

God this open and this sensitive to even change His own stated, published intentions was the God known to Moses, who got Him to change His plan of destroying Israel as a nation. But this is the God unknown to all legalistic religion.

*So that we might not perish?*- This is the word used of Israel's perishing under Divine judgment for their sins (Dt. 4:26 and often). I suggested on :8 that Nineveh may have learnt from the perishing of Israel and therefore repented. It is the same word used of the perishing of the Gentile sailors which was averted because of their repentance and turning to Yahweh (Jon. 1:6,14). Perhaps some of the sailors were Assyrians and had sent word back to Nineveh. The vine likewise perished (Jon. 4:10 s.w.), and the point was that God made to perish that which He had long laboured for, and that perishing was for Jonah's sake. And He did not want to make Nineveh perish because of Jonah's nationalism and elitism.

*Jonah 3:10 God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. God relented of the disaster which He said He would do to them, and He didn't do it-* Their turning led to God's turning. This is how sensitive He is to human repentance, even if He knows that as in the case of some at Nineveh, it will not last long.

How was it that one unknown man could turn up in a huge city and make all of them believe that judgment was really

coming, and they really must repent? Why ever listen to this one man? He must surely have told them the story of his own disobedience, experience of judgment, and gracious salvation. There was something about him that proved to that city that this had really happened; that there was and is a God of judgment above. Perhaps the “sign” of the prophet Jonah was in that 3 days in the fish had bleached his hair, made him thin, making him look arrestingly different. Whatever it was, his antitypical experience of fellowship with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus was enough to arrest a whole city in its tracks. Again, the more real, the more credible.

Mt. 12:41 says that "The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation", Israel of the first century. We must read in an ellipsis, '[the people of] this generation'. For individuals and not entire generations will be judged.

'Standing up' is possibly an allusion to the resurrection of the responsible at the last day, but more likely the figure is of a judge arising in judgment to state the verdict; which in this case, is condemnation. The Lord in Mt. 12:27 had spoken of how the children of the Jews would judge those Jews in the last day. The Lord clearly seems to envisage the judgment process as having a public dimension to it. The fact one person was spiritually responsive, given a similar or harder set of circumstances than what another has had who did not respond, will therefore as it were be the judgment of the person who didn't respond. It clearly won't be merely an awards ceremony nor a yes / no decision, but rather will

context and precedent from others be taken into account. 'If *they* responded and *you* did not, given similar circumstances, then *they* will condemn *you*' - that seems to be the Lord's reasoning.

He says that the Ninevites repented "At the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, one greater than Jonah is here!". This effectively is a noun, referring to "the preaching" as in the message of Jonah, and yet also Jonah was himself the preaching or the message. And that was why he was so credible as a preacher. What he preached was judgment to come, and the Ninevites repented on hearing it. The Lord was teaching not only judgment to come, but was making specific the call to repentance implicit within that message, and urging people to accept God's grace. Hence those who heard Him were even more guilty before the Ninevites. Jonah's preaching occurred *after* he had been three days within the whale; after the Lord had been three days in the earth, He too would preach mightily, through the ministry of those 'in Him' who were effectively His representatives and appealed on His behalf. But He reasons as if that appeal was already being made- as if in essence He had already passed through the cross and resurrection. This is not the only time He reasons in this way; in proclaiming Himself Lord, the serpent lifted up on the pole, the One who had already "overcome the world", He reasoned as if the successful outcome of His death had already occurred. Such was His faith that He would come forth triumphant.

Their repentance according to Mt. 12:41 was so sincere that it lasted a lifetime; for at the last day, they shall arise in judgment over the Jews of the first century and condemn them. Some of the Ninevites will be in God's Kingdom and accepted at the day of judgment.

## JONAH CHAPTER 4

Jonah 4:1 *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry-* Jonah wanted to see Nineveh's destruction. The 'grace' side of God, His desire for human repentance and salvation, just wasn't reflected in Jonah. He focused on God's anger with sin and sinners, and overlooked the rest. The book of Jonah was written by Jonah to state his repentance of legalism, elitism, racism and lack of grace. It's a profound warning that conservatism is not right of itself, and can lead to serious moral failure. It's simply not the case that conservatism is likely, as a rule of thumb, to be closer to God than liberalism. That has been the deeply wrong assumption of so many people. The Lord warned that conservatism is part of our human nature, and His teaching is radically progressive and anti-conservative (see on Lk. 5:39). It was God's right to be angry with sin and Nineveh; it was not for Jonah to be angry just because they had repented. The Lord perceived this feature of human nature when He commented that His goodness leads some to have an evil eye, a bitter outlook because He has saved (see on Mt. 20:15). Jonah had invested so much of himself in the message of judgment that he preached; when he realized God was changing from that path, he felt the whole narrative of his own life had been upset. God can change; this is clearly taught throughout the Bible. His passion for human salvation makes Him open ended in many ways. But for some, that is too much. Divine history has to be foretold in advance according to their

