**The Author and Date of Writing**

The author of the book is Jonah (**1:1**), the son of Amittai, a prophet from Galilee in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. **2 Kings 14:25** states he was born in Gath Hepher, which is part of Nazareth, so Jesus would have known of Jonah, even before he started studying Scripture.

Jonah is from the Hebrew Yo‚na‚h, which means “dove.” The Septuagint Hellenized this word into Ionas, and the Latin Vulgate used the title Jonas.

Jonah is generally accepted to be a real historical character and this is reinforced by him naming real places and persons, as well as corroboration from other sources (**2 Kings 14:25**) and the testimony of Jesus (**Matthew 12:40**).

In **2 Kings 14:27** Jonah is connected with the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (793-753). Jonah ministered after the time of Elisha, writing between 785-760 BC, before Assyria conquered Israel’s Northern Kingdom. This timing means his ministry overlapped Amos and Hosea.

The repentance of Nineveh probably occurred in the reign of the Assyrian king Ashurdan III (773-755). During his reign, historical records show two plagues (765 and 759) and a solar eclipse (763), which may have prepared the people to receive Jonah’s message. Although there are no known Assyrian inscriptions that mention a religious revival such as Jonah described, during the reign of Ashurdan III there is recorded a move towards monotheism which may be due to Jonah’s preaching.

**Overview of Book**

Jonah’s writing shows that ‘the God of the Hebrews’

* has concern for the whole world
* is sovereign over nature and all human affairs.
* is offering salvation to all (**2:9**)

**History or allegory?**

Amongst theologians and commentators there is an argument whether this Book is history or allegorical (a story or parable with a hidden meaning – in this case spiritual).

In favour of the (majority) history argument are facts such as:

* parables are always clearly indicated and never contain miracles.
* this Book is full of historical places and persons, including Jonah’s father.
* Jesus referred to Jonah as a real person.

The objections to Jonah being historical are:

* What he did was highly improbable – a one Jewish preacher convers an entire pagan city.
* A man could not be swallowed by a large fish.

The miracles within the Book include:

* God sends a wind that causes a storm and puts the ship in danger.
* The lots cast by the sailors identify Jonah.
* The sea is calmed when Jonah is thrown overboard.
* God sends the great fish to swallow Jonah.
* God makes the fish vomit Jonah onto dry land.
* God makes a vine/plant to grown overnight to give Jonah cover.
* God send a worm to eat the plant roots so that it dies.
* God sends a hot desert wind.

There are elements included here of God’s control of seemingly random events and nature, which can easily be dismissed by sceptics as just ‘random events’, however, those objections put doubt on God’s ability to work in miraculous ways.

**Jonah 1:1-3 God's call and Jonah’s attempt to flee**

**The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.’ 3But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.**

**The word of the LORD came to Jonah**: We don’t know how God spoke to Jonah, but Jonah is left in no doubt that he has to do two things; firstly to go, then preach against the city of Nineveh. Other translations have that Jonah should ‘**cry out against it**‘, which includes the meaning of a rebuke for their sin and a call for them to repent.

The city of **Nineveh** was the capital of the Assyrian Empire - a large and prominent city in its day, possibly the largest city in the known world at that time and apart from threatening invasion, it had nothing to do with Israel.

God called Jonah to go to a Gentile (pagan) city and call them to repentance. This is at a time when Israel is being ruled by kings who are described as doing …**evil in the eyes of the Lord**… **2 Kings 13:24** and Israel itself was only 30-60 years away from going into exile (to Assyria), because of their own godlessness.

**For their wickedness has come up before Me**: God wanted Jonah to go, because He saw their wickedness. This is a clear indication that none of man's wickedness is hidden before God. Despite God not being their god, He required them (and all nations) to live in a way that they would worship and honour Him. If nations do not live to those standards, there may come a point where God gives a warning, followed by judgment if the warning is not heeded.

