

## **Commentary on Jonah 1&2, by Chuck Smith 4.24.24**

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**March memory verse Ephesians 3:20 (NKJV)** Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,

**April memory verse Ephesians 3:21 (NKJV)**

to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

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**Includes John MacArthur :: Bible Introductions – Jonah**

Now we come to that interesting prophet Jonah.

Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me ([Jon 1:1-2](#)).

Nineveh, a great city; in fact, the historians say was the largest city in the ancient world. There is a reference later on in Jonah to Nineveh being three-days' journey. What is meant by that is that it took three days to walk through Nineveh. So going from one end of Nineveh to the other walking was a three-day journey. So it was indeed a great city. In fact, the population of Nineveh, no doubt, was quite large, because there were sixty thousand babies in Nineveh, so young as to not know their right hand from their left hand. Now, that is something children will usually learn about four or five years old. So having a population of sixty thousand, say under five, you can come to a rough estimate of what the total population of Nineveh might have been.

A great city, but the problem was, it was a wicked city. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians historically were extremely cruel people. History tells us how that the Assyrians would maim their enemies in war. How that they would desecrate the bodies of the victims of war, impelling them, maiming them, cutting off the ears of their prisoners, or cutting off the noses of the prisoners, or pulling out the tongues of the prisoners. They were horribly cruel inflicting grotesque type of maiming processes upon the prisoners of war that they would take. So that history tells us that there were cities that when surrounded by the Assyrian army and doomed to fall that the inhabitants of the cities would all commit suicide.

The Assyrian Empire was the empire that finally conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and they moved against the Southern Kingdom and surrounded Jerusalem. And had cut Jerusalem off and had Jerusalem under siege.

Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, sent the Rabshakeh to Hezekiah with threatening letters, blasphemous letters against God. And Hezekiah would take these letters in and

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would spread them out before the Lord and he'd say, "Look, Lord, what the guy is saying he is going to do." And the guy was promising how he was going to maim them and torture them and what he was going to do when they fell. And Hezekiah just spread the letters out before the Lord and said, "Look at these things that they are saying they are going to do. And Lord, they are able to do them." But all the while the prophet Isaiah was saying to Hezekiah, "Look Hezekiah, don't worry. God is going to take care of you. God is going to deliver you out of the hands of the Assyrians. They are going to be turned back by the hand of the Lord and the king of Assyria is going to be assassinated in his own land. So you don't have to worry, Hezekiah. Just trust in God; God will take care of it." But it was hard to trust in God, because here was this huge Assyrian army, over 185,000 men surrounding the city of Jerusalem. They were cut off from their supplies. And here they were coming up to the wall and they were yelling to the people, "Don't let Hezekiah deceive you saying, 'Trust in the Lord.' Where are the gods of the Israelites? Where are the gods of Syria? Where are the gods of these other nations that we have conquered? They weren't able to deliver them from our hand, and neither will your God deliver out of our hand. Don't believe the words of Hezekiah saying, 'Just trust in the Lord.'" And the men were there on the wall listening and trembling as these threats were being made. And they heard the blasphemes how they were going to cut off every man in Israel; torturing, maiming them. And inside Isaiah is saying, "Hey, keep cool. Hezekiah, don't worry. God is going to take care of it. God is going to deliver them into your hand. Don't worry, Hezekiah."

One morning when the children of Israel arose and went to the wall to look at the encampment of the Assyrians, behold, to their amazement the Assyrian forces were all dead corpses. One hundred and eighty-five thousand of them lay slain on the ground. That night the angel of the Lord had gone through the camp of the Assyrians and had destroyed them. King Sennacherib escaped back to Assyria, and as he went in the house of his god Rimmon, his two sons assassinated him and they fled to Armenia. And another son of Sennacherib began to reign in his stead. But the back of Assyria was broken.

Now at the point that God said to Jonah go to Nineveh, that great city, that wicked city and prophesy, was when Assyria was ascending in power. Assyria had not yet become the world-dominating power. There was a vying at this point between Egypt and Syria and Assyria, but gradually Assyria was gaining ascendancy and power, and they were becoming a real threat to Israel and to Judah at the time the Lord said to Jonah, "Go to Nineveh that great city and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me."

But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and he went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD ([Jon 1:3](#)).