particular interpretation of it. And when things don't work out for them, because either their understanding was faulty or God worked differently because of factoring in human repentance or potential to repent, they lose their faith or drift away from God. Jonah speaks to them.

Nineveh repented; thousands repented, and there must have been a party of joy in Heaven! But on earth, God's preacher, Jonah- didn't share Heaven's joy. He was angry. He didn't walk in step with the spirit. He didn't reflect Heaven's joy on earth. The Lord said: "Is your eye evil [i.e. are you clouded by a mean spirited feeling], because I am good?". We are all prone to this; to respond to God's grace by being evil-eyed, by our worldview, our "eye", becoming narrower and clouded because of the extravagance of His grace. By these comments I do not in any way underestimate the sadness and urgency of resolving divisions in the body of Christ; but we must remember that all true Christians who are in the one body preach, by that token, the same true Gospel. Their baptisms are valid- so, we can rejoice. For who, after all, is Paul or Apollos, or Steve Z or Steve A, or Andy A or Andy Z, or any of us, but ministers. The essence is Christ.

*Jonah 4:2 He prayed to Yahweh and said, Please, Yahweh, wasn't this what I said when I was still in my own country? Therefore I hurried to flee away to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and You relent of doing harm-*

See on Joel 2:14. This remonstrance with God isn't recorded from God's standpoint in the record of Jon. 1. But the book of Jonah is Jonah's confession of sin and repentance. So he now records what he said. And he does so in exactly the terms in which God revealed His character and Name to Moses in Ex. 32. Jonah is effectively saying that he can't stand who God really is. He wanted, like so many religious people, to focus on a few aspects of God [in this case, God's anger with sin and judgment of it] and build the narrative of his understanding of God upon them; without wanting to see the far wider picture of who God is. In Jonah's case, his wilful ignoring of God's gracious side was tantamount to not knowing the God whom he knew only in theory; for the gracious side of God dominates. And Jonah's amazing salvation from death, even his experience of resurrection, ought to have been enough to help him see that side. But here we see how hard it is to understand grace and believe it. Even death and resurrection, salvation by utter grace, wasn't enough to persuade Jonah of it. Others are likewise dragged through hell and high water, as Jonah was literally, and still don't get it. Judgmentalism and elitism dies a hard death, and many never get there. For to accept God's grace means an admission that they were wrong.

Jonah didn't share Heaven's joy. He was angry. He didn't walk in step with the spirit. It is apparent from the lesson of the gourd, and God's final approval of Nineveh's repentance, that His motive in asking Jonah to preach judgment to come

upon Nineveh was because God wanted their repentance. Jonah's initial response had been to refuse to preach, because He feared God's grace might incorporate them too. We need to probe the motives for our reticence in not preaching as we might. It's too easy to excuse it as our personal shyness. Can there not be a sense in us too that we actually don't want our potential audiences to share in God's grace, even though we may not express this to ourselves directly? And another lesson arises for our preaching. It was God's intention, surely, that an upfront confrontation of Nineveh with their sins and the reality of God's coming judgment *if proclaimed with love in the heart and a sense of our own unworthiness* would bring about their conversion. We must ask whether we have perceived this in our approach to preaching.

Jonah 4:3 *Therefore now Yahweh, take, I beg You, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live-* This is a quotation of Elijah's words in 1 Kings 19:4. As noted on Jon. 3:1, there are similarities between Jonah and Elijah; who likewise struggled with spiritual elitism and judgmentalism. His whole life was centred around his sense that he was right and others wrong; and that judgment would come upon the 'others'. To have the whole narrative of his life and psychology wrecked by God's grace... was too much for him. He saw no point in being alive, despite the fact that he of all

people had been preserved alive and resurrected. We too were raised with the Lord Jesus in baptism; our lives are worth it, they are for the Lord's sake and the sake of His grace, rather than to prove ourselves always right and others wrong.