**But Jonah ran away**: Jonah decided not to go to Nineveh – to not do what the LORD had instructed him to do. In human terms, this was not going to be an easy job. **Nahum 3:1** gives an impression of the city’s wickedness **Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder…** At the least, Jonah could expect to be mocked, but **Nahum 3:3** suggests he may even be attacked and killed **Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses…**

Possibly Jonah didn't want the Assyrians in Nineveh to escape God's judgment – given the way the they would invade and destroy countries and their people. He may have thought God should be judging, rather than forgiving.

In the same way that God spoke to Jonah, Jesus has spoken to us in **Matthew 28:19-20** to do His will, so we should be careful before being too critical of Jonah for his subsequent actions.

**Headed for Tarshish**: As the text tells us, Jonah intended to get as far away from Nineveh and God’s calling, as he possibly could. Tarshish was effectively at the end of the earth in Jonah’s time. It is the modern-day Cadiz – on the south western coast of Spain.

**He found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish, to flee from the Lord**: Jonah has seemingly got away from the Lord – his passage has not been blocked. However, ‘…when you run away from the LORD, you never get to where you are going and you always pay your own fare. When you go the LORD's way, you not only get to where you are going, but He pays the fare.’ (Guzik)

‘All the while the ship sailed smoothly over the sea, Jonah forgot his God. You could not have distinguished him from the other heathen on board. He was just as bad as they were.’ (Spurgeon)

Yet, **Psalm 139:7-10** clearly tells us that no one can escape the presence of God.

**Jonah 1:4-6 God send a storm and the sailors reveal their superstitions.**

**4Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. 5All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. 6The captain went to him and said, ‘How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.’**

**Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea… the ship threatened to break up**: Jonah is very clear that it is the Lord who was responsible for sending the wind and we are given an idea of its ferocity given the ship was likely to break up and sink.

**All the sailors… cried out to his own god…**: The sailors did their best to fix the problem, given the circumstances. They cried to their individual gods (this is a polytheistic society similar to the one Paul described in **Acts 17:23**) and they also threw the cargo overboard. On the surface, the sailors were religious men, devout in their prayers to their gods. Yet their gods were not able to do anything.

‘There is a lesson for everyone here, that if we don't know the true God - the God of the Bible - before we get into trouble, we are likely to turn to a false god in our desperation. It is presumptuous to think that in the moment of crisis we will be able to call upon the true God, if we have not dealt with Him before.’ (Guzik)

But Jonah was seemingly unconcerned with ship’s situation and had fallen **into a deep sleep**. Possibly, the storm going on inside Jonah, because of his resistance to God, was so bad that the physical storm outside seemed insignificant to him.

**How can you sleep? Get up and call on your God**: The captain knew that his crew had cried to their gods, but it did nothing, so perhaps Jonah's God could do something in the crisis. The irony being that the captain demanded Jonah call to his God, but the only reason for him being on that ship was to escape from God.

**Jonah 1:7-10 Jonah is discovered to be the source of the trouble.**

**7Then the sailors said to each other, ‘Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.’ They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. 8So they asked him, ‘Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?’ 9He answered, ‘I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.’ 10This terrified them and they asked, ‘What have you done?’ (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)**

**…let us cast lots to find out who is responsible…**: Possibly the sailors were motivated by superstition to find out who was responsible for the storm, but there was a clear thought that an individual was guilty in some way, so they cast lots - which **fell on Jonah**. After that, they asked him many questions, one of which was **what kind of work do you do?**

**2 Kings 14:25** tells us that Jonah was a recognised as a prophet, so if he had declared this ‘job title’ to the sailors, that probably would not have assisted the situation, or calmed their fears.

**I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land**: Jonah declared the truth about God - his claim to **worship the LORD** was only partially true at this point, because he was running from the LORD. Commentators argue that when Jonah said, **I worship the LORD**, he had either begun, or completed his repentance and turned back to God – albeit being forced to do so by his circumstances.

…**who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? …what have you done?**: Even these godless sailors recognise the power of Jonah’s God and can rightly rebuke him for resisting God.

