

## The Life & Times of Jonah (appropriate for Mid Schoolers and older) Michael R. Daily, January 2013

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(Before the lesson everyone should have already read the book of Jonah)

Let's start by looking at the world that Jonah lived in. The nation of Israel had been split in two around 920BC. The split was initially caused by the idolatry and heavy taxation policies of Solomon that were reinforced by his son Rehoboam. Ten tribes became the Northern Kingdom called "Israel" and 2 tribes (Benjamin and Judah) became the Southern kingdom called "Judah". This can be very confusing.

Until 920BC the whole nation was called "Israel". Then, from 920BC to 721BC the name "Israel" only referred to the Northern Kingdom. After existing for about 200 years the Northern Kingdom was conquered and taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 721BC and was permanently destroyed.

From 721BC on into the future, the Israel of the Bible was just the Southern Kingdom (Judah) who was then referred to as Israel. The Southern Kingdom had its own problems and was later carried into captivity into Babylon (Daniel), then was under the Medo-Persians (Esther), Alexander the Great, and finally the Roman Empire which destroyed Israel and dispersed the Hebrews across the empire in 73 AD. The nation came back into existence in 1948 after 1,875 years of non-existence.

So, its really important when reading these names in scripture to know what time period the book is taking place in. For example, during this 200 year period the Northern Kingdom was referred to as "Israel", the "House of Israel", "Samaria" (the Northern Kingdom's capital city), and sometimes as "Ephraim" (Ephraim was the most influential tribe in the Northern Kingdom but the name during this period sometimes referred to the whole Northern Kingdom). The Northern Kingdom was also referred to as the "House of Joseph" on occasion. The Southern Kingdom likewise during this period was referred to as "Judah", "House of Judah", "Jerusalem" (the Southern Kingdom's capital city), and the "House of David". So, when you see these terms the first question to ask is, "Was this time period during the split kingdom or not?"

At the time that Jonah was a prophet (around 780BC to 750BC) the nation had been split for about 60 years and Jeroboam II was in power in the Northern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom was worshipping golden calves (and other demonic gods) set up by Jeroboam I instead of God. And they were sacrificing some of their children to Molech by burning them alive.

Although they had abandoned God, under Jeroboam II they had recaptured all of the lands that they had lost to other nations and were experiencing an economic boom. Life was good and the nation was wealthy.

Jonah was one of God's prophets that lived in this Northern Kingdom during the reign of Jeroboam II. Amos and Hosea were also prophets there during this time. What were these 3 prophets doing?

Jonah was given a message from God to deliver to the Northern Kingdom saying that God was expanding their borders, even though their king (Jeroboam II) was evil.

### II Kings 14:24-25

**He (i.e. Jeroboam II) did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat (i.e. Jeroboam I), which he made Israel sin. <sup>25</sup> He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.**

Jonah was given a message of short term prosperity for the Northern Kingdom which was not hard to deliver. Jonah's message was, "Your borders will expand to what they were before and your nation will be wealthy, at least for now". How does this compare to the messages Amos and Hosea were delivering?

Amos was preaching a longer term, harsh message of death, destruction, and exile for the Northern Kingdom.

### **Amos 7:7-17**

Thus He showed me, and behold, the Lord was standing by a vertical wall with a plumb line in His hand. 8 The Lord said to me, "What do you see, Amos?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "Behold I am about to put a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel. I will spare them no longer. 9 "The high places of Isaac will be desolated And the sanctuaries of Israel laid waste. Then I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." 10 Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent word to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is unable to endure all his words. 11 For thus Amos says, 'Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.'" 12 Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying! 13 But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence." 14 Then Amos replied to Amaziah, "I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. 15 But the Lord took me from following the flock and the Lord said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel.' 16 Now hear the word of the Lord: you are saying, 'You shall not prophesy against Israel nor shall you speak against the house of Isaac.' 17 Therefore, thus says the Lord, 'Your wife will become a harlot in the city, your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword, your land will be parceled up by a measuring line and you yourself will die upon unclean soil. Moreover, Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.'"

Amos' message was a message of Judgment and destruction. God was going to bring a sword against the Northern Kingdom. When the high priest of Baal told Amos to get lost Amos said, "By the way, God has some specific things for me to tell you, high priest. Your wife is going to become a prostitute, your kids will be killed, your land will be divided up and given to others, and you yourself will be carried into slavery and will die in a foreign land. Have a nice day". Why? Because they had abandoned God and were worshipping Baal and sacrificing their children to Molech by burning them alive.