Jonah 4:4 *Yahweh said, Is it right for you to be angry?*- Perhaps the emphasis is on the word "you". Jonah was a sinner. God alone had the right to be angry with the sins of Nineveh, and by being angry that others could be saved, Jonah was playing God. And not even playing God very well, for he was ignoring the gracious side of God which is so fundamental to Him. All who struggle with anger issues need to read Jonah this way; are *you* right to be angry? Even if anger is justified, it is not always for *you* to express that anger. Anger, Divine wrath, is in the end His and not ours. For He is the judge; we are the sinners, saved by grace like Jonah and responding to that grace by showing it to others.

Jonah 4:5 *Then Jonah went out of the city*- Jonah was hoping the city would be destroyed, and so rather than remain there begging them to repent for 40 days, he simply uttered the doom and left. Perhaps he was aware of prophecies that the Assyrians would destroy Judah and God's people go into captivity there. And perhaps that was why he wanted to see Nineveh destroyed. But by thinking that way, he was accepting that God's prophetic word could change according

to human action, in this case, his not persuading Nineveh to repent. And yet again, in a beautiful way, he was brought to realize that if God's intentions can indeed change, then he should allow Nineveh the chance of repentance to change the otherwise inevitable prophetic outcome.

*And sat on the east side of the city, and there made himself a shelter-* This is the same word used of the booths made by Israel at the time of the feast of tabernacles. Perhaps it was that time of year, and Jonah legalistically tried to keep the feast. But he was keeping it in Gentile territory. And so his legalism was used by God to teach him that relationship with Him was perfectly possible outside *eretz* Israel. But the word for "shelter" is also used in Isaiah as a double symbol of Israel in their condemnation (Is. 1:8) and of God's final giving of shelter to all nations upon Zion (Is. 4:6). And by being condemnatory of Gentiles, Jonah was living out the symbolism of a condemned Judah. For if we condemn, we shall be condemned (Mt. 7:1). So God seeks to convert Jonah to see the better symbolism, and live that out. He creates for Jonah a better shelter, to give him shade from the heat, and this is described in the very language of Is. 4:6: "There will be a pavilion for a shade in the daytime from the heat, and for a refuge and for a shelter from storm and from rain". God is ever seeking to convert legalists and hyper conservatives like Jonah, when their judgmentalism and total lack of love would make many of us just give up with them. We note the Lord's similar efforts towards the scribes and

Pharisees, which actually paid off in that after His ascension, many of them were baptized.

*And sat under it in the shade-* As noted above, the shade of the booth was clearly alluding to Is. 4:6, the salvation given by Yahweh in Zion. Jonah experienced it not in Zion but in a Gentile land. But that didn't make him recalculate his position. He himself enjoyed the shade of God's grace, but was unwilling to see Gentiles share it. His story would have been a powerful message to the early Jewish Christians who initially struggled with accepting Gentiles into the hope of Israel.

*Until he might see what would become of the city-* Jonah left the city because he believed and hoped that it would be destroyed. He is presented as being diametrically opposed to the will of God. Indeed, seeing Jonah wrote the book of Jonah, he presents himself this way, because the book is his confession. Let us note that in this case it was religious conservatism which led to his being so totally out of step with God, just as it was the libertinism of the Corinthian believers which led them to the same final position.

Jonah 4:6 *Yahweh God prepared-* "Prepared" is a major theme in Jonah. God prepared a huge fish (Jon. 1:17), the

vine, a tiny worm (:7) and an east wind (:8). The impression is clearly given that God was at work in things and ways great and small in order to bring about the repentance of both Jonah and the Ninevites.

*A vine, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. So Jonah was very glad because of the vine-* We would likely have turned away in disgust from someone as self-righteous and unloving as Jonah. But God saw the man's discomfort and showed him grace. The vine or gourd was a special creation, although perhaps an exaggerated form of a quick growing shrub known in the area, as the big fish likewise was a special creation but an exaggerated form of a whale or shark. The impression given is that God magnifies the natural in such a way as to demonstrate His power and preference to use the natural and well known.

*Jonah 4:7 But God prepared a worm at dawn the next day, and it chewed on the vine so that it withered-* Jonah was being taught that God can give grace and take it away in a moment if we don't appreciate it. From mighty fish to tiny worms, God is at work. For "prepared" see on :6.