…**what have you done?**: This is both a logical question and a demand for Jonah to take action.

**Jonah 1:11-16 Jonah is thrown into the sea.**

**11The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, ‘What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?’ 12‘Pick me up and throw me into the sea,’ he replied, ‘and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.’ 13Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. 14Then they cried out to the Lord, ‘Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased.’ 15Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. 16At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.**

**What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?**: The more the sailors hear from Jonah, seemingly the worse the situation becomes and the **sea was getting rougher and rougher**. The sailors have already thrown the cargo overboard **v5**, meaning they have lost their pay, so in their desperation they only had their lives to save.

Jonah tells them **throw me into the sea**. Jonah may have come to the conclusion that nothing would save the ship and crew if he remained with them. He knew he was the root cause of the storm and the danger it brought.

Commentators have offered the following reasons for Jonah asking to be thrown into the sea:

* He had compassion for the sailors.
* He desired to be forced into complete dependence upon God alone (the safest place to be).
* Anything was better than his continual resistance against and running from God.
* He had truly repented – so a repentant act needed to follow his repentant heart and mind.

**Instead, the men did their best to row back to land**: Despite Jonah’s admission, the sailors were honourable in wanting to preserve life – even guilty life – so they did not want to throw him overboard. We don’t know how close to land the ship was, but rowing proved futile and **the sea grew even wilder than before**.

The sailors may have been convinced by Jonah and believed in God, so they were now scared about the consequences of throwing a prophet (albeit disobedient) into the sea. They were finally convinced that removing Jonah from the ship was the only thing left for them to do, yet they remained conscious of God in their actions. **Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man’s life**: When they did take action, they rightly took the precaution of praying to God - to absolve their guilt in what they believed would be taking Jonah’s life.

**Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. 16At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him**: As soon as Jonah left the ship, the storm ended. For anyone doubting, it provided proof that Jonah's God was real and it was Jonah’s resistance to God that was the cause of the storm.

The sailors’ (correct) response was to fear the Lord, offer a sacrifice and make vows to Him. There was the potential of one positive coming from this voyage – despite all the losses, the sailors had been shown that the God of the Hebrews had powers beyond any of their own gods. The sailors moved from fearing the storm to fearing the LORD. As the vows of the sailors came after they were delivered, many commentators believe that the sailors came to a true faith in God.

**Jonah 1:17 Jonah’s three days and nights in the fish.**

**17Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.**

God was miraculous in providing **a huge fish**. Scripture does not indicate what type of fish it was – so we can only speculate about whales and large fish types. Yet, we can accept the authenticity of the account because Jesus verified it as true **Matthew 12:40** - **For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.**

Despite Jonah’s previous rebellion and resistance, God preserved his life in order to complete his task.

**Jonah 1:17 Three days and three nights**

**17Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.**

Because of the original language used, some commentators believe that Jonah did nothing for three days and three nights in the belly of the fish - only after that time had passed did he pray the prayer that is included in chapter 2.

**Jonah 2:1-2 Jonah praises God for His deliverance.**

**1From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. 2He said: ‘In my distress I called to the Lord and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead** (Sheol) **I called for help and you listened to my cry.**

 **Jonah prayed to the LORD his God**: Jonah is still in the belly of the fish but he knows it is enough that the LORD has heard his cry (**He answered me**). By faith, Jonah is assured of his deliverance and there is an element of peace and assurance that we can only get when we know our prayers are answered - even if we then have to wait for the answer to be given.

Jonah's prayer includes quotations from the Psalms, indicating he knew God's Word and knew it by heart.

* **In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice Psalm 18:6.**
* **Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me Psalm 42:7.**
* **In my alarm I said, ‘I am cut off from your sight!’ Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help Psalm 31:22.**

One of the key questions is whether Jonah survived or not and the language of chapter 2 suggests that Jonah actually died, with the fish picking up a dead body.

When Jonah was thrown overboard, we are told that he sank to the bottom of the sea – seaweed was wrapped around his head **v5** and he was at the roots of the mountains **v6**.

