



Jonah 3:1-5, 10

1 And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time; saying,

2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

3 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.

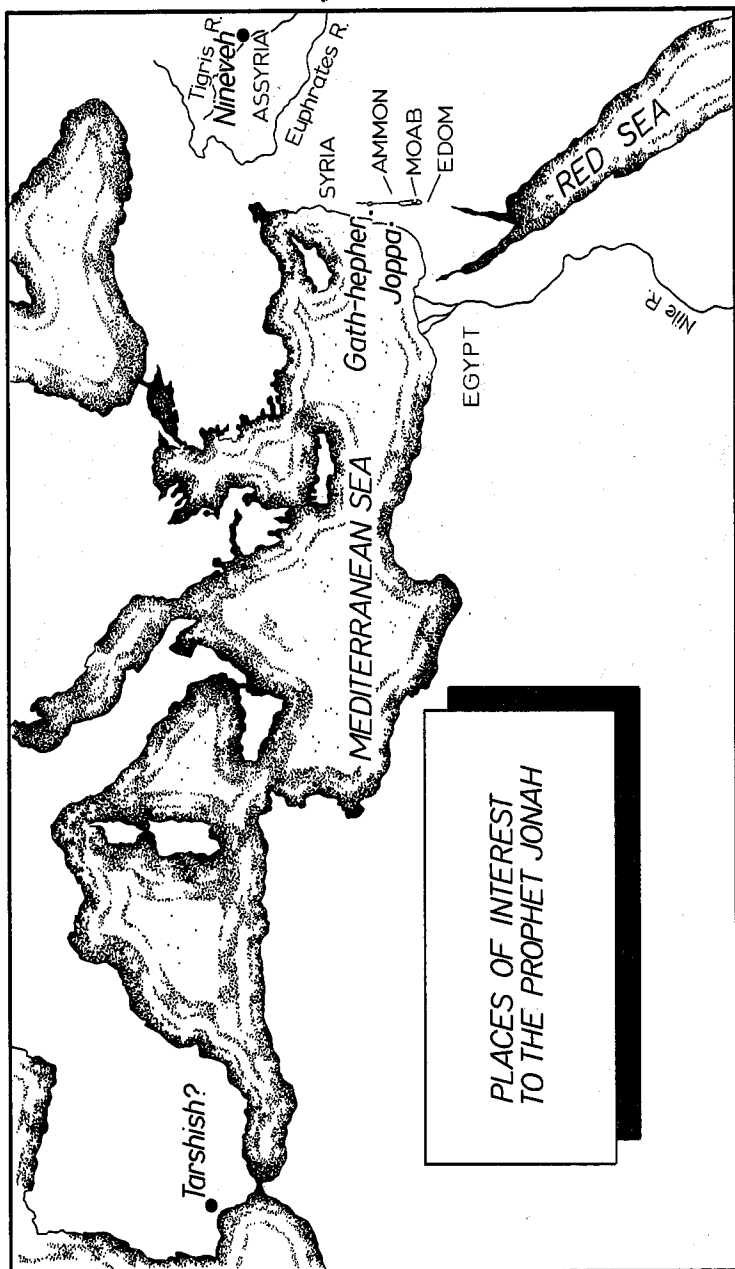
4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

5 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.

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10 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.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Author:* Jonah (or *yonah*, which means literally, *a dove*), the son of Amittai, from Gath-hepher in Galilee. Jonah was a citizen of the northern kingdom, Israel. The destructive critics attack the book as "legendary, mythological—a fairy-tale." One of the reasons the book is attacked as unhistorical is the presence of Aramaic phrases within the book which the critics say would be impossible if Jonah lived at such an early date. The presence of Aramaisms in the book cannot be made a criterion for determining the date or the authorship since Aramaisms occur in Old Testament books from both early and late periods. Furthermore, the recently discovered texts from Ras Shamra contain Aramic elements and they date as early as 1500-1400 B.C.! To deny the authenticity of Jonah is to impeach the integrity of our Lord Jesus Christ for He not only verified the historicity of the miracles recorded in the book (Matt. 12:39-40) but also the historicity of the prophet's mission to the Ninevites thus verifying the authorship and veracity of the book! In addition to the foregoing proof of the book's historicity, J. W. McGarey adds the following observations in his little book "Jesus and Jonah": (a) It is incredible to believe that any Israelite, although capable of conceiving such a tale, would be so irreverent toward one of the great prophets of his nation; (2) It is even more incredible to believe that, if the book be a myth, the chosen people would at any period of their history allowed such a document a place in their Canon of Scriptures—nothing of the mythical is to be found elsewhere!; (3) No Israelite would ever invent a story representing God showing mercy towards the Gentiles; (4) A late date for the book makes the book to be written hundreds of years after the Assyrian city had fallen into virtual obscurity and obliteration!