This incident was to make Jonah understand how God valued Nineveh. God had made each of the Ninevites to "grow" (4:10,11), just as He had made the gourd grow (4:6). Jonah was so grateful for the gourd; he valued it. And this was to

show him God's value of Nineveh. Yet Jonah was angry with the worm, who had made the gourd perish. The perishing of Nineveh (Jon. 3:9) and the perishing of the gourd (4:10) are clearly parallel. He was being led to realize who he really was- a worm, who unthinkingly had sought to fell and cause to perish a wonderful and beautiful part of God's creation. Jonah's anger that Nineveh had been preserved is set against his anger that the gourd had perished. He was being shown that he was not in step with God's thinking / Spirit here. If Nineveh had perished, God would have been angry and sad and depressed, just as Jonah felt on the perishing of the gourd. This was the whole purpose of the gourd incident, and it is the purpose of many incidents in our lives- to show us how God feels. Jonah was angry that Nineveh had been preserved, when instead he should have been angry if it had perished. His anger, his feelings, were not in step with God's. And the gourd incident beautifully brought this out to him.

*Jonah 4:8 It happened that when the sun arose, God prepared-* For "prepared" see on :6.

*A hot east wind-* A sign of Divine judgment, as this was what was sent upon the Egyptians. Jonah was sitting on the east of the city and so it came directly upon him.

*And the sun beat on Jonah's head-* Being smitten by the sun was to be understood as Divine judgment, and preservation from this is a sign of being God's people (the same Hebrew phrase is used in Ps. 121:6; Is. 49:10). Jonah had set himself up in his booth to observe the hoped for judgment upon Nineveh. But in fact they were to be spared judgment, and instead, judgment was aimed at Jonah, even though God in His grace had been willing to spare Jonah from it through creating the vine. The whole narrative of Jonah's thinking and self-understanding was being overturned. Sinful Gentiles had repented and were being saved; and instead Divine judgment was headed for him for his self-righteous elitism.

*So that he fainted-* Jonah “fainted” as a result of the gourd perishing, just as he “fainted” [s.w.] when he refused to preach to Nineveh initially (Jon. 2:7). Circumstances so often repeat in the lives of God’s people, and this is in order to seek to teach us something. It seems that Jonah only preached on the outskirts of Nineveh and then gave up; for it was only word of his message that reached the King (Jon. 3:3,4). Jonah couldn’t maintain the intensity; he wilted as the gourd did. He couldn’t maintain a sense of God’s grace, of His tremendous desire to save, and his motivation waned. And so, circumstances repeated. His half hearted preaching was tantamount to his refusal to preach; and he fainted as a result of each of these things.

*And requested for himself that he might die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live-* See on Jon. 1:4. These are the very words of the self-righteous Elijah, who wished to die because he considered himself to be the only faithful believer in Israel, ignoring the at least 7000 whom God stated were faithful. Elijah said this after the contest on Carmel, after which Ahab apparently repented. Perhaps it was Ahab's repentance which made Elijah wish to die; he wished judgment upon Ahab. And Jonah didn't learn the lesson. I argued on Jon. 2 that Jonah had already died and been resurrected by grace. He really ought to have learnt grace; but instead he just wants to die again. He considered the new life he had been given to be worthless, unless he could in that life see judgment upon sinners. We too can be saved from so great a death, preserved by grace, and yet still not let that grace become the narrative of our lives, but instead return to legalism, anger and self-righteous condemnation of others. The story of Jonah is indeed an incisive challenge to us in our age, where anger and condemnation of others is so much part of daily experience.

*Jonah 4:9 God said to Jonah, Is it right for you to be angry about the vine? He said, I am right to be angry, even to death-* As noted on :8, Jonah ought to have learnt from his own salvation by grace that all bitterness and wrath was to have no part in his life from then on. But he didn't. Again we must put the emphasis upon "you"- is it right for *you* to be

angry, when wrath and judgment belongs to God alone? Jonah was angry that God had taken away the vine, just as he was angry that Nineveh wasn't being judged. Yet the gift of the vine to shelter him in his anger was purely by God's grace. He was angry that grace had been withdrawn from him, just as he was angry that judgment had been withdrawn from Nineveh. He assumed that *he* had a right to God's grace, whereas Nineveh didn't. He was being powerfully tested in these things, just as we are. "Is it right...?" translates a Hebrew word which really carries the idea of 'Are you doing / creating good?'. Anger of Jonah's kind is uncreative. No good will come of it. Whilst anger is part of our human makeup, it needs to be controlled. The expression of God's anger is always ultimately creative, His judgments bring others to know Him, His Name is glorified... whereas the anger displayed by Jonah was not going to do or create anything good or right. It was purely selfish, and he admits that he is angry unto death- so angry, that he wanted to die, and throw away the gift of saved life which He had earlier been given when resurrected out of the fish.