Nineveh was east and north from Israel. Jonah went down and caught a ship going west. He is going to run from the call of God. Now God is calling him to go and preach to the Gentiles, something he did not want to do. Felt this nationalistic spirit--salvation is

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of the Jews; it is not for the Gentiles. He did not want to go to the Gentiles. And so he went to Joppa to escape the call of God to go to the Gentiles.

It is interesting that several years later in this very same port city of Joppa, as Peter was on the rooftop of the house of Simon the tanner, that he saw this sheet in a vision let down from heaven; tied at the corners with all manner of beast and creeping things on it. And the Lord said to Peter, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." And when Peter objected saying, "Lord, I've never eaten anything that was unclean or common." God said, "Don't call that common which I have cleansed." After this thing happened three times, Peter wondered, "What in the world does this mean?" And the Lord spoke to him and said, "There are some men now down at the gate inquiring for you. Go with them and don't ask any questions. I'll tell you what to say." And there in Joppa is where Peter was called to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Interesting how things always seem to come back.

It was to Joppa that Jonah ran to catch a ship to escape preaching to the Gentiles. It was at Joppa that the Lord called Peter and said go to the Gentiles. And the door of the gospel was open to the Gentiles as God dealt with Peter there in Joppa.

Jonah was arising and seeking to flee from the presence of the Lord, heading for Tarshish. Biblical scholars are divided as to the location of Tarshish. Some say it is a part of Spain; others say it is England. The preponderance of scholars seem to favor England. Wherever Tarshish was, it was the furthest outpost of the known world at that time. It was the jumping off. You can't go any farther than Tarshish from the civilized world. It was the end. It was as far as you could go. Beyond Tarshish lay that wild, boisterous Atlantic, and out there somewhere that precipice, that chasm, that just the ships dropped off into oblivion. No ships ever came back from their voyages on the Atlantic. They surely must have gone over the edge of the world someplace and disappeared. So Tarshish was as far as you dared to go, and that is where Jonah was heading. "I'm going to get as far away from God as I can. I'll head for Tarshish. I'll hide from the call of God, from the presence of the Lord."

Now there are many people that do make the mistake of attempting to localize God, as though God dwells in one place as over against another place. As though God dwells here in the sanctuary more so than in your home. "Oh, I wanted to come to the church to pray so I could be close to God. I like to go up to the mountains to pray because I'm so much closer to God; five thousand feet." As though God were somewhere off in the vast universe. Of course, better yet if you could get into a balloon or into a U-2 or something, you get closer to God. Not so! God fills every place in this vast universe or in any other universe that exists.

The astrophysicists are talking about some interesting things in our universe. One of the interesting things that the astrophysicists speaks of is the black hole. Now, there are some interesting theories about these black holes. You see, all matter is made up of expanded atoms, or expanded atoms which are made up of electrons rotating around the protons in the nucleus of an atom. But there is much more space than solid material

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in atoms, so that if the proton of the hydrogen atom was the size of a basketball, the electron that revolves around it would be some three thousand miles away, to give you an idea of the amount of space that is in the atom of hydrogen. There is the proton, the electron revolving around it, but quite a vast space in between in comparison to the size of the proton and the electron. So that, they tell us, that there is more space in solid matter or in material than in solid matter. In fact, they say if all of the atoms in your body would collapse so that there was no space, just the solid material of the protons and electrons, you would be the size of a microscopic speck of dust. So suddenly, all of the atoms in your body would collapse, you'd say, "Hey, where'd they go?" and we'd have to get an electron microscope to find you. But the interesting thing is that this little microscopic speck of dust would weigh the same as you weigh. So you go to blow that dust off the table and it doesn't move.

Now they say if they started to compress the atoms in the earth...of course, we know Einstein's theory of relativity and then also of gravity,  $E=MC^2$ . Now they say that if you would start compressing the earth, (you know we're eight thousand miles in diameter), so that you are four thousand miles from the center of the mass of the earth. Therefore, four thousand miles away from the center of the mass you weigh whatever the scales tell you you weigh. So let's say you ladies weigh 130 or 125 or whatever, and us fellows, (I'm not going to tell you what I weigh), but we weigh around two hundred, plus or minus, because we are four thousand miles away from the center of the earth, the center of the mass of the earth, and there is this pull towards the center of the mass. I'm being pulled towards the center of the earth, and that pull upon the mass of my body equals what I weigh.