This prayer tells us that Jonah considers himself in Sheol, the place of the dead prior to judgement. He says it is only in his last moments of consciousness that he remembers the Lord.

If Jonah’s death is correct, rather than surviving, being swallowed alive and kept alive in a fish, this means Jonah is resurrected. A death and resurrection would be more fitting when considered against Jesus statement that, **as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth Matthew 12:40.**

**Jonah 2:3-7 Jonah calls to God, who answers.**

**3You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. 4I said, “I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again towards your holy temple.” 5The engulfing waters threatened me,the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. 6To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in for ever. But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit. 7‘When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord,
and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.**

**You hurled me into the depths**: Jonah is saying it was ultimately God who threw him into the sea – the sailors were merely doing God’s work. Despite trying to run from God, Jonah has never been out of His hands.

**I have been banished from Your sight**: Jonah feels separated from God, but in repentance he seeks God by looking towards His **temple**. Jonah remembered the Lord.

**But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit…**: Jonah praises God that his prayers will reach God, despite his immediate circumstances.

**Jonah 2:8-9 Jonah commits himself to God.**

**8‘Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them. But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, “Salvation comes from the Lord.”’**

**Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them**: Jonah says that resisting God and running from Him, is idolatry and looking denying God’s Sovereignty.

**But I… will sacrifice to You**: Jonah turns to God with praise and promises to once again sacrifice to Him. He states **what I have vowed I will make good**, which is Jonah telling God that he will do whatever God tells him to do. Jonah may have made a similar promise before then trying to run from the task, but now there is a sincerity to Jonah’s statement.

Jonah is not engaging in a negotiation here – he is in no position to do that. He is making a profession of faith that God has rescued him from his previous predicament (being adrift at sea) and will provide a way for him to continue in God’s work.

**Salvation comes from the LORD**: This is both a statement of fact and Jonah's triumphant declaration. God has saved and will save, but on this occasion it is Jonah’s personal **salvation from the LORD**. Your Grace finds me (Matt Redman).

At the end of **2:9** Jonah’s repentance is complete, but it has been an ongoing process.

* Jonah said he worshipped (feared) the LORD and was willing to be associated with God **1:9**.
* Jonah allowed himself to be thrown into the sea – an admission that he was both the problem and part of the solution **1:12**.
* Jonah renewed his commitment to his vow to God **2:9**.

Repentance for Jonah and all of us, is an ongoing process. It will begin at one moment, but it should continue always – it is both an event and a process.

**Jonah 2:10 Jonah leaves the fish.**

**10And the Lord commanded the fish and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.**

**The LORD commanded the fish…**: The whole of creation is at the command of God and is able to do things that are out of their normal realm when required to do so. Consider:

* The sun stood still **Joshua 10:12-14**
* Balaam’s donkey speaking **Numbers 22**
* Hezekiah’s extra day **2 Kings 20**
* The star at Jesus’ birth **Matthew 2**
* The resurrection of Jesus **Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20**
* The promise of eternal life **John 3:16**

Just as much as the fish was under the command of God when it swallowed Jonah, it was under His command when it let him go.

**…vomited Jonah onto dry land**: Jonah is delivered back to the shore.

Jonah laid down his life to save all the others on the ship – to avert God’s anger. But as with our Saviour’s death, it had no hold on him and after three days and nights of imprisonment, he was alive and free.

Nineveh was about 375 miles from the Mediterranean Sea, so Jonah now had a sizeable journey ahead of him.

**Nineveh**

The first reference to Nineveh is in **Genesis 10:6-11**, when following the Flood, the sons of Noah spread across the world.

**6The sons of Ham: Cush… 8Cush was the father of Nimrod, who became a mighty warrior on the earth. 9He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; that is why it is said, ‘Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord.’ 10The first centres of his kingdom were Babylon, Uruk, Akkad and Kalneh, in Shinar. 11From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah 12and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah – which is the great city.**

Some of these cities would become empires in their own right and have great importance in the history of Israel and God’s people. Nineveh was built by Nimrod, the grandson of Noah, the man who went on to build the Tower of Babel.