*Jonah 4:10 Yahweh said, You have been concerned for the vine, for which you have not laboured, neither made it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night- If Jonah didn't want God's grace withdrawn from him nor the vine, then he had to understand that God also didn't want to*

withdraw His grace from Nineveh. And God had far more invested in Nineveh than Jonah had in the vine. He had laboured for Nineveh and its people; proof enough that this world isn't just wound up by God and left ticking on a clockwork mechanism. Everything, especially human life, is a result of His outgoing giving out of His power and energy. God had made the people of Nineveh grow... this is how close God is to Gentiles. And let us not think that people are unimportant to God, or not noticed by Him if they don't know the Gospel. He expends conscious effort for all growth, especially human growth. People matter to Him, even if we cannot fathom why many die without never hearing the Gospel; perhaps He foreknew they would not accept it, and so not calling them to hear it was an act of grace. For those who hear it and reject it shall be raised to condemnation. Whatever the reason, we must accept that God is love, and reveals Himself here as having made each animal and human to grow; to destroy them with mass destruction was clearly not what He wanted to do. Instead, He had "pity" (AV), or "was concerned" for Nineveh even more than Jonah was for the vine (:11). And so we should be for all people; John Thomas was quite wrong to claim that we should "not care a rush" for those who differ from us in their religious understandings.

The vine 'perished' as Nineveh were going to perish and as the Gentile sailors had almost perished (see on Jon. 3:9).

The point was that God made to perish that which He had long laboured for, and that perishing was for Jonah's sake. And He did not want to make Nineveh perish because of Jonah's nationalism and elitism.

Can one person on a speck of a planet in a speck of a solar system in a mediocre clump of a galaxy really make a difference to the creator of that universe? Just one of the billions who have lived on this planet since Adam? As David looked to the heavens, he felt what surely we all have: "What is man, that You are mindful of him...?". Almighty God created a bush to give Jonah shade from the sun; and created a tiny worm to take it away, to teach Jonah something. We *matter* to God. Our lives and experiences and the things in our lives are important to Him, down to the micro level [a worm, in Jonah's case]. And we should reflect this in the way we treat others- *all* men. God reminded Jonah that He had laboured and 'made to grow' the people of Nineveh, just as He had consciously expended energy on the growth of the gourd. People should matter to us; their lives, their feelings, their eternal destiny. I am not preaching some kind of humanism. Rather, appealing for us to reflect the same senseless, illogical, caring and saving spirit of our Lord and our Creator.

Jonah 4:11 *Shouldn't I be concerned for Nineveh, that great city-* The greatness of the city was the basis for His feeling of compassion, His desire that they would not perish [although they were worthy of it] and come to repentance.

This enables us to read Jon. 1:2 in a somewhat different light: “Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against”. When God described Nineveh as a “great city”, the very fact of its size elicited a desire to spare it. And of course we meet the same phrase in Revelation (Rev. 18:21), where a condemned Babylon is described as a “great city”. This was not God gleefully preparing to destroy a huge city. He surely had Nineveh in mind when He inspired those words. This was, and will be, a God whose very heart is touched by the tragedy of sinners having to be punished, and who is open to a change of purpose if they will repent. Thus the latter day appeal to “Come out of her!”, whether we understand ‘Babylon’ as false religion, the Moslem world, the world of sinners or whoever, is rooted in God’s spirit of passionate love towards Nineveh. As Jonah “cried” against Nineveh, so God ‘cries’ against Babylon (Rev. 18:2). We who make that appeal in these last days should be reflecting here on earth the mind of God in Heaven; not merely pronouncing doom and gloom against ‘Babylon’, but warning them of God’s stated intentions towards them *with a heart that bleeds for them and seeks their repentance*. The heart of God Almighty responded in harmony to the hearts of the Ninevites- brought out by the repeated word play in Jonah 3:8-10, whereby the ‘turning’ of Nineveh in repentance is reflected in how God ‘turns’ and repents of what He had said He would do to them.