How does that compare to the United States? We are living in a prosperous nation. But this year (2013) is the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Roe vs Wade Supreme Court decision that made abortion legal. Over the last 40 years how many children has America sacrificed to the god of convenience? 55 million. How many Jews did Hitler kill in his extermination camps during World War II? About 1/10 of that. If God does not judge America He is going to have to apologize to the Northern Kingdom! When will that happen? I don't know. God is very patient. He may wait 50 years or more (I hope He does). But here's the thing. God is patient and He may wait a long time – but He won't wait forever. President Obama recently gave his inaugural address. Some of the headlines describing the speech called it a "clarion call" (an urgent call to action) promoting gay marriage. We used to call homosexuality "sodomy" named after the city of Sodom mentioned in the Bible. What happened to that city? God judged it and destroyed it. If God does not judge America He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah! Hopefully, America, as a nation, will repent, but right now we don't appear to be heading in that direction.

Let's look at Hosea's message. Hosea was told by God to marry a prostitute and be an example of the faithlessness of Israel. His message was that the Northern Kingdom had passed the point of no return.

### **Hosea 1:1-9**

The word of the Lord which came to Hosea the son of Beerai, during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash (i.e. Jeroboam II), king of Israel. 2 When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord." 3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. 4 And the Lord said to him, "Name him Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. 5 On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." 6 Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. And the Lord said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel, that I would ever forgive them. 7 But I will have compassion on the house of Judah and deliver them by the Lord their God, and will not deliver them by bow, sword, battle, horses or horsemen." 8 When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and gave birth to a son. 9 And the Lord said, "Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not My people and I am not your God."

So, Hosea's message was that the Northern Kingdom had passed the point of no return and would come to an end. God states that He will never forgive them. You don't see God say that very often. God is a very patient, forgiving God. He rarely says that forgiveness is no longer available – but He says that here. He also says that He is no longer their God – they have passed the point of no return and Judgment will be executed.

It was in this environment that God called Jonah to deliver a message to Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria. A brutal nation that made its living by conquering other nations and taking their wealth.

Until now Jonah had been delivering easy messages. Now he was asked to do the unthinkable. Go to the enemies of God with a message of destruction.

Was Jonah's reaction unreasonable? After all, if God told Him to do it he should have obeyed knowing that God would protect him. Right?

But what about you. How would you react if God said to you, "You have been a faithful Sunday School teacher all these years and I really do appreciate it. But now I want you to go to the Middle East, to the city where the headquarters of Al-Qaeda is located. And I want you to walk up and down the streets of that city saying, 'In 40 days God will destroy this city unless you repent'". How would you react?

Jonah was a prophet. He knew the scriptures. What do the scriptures say about prophets?

#### **Luke 11:49-51**

**For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they will kill and *some* they will persecute, <sup>50</sup> so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, <sup>51</sup> from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.'**

#### **(Hebrews 11:32-40)**

**And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, 33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; 36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. 39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.**

Not all prophets that delivered the message God told them to deliver survived. Sometimes the death of the prophet is the message.

A day is coming in each of our lives when God is going to say to us, "I want you to go here and do this" and He knows that if we obey Him, we will die. Are you OK with that?

Every one of us is going to die. But if God wants to orchestrate your death in order to bring more people into the kingdom are you OK with that? There are times in life when you dying can bring more people into God's kingdom than you staying alive.

#### **Romans 14:7-8**

**For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; <sup>8</sup> for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.**

### **John 12:24-26**

**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. <sup>26</sup> If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.**

It was obvious to Jonah that God was sending him to die and Jonah was not OK with that. So he ran. He caught a ship to Spain which was as far away as you could get from Nineveh at the time.

Jonah was a believer but he was rebelling against God. How does God deal with rebellion by His children?

### **Hebrews 12:4-10**

**You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; 5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reprov’d by Him; 6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives.” 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.**

If you are a Christian you can't continue in sin and get away with it like the non-Christians. Did you know that? Now you belong to God and because you are His child He's not going to let you continue in sin forever.