Now, if we would start compressing the earth so that it was only four thousand miles in diameter instead of the eight thousand miles in diameter, as you are now only two thousand miles away from the center of the mass, the earth would still weigh the same as it weighs now. But your weight would go up tremendously, because you are closer now to the center of the mass. And being closer to the center of the mass your weight would now increase to where you would weigh several tons.

Now, if you continued to compress the earth until, say, it was the size of a baseball, then you would be so close to the center of the mass that you would weigh over one hundred million tons. Now, if you continue to compress the earth, you finally can press it so much that you create a black hole and the whole thing disappears, because now the center of gravity is so powerful that not even light can escape it. So all of the light now is going inward because it is being drawn by this powerful gravity and so now you have a black hole. And you pass this point in the compression to where the center of gravity becomes so great, or the power of gravity is so great that not even light can escape it. And that is the theory for the black holes that we have in the universe.

Now, if you would step into this black hole, according to some of the astrophysicists, you would enter into a whole new universe within this small black hole. You come out into a vast new universe in which, if you would take the object in that universe and begin to compress them, you could make other black holes in that universe. And when you

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have created the black hole, step into it and you'd enter out into another vast universe. Sounds like science fiction, doesn't it? But that is what the astrophysicists are telling us about these black holes.

Now, you see, in order for us to see things we have to have light, and what we see is reflected light off of the object. We don't see the object, but the light that is reflected by that object is what we behold. But if the gravity is so powerful that light doesn't reflect but it is drawn inward, the light can't escape then this creates the black hole. And it is created by the compression of atoms to the point that the center of gravity is so powerful within them that even light can't escape.

So Jonah is talking about escaping from the presence of God, but you can't. If you would enter into one of these black holes and enter into another whole new universe, you'd find God was there and He fills that whole universe.

Jesus said, "In My Father's house there are many mansions," in My Father's house. How vast is the Father's house? Vast enough that there are many mansions in it. Those mansions could even be universes within the black holes of the black holes of the black holes. Paul the apostle, when talking with the Epicurean philosophers there in the Areopagus, said unto them, "I perceive that you are very religious, for as I have been walking through your streets I have observed all of the altars that you have made to the gods. And on one corner I saw an altar and the inscription was to the unknown god. This is the God that I'd like to talk to you about, because He is the one who has created the heaven and the earth and everything that is in them and in Him we live, we move, we have our being." I'm surrounded by God. I can't escape God. Wherever I am I'm surrounded by God.

David the psalmist said, "If I ascend into heaven thou art there: if I descend into hell thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and flee to the uttermost parts of the sea, even there You lead me" ([Psalms 139:8-10](#)). I can't get away from God. I'm surrounded by God, and thus, it is wrong for you to think of God in a local situation.

Now when I was in Sunday school, the Sunday school teacher taught us that it was evil to go to shows. And they told us the story of the little boy who went by the theatre and saw on the marquis the show that was playing and oh he wanted to go in and see it. And he was tempted to go in and see it, but he knew that the Lord wouldn't want him in there, and if the rapture would come, if he were in there would surely not be taken. And I had that boogiemer over my head when I was a child. And so he said, "Lord, if you wouldn't mind waiting outside, I'll be with You in an hour and a half," as though we can leave the presence of the Lord, or as though we do leave the presence of the Lord when we turn our backs upon God. Not so, I'm always surrounded by God no matter where I am. And I think that this is an important concept that we need to be aware of. I don't escape God.

When Ben-Hadad was questioning his generals because of the apparent security leak... He had the same problems that Reagan had only of a different sort, because his

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generals said to him, "Listen, we're true to you. We're not leaking out this security information. The problem is there is a prophet over there in Israel and you can't even talk to your wife in bed but what he doesn't know what you are saying to her." Now how did the prophet know? Because God was revealing it to him. You see, you don't escape God. I don't care where you are. You cannot escape God.

Now, it was a deceptive lie for Jonah to think that he could escape God. It was a deceptive lie to think that he would be better off running from God and running from the call of God. That was a deception and that was a lie. Many people live under that same delusion. "I would be better off if I could just escape the will of God for my life. I can determine what is best for me better than God can determine. I know what is better for the people of God than God does. If I go to Nineveh and preach the gospel to those Gentiles, if they believe and repent, then God being the softy that He is, being merciful as He is, will probably forgive them and not destroy them. And if they are not destroyed then they are apt to destroy our people. I'm not going. I'm heading for Tarshish. I'm going to get as far away from Nineveh as is humanly possible."