*Date:* It is not difficult to date the book if the passage in II Kings 14:25-28 be accepted. Jeroboam II, under whom he carried out the most of his ministry, reigned from 783-743 B.C. But, as Fairbairn points out, this statement in II Kings 14 was made at a time when the affairs of Israel were in the most shattered and depressed condition; "there was none shut up or left, nor any helper for Israel . . ." and this was certainly not true in the days of Jeroboam. Israel had been in this condition in the days of Joash, Jeroboam's father, and Joash gradually restored it by a succession of victories and began the prosperous administration which Jeroboam inherited. So the prediction of Jonah concerning the recovery of Hamath and Damascus seems

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to belong to the reign of Joash, which would make Jonah a contemporary of both Elisha and Joel. Perhaps the date of Jonah would best be put at approximately 800 B.C.

*Background of the Times:* It is important to understand what has transpired in the history of the divided kingdoms as well as what is currently taking place in Jonah's time in order to understand the purpose of the book. When God first decided to give part of the kingdom over to Jeroboam I (I Kings 11:26-40), it was because Solomon had perverted the chosen people from their God-appointed purpose of leavening the heathen nations round about them! Instead of being an influence for holiness and a witness to the true God, the chosen people under Solomon incorporated heathenism into their religion and their lives. Jeroboam the First was called by God to bring reform (I Kings 11:37-39) and to be the witness God desired among the heathen. But Jeroboam did not fulfill this high calling. His perversion of worship by worshipping idols caused great numbers of the priests to desert back to Judah (II Chron. 11:13-14) while a revived prosperity in the southern kingdom also led many to desert back to Judah (II Chron. 15:9ff). Now this did not abate even though there were periods of superficial reform between Jeroboam I and Jeroboam II. Jehu, great-grandfather of Jeroboam II wrought a bloody purge of the prophets of Baal in his day. Jehoahaz, Jeroboam's grandfather also attempted a reform (see our comments on the Introduction to Obadiah) but it was short-lived. And Jeroboam II followed the example of his ancestors (II Kings 14:24) in keeping up the idolatrous worship of the golden calves. He reigned for 41 years and outwardly his tenure on the throne seemed to be one of prosperity, peace and growth. But, as Amos and Hosea describe it, it was a time of heinous crime and licentious indulgence (see our comments on the Introductions to Amos and Hosea). The material prosperity was a thin veneer covering the utter spiritual decadence which the prophets, men of righteousness and faith, saw plainly.

*Purpose:* Israel had become so bereft of any right relationship to the One True God they had begun to call Jehovah, Baal and Baal, Jehovah (Hosea 2:16). So Jonah's mission and the recording of it was to teach Israel that if they would repent God would spare them the judgment that must inevitably come from the Righteous Jehovah should they continue in wickedness. Further, if they should continue in heathen wickedness and reject their divine calling to become a peculiar people, a holy nation, witnesses to the One True God, then

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God had children among the Gentiles who would repent and thus become the vessel God needed to carry out His purpose to redeem the world. Fairbairn's interpretation of Jonah's behaviour at the withdrawal of Nineveh's destruction by God is tied in with this purpose of Jonah's mission. Mr. Fairbairn is persuaded that Jonah is so desperately anxious that his own people, Israel, repent he believes the only thing that will bring about this repentance is a terrible manifestation of God's judgment upon this wicked Nineveh. So when Nineveh is spared, Jonah is "grieved and vexed sore," not because he is a sadist and delights in seeing thousands of people suffer, but because he is sure that now Israel will not repent. Mr. Fairbairn does not in any way attempt to excuse Jonah for the spiritual blindness he manifests in misunderstanding the mercy God shows to the Gentiles but his interpretation certainly portrays Jonah in a kinder light than the sadistic, pessimistic, bigoted character by which he is usually portrayed. We personally feel Fairbairn's treatment of Jonah is fairer and represents a deeper understanding of this man whom God called and Jesus praised. We shall have more to say about Mr. Fairbairn's book, "Jonah, His Life, Character, and Mission," later in our exegesis of the text.