Nineveh is believed to have been the largest city in the world for 50 years around Jonah’s time, with a population around 120,000 (**Jonah 4:11)**

**Jonah 3:1-2 Jonah's ministry in Nineveh.**

**Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 2‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.’ 3Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. 4Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, ‘Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.’**

**Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time**: God was prepared to give Jonah a second chance – as He is willing to do so for us when we fail Him. Despite Jonah doing everything he could to avoid God’s first call, God was under no obligation to give a second chance, but He did so because of His merciful nature.

‘By paralleling here the book's opening remarks, almost word for word, **The word of the Lord came to Jonah 1:1,** the author conveys the idea that Jonah is being offered a new beginning.’ (Alexander)

God specifically wanted one man, Jonah, to deliver his message of the need for the city to repent, so he was instructed to **Go… and proclaim to it the message I give you**. Jonah will be given the message he has to deliver when he arrives.

**Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD**. Having learned the lesson that resisting the will of God is both futile and counter-productive, Jonah now obeys the call and goes to Nineveh.

**Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it**: The idea behind this statement probably refers to how long it would take to walk around the city of ‘Greater Nineveh’ - the metropolitan area around the city. Jonah goes into the city and proclaims God’s message.

**Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown**: Jonah told the people what would happen if they did not repent - the city would be **overthrown** in judgment. It is most likely that this wasn’t Jonah's entire message, but it was the main emphasis of what he said.

The word ‘**overthrown**’ is the same as used to describe the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (**Genesis 19:25, Lamentations 4:6,** and **Amos 4:11**). If Jonah had spoken about the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, this could have had an influence on the people’s repentance.

**Jonah 3:5-9 The people respond**

**5The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. 6When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. 7This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles:**

**Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. 8But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. 9Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.’**

**The Ninevites believed God**: Understanding the need to repent, needs to have at its centre a belief in God and a desire to follow and serve Him. Repentance as a mere action, without confession before God, is a temporary human thing and is useless in terms of a person’s salvation.

‘You can't believe God apart from the Word of God. Therefore, any real revival or repentance will begin with faithful preaching and faithful hearing of God's Word, just as it was in Nineveh.’ (Guzik)

**A fast was proclaimed and all of them… put on sackcloth**: Repentance requires action. The actions of the people included fasting and mourning as if a person had died. This was done by all the people, regardless of their status in society

Clearly the people would have heard Jonah first, **before Jonah’s warning reached the king** so this was a repentance of desire, rather than something imposed on the city. The king could easily have dismissed this warning, but instead he chose to issue a decree that would enforce the repentance.

‘If repentance is anything, it is not business as usual. When repentance comes, something has to change and something has to be different. In their case, the people of Nineveh took off their normal clothes and put on **sackcloth** – a thick coarse cloth, normally made from goat's hair. Wearing it displayed the rejection of earthly comforts and pleasures.’ (Guzik)

What caused the **animals be covered with sackcloth** is not clear, but possibly this indicated an unusual and additional, but sincere level of repentance.

**But let man and beast … cry mightily to God**: One definition of Biblical repentance *is a call to persons to make a radical turn from one way of life to another. It is a summons to a personal, absolute and ultimate unconditional surrender to* ***God*** *as Sovereign*.

For the Ninevites, this meant crying **mightily to God** – they came before God with a seriousness about their sin and their need for His mercy and forgiveness.

‘So much of modern repentance, with its claim of excuses and reasons why we sinned, is really not repentance at all. It is only an attempt to justify and excuse our sin. You either sinned or you didn't; if you did, there is no excuse and if you haven't, there is no need to repent. Repentance and excuses simply don't belong together.’ (Guzik)

**Let them give up their evil ways and their violence**: If these were the traits recognised by the king of subjects, what did God see?

**Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger**: The king was correct in his belief that God was angry with them, yet He was a God who possessed compassion. Whilst some of the Assyrian gods were not aggressive in their nature (many were), few of their gods had compassion attributed to them. The king’s decree is backed by the hope that God will **relent** and that the repentant people will **not perish**.

‘Jonah was an effective preacher of repentance because he knew his own need to repent. Being a repentant sinner didn't disqualify Jonah from preaching repentance; it made his preaching all the more effective.’ (Guzik)

**Jonah 3:10 God's response to the people's repentance**

**10When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.**

**When God saw what they did… He relented**: God honoured their repentance, even though their previous sin was sufficient reason for an outpouring of judgment. Whilst human nature may not forgive a criminal who vowed to never do it again, God mercifully relented from judgment against the people of Nineveh.

God **relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened**: God’s grace was shown for all the Ninevite’s to see.

Some argue that God's relenting made Jonah a false prophet, in that he had prophecied **Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown. 3:4**. There are two counter arguments to that theory:

* Firstly, God acted consistently to His Word: **The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy *it,* 8if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it Jeremiah 18:7-8**. Jonah's preaching was similar to all warnings of judgment: it was an invitation to repent and avert the promised judgment. His words had an implied ‘if you do not repent’ in front of them. Remember that we are not told the sum total of Jonah's preaching; though we should assume that **3:5** is the central theme, not the sum total.
* Secondly, God did judge Nineveh (as recorded in the book of **Nahum**), albeit in light of their repentance He delayed the judgement for another 150 years. The city was destroyed in 612 BC and within another five years, the entire Assyrian empire had been wiped out.

**Jonah 4:1 Jonah's displeasure at the repentance of the people of Nineveh.**

**But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.**

…**to Jonah this seemed very wrong…**: Usually the preacher is pleased when the congregation repents, but Jonah wasn't and this led him to anger. This is now doubly unusual, as it was not Jonah’s preaching that was at fault – in fact it was completely the opposite.

Jonah’s language (in the original Hebrew) is strong. The ESV translates **4:1** as **But it displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was angry**. The Hebrew in that verse translates as follows:

* Displeased - inner turmoil or trembling with rage.
* Angry – Blazed/burned with anger (also used in **Genesis 39:19**, when Potiphar heard his wife’s accusation of rape against Joseph).

**Jonah 4:2-3 Jonah explains his anger.**

**2He prayed to the Lord, ‘Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. 3Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.’**

**…I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity**: Jonah was angry because God granted repentance to the Ninevites. The Assyrians were enemies of Judah and Israel and possibly Jonah wanted God to bring judgment upon these people that he (Jonah) hated.

**‘Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish**: Jonah knew that God was full of grace and mercy, which was why he was afraid to carry out God’s instructions to tell the people of Nineveh. In this statement, Jonah says the reason he fled God’s call, was not out of fear that he would be ineffective, but fear that he would be effective!

Jonah had called on and received the mercy of God, but now he disapproves of this grace when it is extended to the Assyrians, Israel’s enemies. ...**it is better for me to die than to live** The repentance and salvation of the people of Nineveh is apparently not what Jonah wanted and he is pained by the thought, that he would rather die than think about it.

**Jonah 4:4 God questions Jonah's heart.**

**4But the Lord replied, ‘Is it right for you to be angry?’**

**Is it right for you to be angry?** Jonah is honestly expressing his feelings, but that doesn’t mean such feelings are always justified, especially when focussed towards God.

Here God asks Jonah a question. God already knows what the answer should be and he knows Jonah’s (and our) hearts before he asks the question. But often by asking a question that doesn’t need to be answered, it reveals how we are and gives us an opportunity to realign ourselves with God.