So he went down to Joppa to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. And he got a ship and paid the fare; went down in the hull to flee from the presence of the Lord.

But the LORD sent out a great wind in the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was being broken. Then the mariners [the sailors] were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and they cast forth the cargo that was in the ship on into the sea, in order to lighten it. But Jonah was gone down in the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep ([Jon 1:4-5](#)).

Now people are troubled because of the miraculous aspects of the book of Jonah. But usually the part that troubles them most is the fact that he was swallowed by the great fish. But in reality, here are the evidences of God's hand even before we ever get to the fish. The storm that came up was sent from God. A miraculous kind of a storm in that God sent it. But then Jonah able to sleep through the storm has to be some kind of a miracle also. Have you ever been out in a boat in a storm being tossed? And down in the ship fast asleep.

So that the shipmaster came to him, and said, What do you mean by this, O sleeper? arise, and call on your God, if so be that God will think upon us, and we perish not. And they said every one to his fellow, Come on, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and [another miracle] the lot fell on Jonah. So they said unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, why has this evil come upon us; What is your occupation? Where do you come from? what is your country? from what people are you? And Jonah said unto them, I am a Hebrew; and I fear Yahweh, the God of heaven, which has made the sea and the dry land ([Jon 1:6-9](#)).

I fear the great God, Yahweh, the Creator of the universe.

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Francis Schaeffer says that the term *god* is being so commonly used by people today without definition, that as we speak of God we need to become more definitive. And we probably should say, "The living God, the Creator of the heaven and the earth," so that we define to people the God that we are talking about, because there are so many gods. And people use the term *God* so freely, and so liberally to express almost anything.

So here he defines Yahweh who made the sea and the land.

Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and they said unto him, Why have you done this? For the men knew that he had fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them ([Jon 1:10](#)).

He told them that he was trying to flee from the presence of God, from the call of God to go to the Gentiles and preach to them.

Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto you, that the sea may be calm? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous. And he said unto them, Just throw me overboard; and the sea will be calm: for I know that it is for my sake that this great tempest is come upon you. Nevertheless ([Jon 1:11-13](#))

Because he had paid his fare and it wasn't polite to throw over fare-paying passengers.

the men rowed hard to bring the ship to land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them. Wherefore they cried unto Yahweh, and said, We beseech thee, O Yahweh, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and don't lay upon us innocent blood: for thou, O Yahweh, has done as has pleased thee ([Jon 1:13-14](#)).

God don't blame us. We're going to throw this guy over. We don't want to perish for him, but God, don't blame us for throwing him over, because You're the one that has brought all of this because of him. So God, have mercy on us when we throw him overboard.

So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and [the next miracle] the sea ceased her raging ([Jon 1:15](#)).

You see the miraculous is interwoven all the way through the book of Jonah.

Then the men when they saw this they revered the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and they made vows ([Jon 1:16](#)).

I imagine there was quite a scene on that ship when they saw all of this.

Now the LORD prepared [more accurately, appointed] a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights ([Jon 1:17](#)).

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The Lord appointed a great fish. What kind of fish was it? The Bible doesn't tell us. Whether or not it was one of the sperm whales or whether or not it was a great shark, or whatever, it doesn't matter. I believe it did happen, because it is here in the Word of God.

Now here is where, of course, the biblical critics have a field day and you can read in so many Bible commentaries and in Bible dictionaries of the legend of Jonah or of the myth of Jonah. Or you can read men's endeavors to give some kind of a plausible, natural explanation of how really it wasn't a fish, but some other ship came along and the captain pulled Jonah out of the water. And it so happened he was going back towards Joppa and so he gave him a ride back, and he got back safely. And you can read a lot of natural explanations of man who are endeavoring to remove the supernatural from the story.

The real problem with the book of Jonah is that Jesus believed it. That is the problem for the critics of the book of Jonah. And I will personally cast my lot with Jesus than with all of the critics that I have ever read. I believe that Jesus knew better than these supposed wise scholars who write with the earthly wisdom of man in their endeavors to discount the miraculous aspects of God.