Jesus pointed to Jonah twice as a typical prophecy of His Messiahship. Jonah was a *sign* of the humiliating death, and glorious resurrection in the personal experience of the Messiah. The reception of Jonah's preaching by the Gentiles also typified the fact that the message of the Messiah would be rejected by the Jews and received by the Gentiles (cf. Matt. 12:38-42). There are some (Lange, for example) who would, while in full agreement as to the historicity of the account, extend the typical nature of the book even farther. Mr. Lange sees Jonah typifying the nation of Israel as follows:

### *Jonah*

1. Sent to Nineveh to declare the nature of Jehovah to Gentiles.
2. Shuns his call and attempts to forget God by taking a trip.
3. God attempts to reprove the fugitive by a storm.
4. Jonah is thrown into the sea and swallowed by a monster.

### *Israel*

1. Set amidst the heathen to declare the nature of Jehovah to Gentiles.
2. Abandons purpose and goes after other gods.
3. God calls them to repent through national calamities.
4. Israel is thrown into the sea of heathendom and swallowed by a monster ("beast" says Daniel).

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| <p>5. In adversity Jonah prays to God.</p> <p>6. Jonah remains there for a definite time allotted to serve God's purpose.</p> <p>7. The fish vomits Jonah out at the command of God.</p> <p>8. Jonah is sent a second time to be a witness to the Gentiles.</p> <p>9. Jonah's preaching works repentance among the Gentiles.</p> <p>10. Jonah rejects God's mercy unto the Gentiles.</p> | <p>5. In adversity Israel turns to God.</p> <p>6. Israel remains there for a definite time allotted to serve God's purpose. (Hosea 6:2).</p> <p>7. God stirs up Cyrus to "vomit" out Israel.</p> <p>8. Israel is restored in order to be the holy nation she was purposed to be at her first call.</p> <p>9. Israel's bringing in the Messiah works repentance among the Gentiles.</p> <p>10. Israel rejects its Messiah because of mercy extended to the Gentiles.</p> |
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After a number of years studying and teaching the Old Testament Prophets and studying and teaching the book of Hebrews and the emphatic, all-inclusive statements concerning the typical nature of the Old Testament in Hebrews, it is not difficult for us to accept Mr. Lange's view as altogether in harmony with the typical nature of the Old Testament. One has but to refer to the many references of the New Testament to see that the entire Old Testament, although absolutely historical, was at the same time "a shadow of the good things to come." Compare the following references (Matt. 5:17; Lk. 24:25-27; Lk. 24:44-49; Acts 3:18, 24; I Cor. 10-11 where the word *impos* "type" is used; Heb. 8:5; 9:9; 9:23; 10:1). One thing is certain—Jonah's experience was typical for the Lord Jesus so classified it! And it is interesting that Jesus implied Jonah's experience was to be a "sign" to the Jewish nation pointing to their Messiah and He inferred that the Jews, even of His day, should so understand it!

In all our attempts to outline the book of Jonah and in all our searching for suitable outlines we have found that the book falls into four natural divisions (by chapter) which practically all commentaries and survey books use as a standard outline.  
Theme: God's Messenger Is To Declare God's Message To All Men (Rom. 3:29)

- I God's Messenger Running From God (chapter 1)
  - A. The commission of Jonah (1:1-2)
  - B. The contrariety of Jonah (1:3-10)
  - C. The chastening of Jehovah (1:11-17)

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- II God's Messenger Running To God (chapter 2)
  - A. The prayer of Jonah (2:1-6)
  - B. The promise of Jonah (2:7-9)
  - C. The preservation of Jonah (2:10)
- III God's Messenger Running With God (chapter 3)
  - A. The commission renewed (3:1-3)
  - B. The cry for repentance (3:4)
  - C. The consequences of repentance (3:5-10)
- IV God's Messenger Running Ahead of God (chapter 4)
  - A. The displeasure of Jonah (4:1-3)
  - B. The demonstration by Jehovah (4:4-10)
  - C. The declaration of Jehovah (4:11)

## GOD'S MESSENGER RUNNING FROM GOD— THE COMMISSION OF JONAH

### TEXT: 1:1-2

- 1 Now the word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,
- 2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

### QUERIES

- a. Who was Jonah—where did he live—when did he live?
- b. Why send a Jewish prophet to a Gentile city?

### PARAPHRASE

And now at Jehovah's appointed time in the course of events the word of Jehovah was communicated to Jonah, the son of Amittai. Jehovah said to Jonah, Arise and go with haste to that great Gentile city of Nineveh, in Assyria, and preach My sentence of judgment against it; for the wickedness of the people is great and it has come up before Me.

### SUMMARY

Jehovah's righteous judgment is about to fall upon Nineveh but He commissions Jonah to go with a final message of repentance, which, if heeded, will bring salvation from the impending judgment.