

# JONAH

*What's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the name Jonah?*

*It's obvious, right?*

*Tonight, we reconsider the story told us from our youth ...  
and find out that Jonah may not be who you thought he was!!!*

To begin, we need to address some important questions:

- \* Who was Jonah?
- \* Who were the Ninevites?
- \* Where was Tarshish?

Who was Jonah?

- \* A PROPHET from Israel. (Hometown: Gath Hepher; Tribe: Zebulon)
  - *Jonah is unlike any other prophetic book. While other prophetic books focus on the message of the prophet, the focus of Jonah is an episode in Jonah's life. His story is the message.*

Who were the Ninevites?

- \* Nineveh was an ASSYRIAN city. Key: They were NOT JEWS, but hated GENTILES!!!
  - located about 500 miles from Jonah's hometown of Gath Hepher.

Where was Tarshish?

- \* No one is sure. Possibly: *Tartessus*, in SW Spain – a Phoenician mining colony near Gibraltar.
  - *Inscriptions and pottery from Spain demonstrate that Phoenician trade linked the far distant ends of the Mediterranean, perhaps as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C.*
- \* Definitely: Tarshish was associated with coastlands in the western Mediterranean.
  - Key: Tarshish was on “the opposite end of the earth” from Nineveh!

EPISODE 1: Jonah Flees! (1:1 – 16)

Q: Why did Jonah disobey God and travel away from Nineveh and toward Tarshish?

Q: How is this question often answered in Sunday School?

A: (v.3) to FLEE THE PRESENCE of the Lord

> Was Jonah successful?

> The answer to this question is a key ingredient in understanding the message of this book!  
*Many believed that a people's god / gods had jurisdiction only over a people's lands. I.e., when you traveled to a distant land, you worshipped that locale's gods (and escaped the authority of your 'home god(s)').*

> How do we sometimes try to flee from God's presence?

→ Notice the varied use of the phrase, “went down.” (1:3,5; 2:6).

> Same verb is used for “went on board” in 1:3.

> ‘Going down’ is a euphemism for DEATH

> Suggestion is that each step away from the presence of the Lord is one step closer to death!

→ But why did Jonah need to flee God's presence in the first place? (Answer coming up!)

- How was the sailors' behavior different from Jonah's behavior during the storm?
- What does Jonah's response in 1:12 tell us about God? (cf. Acts 16:6-8 – the Macedonian Call)
  - Q: Will He always force us to follow his direction?
  - Q: Does He give us freedom to "go in the other direction?"

#### EPISODE 2: In the Belly of a Whale! (1:17 – 2:10)

- The most familiar, famous and doubted part of the story!
- Q: Can we trust the historicity of this account?
  - > Can a fish swallow a human? What about a whale? Are there whales in the Med?
    - \* Heb. word for "fish" also refers to whales.
  - > What would be the symptoms of a person who had been whale-digested? (read footnote, Archer p.321)
    - \* Could this be the reason Nineveh so quickly repented?
- Consider the prayer of Jonah in the whale: did he have a change of heart?
  - > Warning! Hold that answer!
  - > Pivotal statement in Jonah's prayer: "SALVATION belongs to the LORD."

#### EPISODE 3: The 2<sup>nd</sup> Time's A Charm?!? (3:1 – 10)

- Jonah OBEYS and the people REPENT!
  - > If we examine the larger Biblical context (other prophetic books and historical books from the same era), what do you think we'd find happening in Israel?
- Why did the "King of Nineveh" call for a show of repentance if the people already repented?
  - > The author is showing that the people weren't simply responding to a royal decree, but were genuinely repentant!

#### EPISODE 4: Time for Fireworks!!!! (4:1 – 11)

- > The same word for "overthrown" in 3:4 was used of Sodom and Gomorrah!

Q: What was Jonah's response to God's compassion toward Nineveh?

- Now, we come to the real reason why Jonah fled in the first place!!! Why? (4:2)

Jonah HATED the Ninevites and did not want God TO SAVE them!

- God proves a point!
  - > Look at the ways God "APPOINTS" nature to communicate to Jonah!
    - \* 4:6 – A PLANT
    - \* 4:7 – A WORM
    - \* 4:8 – A SCORCHING EAST WIND

~ Where else does God "appoint?" (1:17) The BIG FISH! (significance?)

- > What point is God making? (4:10-11)
- > Would you say Jonah's story is happy or sad?

- The Heart of the Matter: How Do We Apply This Lesson? (see Acts 10:34)

- > Can you think of anyone you don't want to see make it to heaven?
- > What should our attitude be towards ALL PEOPLE?