Jesus made a couple of references to Jonah. The one refers to Jonah's experience in this fish. "And as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" ([Matthew 12:40](#)). Jesus gave that to the scribes and Pharisees who were asking Him for a sign. After He had been doing all of the miracles, they said, "Show us a sign that You're the Messiah." Jesus said, "A wicked and an adulterous generation seeks after a sign but no sign will be given except the sign of the prophet Jonah" ([Matthew 16:4](#)), "for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." And so Jesus refers to Jonah's experience as a real, literal experience, and thus I accept it as a real, literal experience. And I have no problem accepting it as a real, literal experience.

For I believe that God has created creatures of which we know nothing about that are surely capable of swallowing a man and retaining him for a period of time. I have no problem with God's ability to create. As I look at the vast creation of God, really I have no problem with creation. They talk of a whale's throat being too small to swallow a man. Well, that's some species of whales, but there is the sperm whale in which they have found the arms of squid that are five feet in diameter in their stomachs, so evidently they swallowed that portion of the squid. There must be gigantic squid in the oceans that we have never seen. In fact, they have found on whales the imprints of the suction cups of squid that are one foot in diameter, giant squid down there in the depths of the ocean. I would personally love to see a whale and a squid going at it. Boy, if you could get that on film how exciting that would be. One of these giant squid with suction cups a foot in diameter and a five foot in diameter on their tentacles. God has created some interesting creatures that we have not yet seen dwelling, no doubt, in the depths of the seas.



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God said to Job, He said, "Hey, Job, you think you know so much, tell Me, have you seen this and that and the other?" And God rings off some of these things. Hey, it's beyond my dimensions. It is beyond my realm.

So Jonah was three days and three nights here in the belly of this great fish.

### Chapter 2

Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly ([Jon 2:1](#)),

Jonah must have been a stubborn man indeed that he would wait three days and three nights before he would begin to pray. He was determined not to take the gospel to the Gentiles. He was determined not to go, sitting it out for three days and three nights.

Now he describes the conditions that he was in.

And he said, I cried by reason of my affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I ([Jon 2:2](#)),

He thought the conditions... he maybe even thought he died and gone to hell. After all, he was trying to run from God, and it was so hot, 98.6 if it were a whale and it's a mammal, so it has a 98.6 temperature, body temperature, beside the heat, the humidity that must have been inside that whale. The gastric juices sloshing around him, the seaweed wrapped around his head. "Out of my affliction, out of hell I cried,"

and you heard my voice. For you had cast me into the deep, into the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all of thy billows and thy waves passed over me ([Jon 2:2-3](#)).

It is interesting that most of his prayer can be found in the Psalms. Jonah evidently had a very good knowledge of the Psalms, because his entire prayer you can reference back in the Psalms. And that might be an interesting little project for you to take your concordance and reference Jonah's prayer. And he is jumping all over the Psalms in his prayer. It's too bad he didn't get to the hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm, and he could have saved himself problems to begin with, because he would know there is no way to escape from the presence of God. For in [Psalm 139](#), "If I take the wings of the morning and flee to the uttermost parts of the sea, even there You will lead me." Now he knew the Psalms. He knew them well, because he really quotes them in his prayer, but isn't it interesting how that so many times we overlook important things.

Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight [[Psalm 31:22](#)]; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple ([Jon 2:4](#)).

You remember when Solomon was dedicating the temple he said, "Lord, if your people get in trouble, if they be taken captive by the enemy, if they be in a strange land or whatever, if they turn towards the temple and pray, then hear Thou from Thy place in

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heaven and answer their prayer and all." Now how he knew which direction the temple was I don't know. He surely had no sense of reference, but he turned in what he evidently thought was the direction of the temple to pray unto the Lord. You know he is going to cover all of his bases.

The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the bottom of the mountains ([Jon 2:5-6](#));

This thing was sounding and going way down and no doubt would get dark, dark, dark, dark and then surfacing. Oh, what a miserable experience as this movement within. Probably seasick and just horrible.

the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came unto thee, into thine holy temple ([Jon 2:6-7](#)).

Now Jonah shares with you the valuable lesson that he learned. He learned it the hard way, but he shares it with you so that you can learn it the easy way.

They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercies ([Jon 2:8](#)).