Other recorded questions that God has asked people (although they may be asked by God’s servants), include:

* Where are you? Who told you that you were naked? What is this you have done? **Genesis 3**
* Where is your brother Abel? What have you done? **Genesis 4**
* What have you done? **1 Samuel 13:11**
* Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? **2 Samuel 12**
* Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? **Isaiah 6**
* Who do you say that I am? **Matthew 16**
* What do you want Me to do for you? **Matthew 20**
* Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss? **Luke 22**
* Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? **Acts 9**

If we are angry against God, He will ask us the same question He asked Jonah: **Is it right for you to be angry?** And the answer must always be ‘No, Lord. All Your ways are right even if I don't understand them.’ Stating our anger against God, must be followed by repentance for the same.

**Jonah 4:5-8 God teaches Jonah**

**5Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. 6Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. 7But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. 8When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, ‘It would be better for me to die than to live.’**

**Jonah had gone out** (of the city)**… and waited to see what would happen to the city**: Jonah waits outside the city – possibly not wanting to be inside when God’s judgement takes place. The Hebrew word translated as shelter (NIV) and booth (ESV), is the same word also used during the Jewish Feast of Sukkoth (Tabernacles), but it can also mean a very basic shelter as would be used by a soldier or shepherd.

**Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade**: God had previously **provided** the fish, now He **provides** a plant to shelter Jonah as for he waited hoping that they city would be destroyed.

This was a very fast-growing plant and was most likely a *qiqayon* (Hebrew), or more commonly known as a castor, from which castor oil is extracted.

Jonah is happy for the first time in this account – maybe because he sees it that God is doing something for him at last. He seems to forget; the honour of being chosen to do God’s work, being forgiven for being disobedient, being rescued by the fish, having his prayers answered and being resurrected, having a successful ministry where over 100,000 people are saved. ‘Jonah's happiness was just as fleshly as his anger. Both were all about himself.’ (Guzik)

**…God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered**: God is Sovereign – in this case, he **provides** again - He tells the worm where to be and what is required to be done.

**…the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint**: There may be word play going on here - Jonah was angry (Hebrew ‘angry’ – Blazed/burned), but now the sun blazes on Jonah, so God literally sends heat in return.

**It would be better for me to die than to live**: Jonah’s life perspective changes when the plant dies and his additional layer of shelter has gone. He misses the plant so much that he wants to die. Even within the short time he had the plant, it had become something so central in his life, that it was a cause for complaint when gone and it was risking Jonah’s rightful relationship with God.

**Jonah 4:9-11 God explains His teaching to Jonah**

**9But God said to Jonah, ‘Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?’ ‘It is,’ he said. ‘And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.’ 10But the Lord said, ‘You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left – and also many animals?’**

**Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?** Jonah’s answer ‘**It is’** shows he feels right to be angry about the plant's death, despite it being just a plant and Jonah having had no involvement in its growth or development beyond the shelter it gave him for a time.

**…I’m so angry I wish I were dead**: These are Jonah’s last recorded words in this book, but God's mercy and compassion still continued for Jonah and the people of Nineveh.

**And should I not have concern for the… Nineveh**: God is concerned about all people, even the Assyrians- we are all made in His image **Genesis 1:26**. God's response to Jonah showed the prophet that he really didn't know God as well as he thought he did.

…**people who cannot tell their right hand from their left** means people who are unable to make moral judgments. God’s concern for people goes beyond Israel and Jonah’s writing shows us that God is the God of all people.

*‘Chapter 4 goes part way to showing why Jonah ran away from God’s task in the first place.*

*Some people say he was thinking primarily of himself and was just scared to go to Nineveh – he feared being killed as an enemy of Assyria. But this doesn’t explain why he suggested that the sailors throw him into the sea. He wasn’t afraid of death.*

*Other people say he thought the Gentiles had no right to hear about the God of Israel. But that doesn’t explain why he fled towards Tarshish.*

*Others say he was thinking of Israel and didn’t want anything to do with this potential invader.*

*But none of these theories account for the chapter 4. Jonah had told the people of Nineveh that in forty days God would wipe out their city. Yet, the result of Jonah’s preaching was the entire city repented.*