*In which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who can't discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?*- As noted on :10, all life on this earth is a result of God's conscious, active involvement and labour. And this includes animal life; and so the tragedy of destroying the city would involve the loss of the animal life too. What was in God's mind therefore was a cataclysm the size of that which hit Sodom; it would have been on a huge scale, if 120,000 children and all the animals would have been destroyed. Keil and Delitsczh quote ancient sources which claim that a child was considered to only be able to certainly differentiate between right and left at seven years old. 120,000 under seven would mean a population of over half a million, with high population density. The total desolation of the Nineveh area was clearly in His mind; and therefore His sensitivity to human repentance is the more evident, in that He changed that plan.

In all true spiritual endeavour and genuine spiritual progress, there seems almost inevitably to be a process of two steps backward and three forward. Consider the pattern of Jonah's life:

- Encounters the presence of God
- Flees from his preaching responsibility; faints
- Saved by God's grace
- Repents and obeys the call to preach

- Loses his intensity
- God shows Jonah how He feels about Nineveh
- Jonah faints
- Repents and obeys the call to preach by writing up his poem and writing the book of Jonah.

Within the course of a few hours, we can go through the essence of this process, learning again the lesson of Jonah and the gourd. We are encountering the presence and call of God to minister every hour; for the need of the world around us is the call.

## **Jonah and Nahum**

Nahum also prophesied against Nineveh. When we read his words, it would appear that there was no chance for Nineveh. And yet presumably there was always a chance for them, just as there was at Jonah's time some years previously. But it seems to me that the essential message of Nahum was that of Jonah. They could have repented, even then. Not surprisingly, we find many allusions by Nahum back to Jonah:

### *Nahum*

God is slow to anger  
(1:3)

### *Jonah [re. Nineveh]*

4:2 [same Hebrew words]- and therefore  
He saved Nineveh.

“Who can abide in the  
fierceness of His anger?”  
(1:6)

God turns away from  
“the fierceness of His  
anger” [s.w.] against  
Nineveh (3:9)- Nineveh  
had survived God’s  
fierce anger by  
repenting, and so they  
could even in Nahum’s  
time. The Hebrew word  
translated “abide” in  
Nah. 1:6 is that used in  
Jonah to describe how  
the King of Assyria  
“arose” (3:6) in  
repentance. The answer  
to the question: “Who  
can abide / arise in the  
[presence of] the  
fierceness of His  
anger?” is: ‘The King of  
Assyria if he repents’.

The wickedness of  
Nineveh “came up”  
before God’s face (2:1)

The same words are  
used about Nineveh  
(1:2).

God was “against”  
Nineveh (2:13)                      Same word in 1:2

Judged for “wickedness”  
(3:19)                      Same word in 1:2; 3:8

It becomes apparent that the Ninevites of Nahum’s day are being directed back to the repentance of their city at the time of Jonah; but clearly they are also being invited to share in Jonah’s personal repentance.

***Nahum***

God has His way in the  
storm (1:3)

God rebukes the sea  
(1:4)

Who can stand before  
God? (1:5)

The Lord is a stronghold

***Jonah [re. Jonah]***

Jonah’s experience in the  
storm

As God stilled the storm  
which Jonah was in

Jonah had to be ‘stood  
up’ [s.w.] from his hiding  
in the ship when fleeing  
from God’s presence  
(1:15)

Jonah cried to God in his

“in the day of trouble”  
(1:7) to those who trust  
Him.

“affliction” [s.w.  
“trouble” ] (2:2)

An “overrunning flood”  
will overtake Nineveh  
(1:8)

“The floods...passed  
over [s.w. “overrunning”]  
Jonah (2:2); but Jonah  
repented and was saved.  
Note how the connections  
between Nah. 1:7,8 and  
Jonah 2:2 are in close  
proximity- surely an  
allusion is intended here.

Affliction (1:9)

Affliction [s.w.] (2:2)

From this it becomes apparent that Jonah is seen by God as in essentially the same position as the Ninevites. This was why his appeal to them was so strong. For he had been in just their position, in essence, yet had repented. The fact Nahum makes all these allusions to Jonah’s personal repentance indicates that they well knew the story of Jonah; and his repentance had inspired that of the audience he preached to. In these we see a very real pattern for ourselves; it is our identity with our audience, as repentant sinners ourselves, which will elicit their response.

Nahum's message was not only a warning of judgment to come upon Nineveh. It was an appeal to Israel, that unless they repented, they would likewise perish. The appeal to Judah to "perform thy vows" (Nah. 1:15) is couched in the very same words as Jonah used in Jonah 2:9: "I will pay [s.w. perform] that which I have vowed". Judah were being asked to be like Jonah, and not despise Nineveh, but rather appeal to her to repent.