If you are following after deception or after a lie, you're only making it hard on yourself and you're only running away from that which is best for you. It is a lie to think that you know better for your own life than does God. It is a lie for you to think that you can find happiness apart from God. It is a lie for you to think that you can escape from God, or from the call of God, or from the presence of God. And for you to attempt to do so you are only bringing misery and disaster upon yourself. You're forsaking your own mercy, because God is merciful, God is loving. And whatever God has in mind for you is the very best thing that could ever happen to you, though you may not think it. God may be calling you to something, and you are trying to run. And you think, "Oh, that's the last thing I want to do. I never want to do that." And you are trying to run, because you have this fear that to do what God is calling you to do will mean such deprivation and mean all of this, and you think "Oh, I can't do that. I don't want to do that." And you are trying to run from the call of God. Really you are running from what is the very best thing that could ever happen to you. If you are running from the will of God, trying to run from the will of God.

"They that observe these lying vanities are only forsaking their own mercies." You're creating your own hell, a misery in which you are going to find yourself sitting, and the misery is of your own making, and it is come from your own foolishness in thinking that you know better than God what is good for you. And yet, haven't we all been in that position in our lives?

When I think that I know better than God what will make me happy and what is good for me. And as I look back on those instances in my life, when I was observing these lying

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vanities, and when I had forsaken the path that God had set before me and I thought that I could find greater happiness and greater pleasure by leaving the path of God, I look back upon those experiences today and I realize they were the most miserable experiences of my entire life. The misery that I brought to myself and brought to others when I thought I knew better than God what would make me happy. And I created a hell in which I had to live until with David I confessed my sin before the Lord and received His forgiveness and His cleansing and the blotting out and was restored in fellowship with God. Oh, to be out of fellowship with God is hell itself. That is what hell is all about. It is out of fellowship with God. And to think of being out of fellowship with God eternally is unthinkable.

So he declares,

I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving ([Jon 2:9](#));

Now he couldn't offer a lamb or anything where he was. He could not build a fire and offer a sacrifice to God there in the whale, so he's gonna have to just be satisfied with offering to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving. This is the offering that we are encouraged to give to God in the New Testament in the book of Hebrews, to offer unto God the thanksgiving of praise unto Him, which is a sacrifice that is well accepted by Him.

I will pay that that I have vowed ([Jon 2:9](#)).

Evidently he said, "God, I give up. I'll go to Nineveh." So I'll pay that which I vowed.

And then the acknowledgment,

Salvation is of the LORD ([Jon 2:9](#)).

What an important lesson to learn for us, for you, for me. Salvation is not of my own works. It is not of my own efforts. I tried for a long time with my works and my efforts to be pleasing to God. Knowing about the little boy that had to leave Jesus outside when he went to the show, I didn't go to shows. And I was trying to be righteous in my own works. But what a glorious day when I learned the lesson that Jonah learned: salvation is of the Lord. I learned that after a lot of bitter experiences, bitter experiences of failure, trying to do what was right, unable to always do what was right, feeling this failure before God, living in this yo-yo Christian experience, up and down and up and down, great highs, tremendous lows. Until I came to the truth that Jonah discovered there in the whale-salvation is of the Lord, and I began to rest my salvation with Him. Oh, what a glorious day when I ceased from my labors and I entered into His rest. One of my most happy days in my whole Christian experience when God taught me this truth-salvation is of the Lord.

## John MacArthur :: Bible Introductions – Jonah

### Title

Following the lead of the Hebrew Masoretic text (MT), the title of the book is derived from the principal character, Jonah (meaning “dove”), the son of Amittai (1:1). Both the Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate ascribe the same name.

### Author and Date

The book makes no direct claim regarding authorship. Throughout the book, Jonah is repeatedly referred to in the third person, causing some to search for another author. It was not an uncommon OT practice, however, to write in the third person (e.g., Ex. 11:3; 1 Sam. 12:11). Furthermore, the autobiographical information revealed within its pages clearly points to Jonah as the author. The firsthand accounts of such unusual events and experiences would be best recounted from the hand of Jonah himself. Nor should the introductory verse suggest otherwise, since other prophets such as Hosea, Joel, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Zechariah have similar openings.

According to 2 Kin. 14:25, Jonah came from Gath-hepher near Nazareth. The context places him during the long and prosperous reign of Jeroboam II (ca. 793–758 B.C.), making him a prophet to the northern tribes just prior to Amos during the first half of the eighth century B.C., ca. 760 B.C. The Pharisees were wrong when they said “no prophet has arisen out of Galilee” (John 7:52), because Jonah was a Galilean. An unverifiable Jewish tradition says Jonah was the son of the widow of Zarephath whom Elijah raised from the dead (1 Kin. 17:8–24).