*An evangelist would be thrilled if a whole city repented, but Jonah was disappointed. He sat on a hill outside the town and effectively said to God, ‘I told you this would happen. I know what you are like. I knew You would let them off and just threaten them with destruction, but would not go through with it.’*

*Possibly we can understand Jonah’s statements by looking at events that had taken place in Israel. In* ***4:2****, Jonah says,* ***‘Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.’***

*The events Jonah is referring to are possibly recorded in* ***2 Kings 14:23-25****,* ***In the fifteenth year of Amaziah son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel became king in Samaria, and he reigned for forty-one years. 24He did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit. 25He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Dead Sea, in accordance with the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hepher.***

*When Jonah was called to be a prophet, he was sent to King Jeroboam II of Israel. Although being a ‘bad king’, Jonah responded positively, expecting to be able to turn the King away from wickedness, but God’s message was unexpected and despite being an evil king, God says that He ‘wants to bless him, by enlarging his borders and making him great’.*

*Jonah’s point was that by blessing evil people, they just get worse and that is what happened with Jeroboam II. Jonah’s conclusion is mercy doesn’t change wicked people and in* ***Jonah 4:2****, Jonah makes it clear that he knows God’s how to do God’s work better than God knows Himself.*

*So, as Jonah sits outside Nineveh, he is thinking, ‘let’s see what happens, Lord. Will You letting them off cure them or make them worse.’ Jonah didn’t want to see the Assyrians escape punishment, but neither did he fully understand God’s compassion for all people, which was why he delays judgement for as long as possible. That was why he ran away and why the success of his preaching did not cheer him.’ Unlocking the Bible – Pawson p452-5.*

Jonah’s true message to everyone was made before he ever got to Nineveh: **Salvation comes from the LORD** **Jonah 2:9** and that statement was not made to any specific person or nation. The message was spoken by Peter in **Acts 10:34-35 34…‘I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism 35but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.**

Jewish tradition says that after God said the words of **4:11**, Jonah then fell on his face and said: ‘Govern your world according to the measure of mercy, as it is said, To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness.’ This is very similar to **Daniel 9:9****The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him…**

Through faith in Jesus and His Salvation, we should also come before God with that humble response.

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**Other Biblical references to Jonah**

* **2 Kings 14:25**
* **Matthew 12:38-41, 16:4 & Luke 11:29** - Jesus speaks about his death and resurrection using Jonah’s time of three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish as a reference.
* **Matthew 16:17** Jesus speaking to Simon.

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**Biblical Sheol**

The Hebrew word Sheol refers to the grave or the home of the deceased, a place where all living creatures ended up, whether human or animal, righteous or wicked. No one could evade Sheol, which was believed to be down in the lowest parts of the earth. This early thinking changed as the Biblical prophets spoke of Sheol.

**Who can live and not see death, or who can escape the power of the grave? Psalm 89:48.**

Unlike this world, Sheol is devoid of love, hate, envy, work, thought, knowledge, and wisdom.

**Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun Ecclesiastes 9:6**.

Descriptions of Sheol are gloomy: There is no light, remembrance, praise of God, or any sound at all. Its occupants are weak, trembling souls who can never hope to escape from its gates. **Before I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and utter darkness, to the land of deepest night, of utter darkness and disorder, where even the light is like darkness Job 10:21-22**.

**The realm of the dead below is all astir to meet you at your coming; it rouses the spirits of the departed to greet you— all those who were leaders in the world; it makes them rise from their thrones— all those who were kings over the nations. They will all respond, they will say to you, You also have become weak, as we are; you have become like us Isaiah 14:9-10**.

As the Old Testament progresses, the belief that there will be a resurrection from the dead becomes stronger - that Sheol will no longer be occupied, instead, God will swallow up Death. The faithful will be rewarded with everlasting life while the rest will experience eternity in hell. This theology develops further even before Jesus’ ministry.

**But your dead will live, LORD; their bodies will rise— let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy— your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead Isaiah 26:19**.

**Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt Daniel 12:2**.