Instead, He's going to discipline you – He's going to spank you. Sin hardens our hearts and blinds us to the truth. Sometimes God has to take action to get our attention and stop our rebellion with a spanking. That's what happened with Jonah.

### **Matthew 12:38-41**

**Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” 39 But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; 40 for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.**

### **(Matthew 16:1-4)**

**The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. 2 But He replied to them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ 3 And in the morning, ‘There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? 4 An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.” And He left them and went away.**

### **(Luke 11:29-32)**

**As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, “This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. 30 For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. 31 The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. 32 The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.**

Why does Jesus mention the story of Jonah? One reason is to validate that the story was a real event and that the book of Jonah was scripture. Another reason was that the Jews were very familiar with the story and Jesus referred to it so that people might look to His rising from the grave after 3 days as just as real as what happened to Jonah.

After being vomited out by the sea monster what did Jonah do? He finally went to Nineveh. He preached the message and the city repented.

Why did they repent?

We don't really know why but we know from the Bible that God often uses us as an exhibit or spectacle for people to look at and that something about that brings some people to repentance.

### **I Corinthians 4:9**

**For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.**

### **(Hebrews 10:32-38)**

**But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, <sup>33</sup> partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. <sup>34</sup> For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. <sup>35</sup> Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. <sup>36</sup> For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. <sup>37</sup> FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. <sup>38</sup> BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.**

Perhaps the people of Nineveh heard about Jonah's run before he got to the city. Maybe being inside a sea monster for 3 days makes you look pretty gross and makes people think it might be better to repent than have that happen to them. It may have just been the fact that the prophet of an enemy took the personal risk to come and warn them. We don't really know.

All we know is that the city genuinely repented and God withheld His judgment.

How did Jonah respond to God's mercy for the Assyrians? He was very angry about it! Obviously Jonah's agenda was not the same as God's.

Jonah then chose to sit outside the city and watch what happened. Why did he do that? He was still hoping God would destroy them!

What happened when his shelter was ruined and the weather got bad? How did he react? He was very upset about it.

If Jonah did not want to be exposed to the hot weather what could he have done? He could have gone into the city and while he was there maybe he could have taught some Sunday School classes. He chose not to do that.

Although the Assyrians repented for a time, the Northern Kingdom did not. About 30 years later, the next generation of Assyrians went back to Assyria's old ways and God used them to permanently destroy the Northern Kingdom in 721BC.

As a side note, during the first few days that the Northern Kingdom was attacked by the Assyrians many people fled from the Northern Kingdom to Judah, the Southern Kingdom and survived. This is why descendants from all of the tribes still exist.

### **II Kings 17:5-18**

Then the king of Assyria invaded the whole land and went up to Samaria and besieged it three years. 6In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israel away into exile to Assyria, and settled them in Halah and Habor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. 7Now this came about because the sons of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up from the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and they had feared other gods 8and walked in the customs of the nations whom the LORD had driven out before the sons of Israel, and in the customs of the kings of Israel which they had introduced. 9The sons of Israel did things secretly which were not right against the LORD their God. Moreover, they built for themselves high places in all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city. 10They set for themselves sacred pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, 11and there they burned incense on all the high places as the nations did which the LORD had carried away to exile before them; and they did evil things provoking the LORD. 12They served idols, concerning which the LORD had said to them, "You shall not do this thing." 13Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, My statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through My servants the prophets." 14However, they did not listen, but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God. 15They rejected His statutes and His covenant which He made with their fathers and His warnings with which He warned them And they followed vanity and became vain, and went after the nations which surrounded them, concerning which the LORD had commanded them not to do like them. 16They forsook all the commandments of the LORD their God and made for themselves molten images, even two calves, and made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal. 17Then they made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire, and practiced divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him. 18So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from His sight; none was left except the tribe of Judah.

Later, God destroyed Assyria 150 years after they had initially repented as recorded in the book of Nahum.

**QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD**

*JEREMIAH 15:16*

**THEME: *The Life & Times of Jonah***

**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Book of Jonah***

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

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**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Luke 11:49-51, Hebrews 11:32-40***

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**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Romans 14:7-8, John 12:24-26***

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**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Matthew 12:38-41, Matthew 16:1-4, Luke 11:29-32***

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**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I Corinthians 4:9, Hebrews 10:32-38***

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