### Background and Setting

As a prophet to the 10 northern tribes of Israel, Jonah shares a background and setting with Amos. The nation enjoyed a time of relative peace and prosperity. Both Syria and Assyria were weak, allowing Jeroboam II to enlarge the northern borders of Israel to where they had been in the days of David and Solomon (2 Kin. 14:23–27). Spiritually, however, it was a time of poverty; religion was ritualistic and increasingly idolatrous, and justice had become perverted. Peacetime and wealth had made her bankrupt spiritually, morally, and ethically (cf. 2 Kin. 14:24; Amos 4:1ff.; 5:10–13). As a result, God was to punish her by bringing destruction and captivity from the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Nineveh’s repentance may have been aided by the two plagues (765 and 759 B.C.) and a solar eclipse (763 B.C.), preparing them for Jonah’s judgment message.

### Historical and Theological Themes

Jonah, though a prophet of Israel, is not remembered for his ministry in Israel which could explain why the Pharisees erringly claimed in Jesus’ day that no prophet had come from Galilee (cf. John 7:52). Rather, the book relates the account of his call to preach repentance to Nineveh and his refusal to go. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria and

## Commentary on Jonah 1&2, by Chuck Smith 4.24.24

infamous for its cruelty, was an historical nemesis of Israel and Judah. The focus of this book is on that Gentile city, which was founded by Nimrod, great-grandson of Noah (Gen. 10:6–12). Perhaps the largest city in the ancient world (1:2; 3:2, 3; 4:11), it was nevertheless destroyed about 150 years after the repentance of the generation in the time of Jonah's visit (612 B.C.), as Nahum prophesied (Nah. 1:1ff.). Israel's political distaste for Assyria, coupled with a sense of spiritual superiority as the recipient of God's covenant blessing, produced a recalcitrant attitude in Jonah toward God's request for missionary service. Jonah was sent to Nineveh in part to shame Israel by the fact that a pagan city repented at the preaching of a stranger, whereas Israel would not repent though preached to by many prophets. He was soon to learn that God's love and mercy extends to all of His creatures (4:2, 10, 11), not just His covenant people (cf. Gen. 9:27; 12:3; Lev. 19:33, 34; 1 Sam. 2:10; Is. 2:2; Joel 2:28–32).

The book of Jonah reveals God's sovereign rule over man and all creation. Creation came into being through Him (1:9) and responds to His every command (1:4, 17; 2:10; 4:6, 7; cf. Mark 4:41). Jesus employed the repentance of the Ninevites to rebuke the Pharisees, thereby illustrating the hardness of the Pharisees' hearts and their unwillingness to repent (Matt. 12:38–41; Luke 11:29–32). The heathen city of Nineveh repented at the preaching of a reluctant prophet, but the Pharisees would not repent at the preaching of the greatest of all prophets, in spite of overwhelming evidence that He was actually their Lord and Messiah. Jonah is a picture of Israel, who was chosen and commissioned by God to be His witness (Is. 43:10–12; 44:8), who rebelled against His will (Ex. 32:1–4; Judg. 2:11–19; Ezek. 6:1–5; Mark 7:6–9), but who has been miraculously preserved by God through centuries of exile and dispersion to finally preach His truth (Jer. 30:11; 31:35–37; Hos. 3:3–5; Rev. 7:1–8; 14:1–3).

### Interpretive Challenges

The primary challenge is whether the book is to be interpreted as historical narrative or as allegory/parable. The grand scale of the miracles, such as being kept alive 3 days and nights in a big fish, has led some skeptics and critics to deny their historical validity and substitute spiritual lessons, either to the constituent parts (allegory) or to the book as a whole (parable). But however grandiose and miraculous the events may have been, the narrative must be viewed as historical. Centered on an historically identifiable OT prophet who lived in the eighth century B.C., the account of whom has been recorded in narrative form, there is no alternative but to understand Jonah as historical. Furthermore, Jesus did not teach the story of Jonah as a parable but as an actual account firmly rooted in history (Matt. 12:38–41; 16:4; Luke 11:29–32).