

Jonah Chapters 1-2 – John Karmelich

1. I want to open with a story that probably occurred over 20 years ago. My father was worried that I was getting carried away with this "God Stuff". We had lunch with a friend of his who was also a devout Christian. I recall my father asking, do you really think Jonah was swallowed by a fish? I responded the greatest miracle in the story of Jonah wasn't that a big fish ate Jonah. The greatest miracle is that the city of Nineveh repented. My father loved history, and he knew the history of the city of Nineveh. The man who came to lunch with us smiled and essentially said, "You're my kind of guy!" I admit when it comes to pondering what God is capable of doing, I've always been bored by that question. I figure if God is God, then He's capable of creating a fish or a whale that can swallow a man and spit that same man back up three days later. The amazing thing to me is a large city of non-Jewish people can turn to the God of the bible based on the teachings of a Jewish prophet and get the residents of that city to trust in God!
 - a) With that said, welcome to my study of the book of Jonah. It's only four chapters. One of the hardest things for a bible teacher to do is cover a story people know well. I remember I had the same problem with Daniel in the Lion's Den among others. I assume most of us have heard this story from childhood or at least seen the movie Pinocchio. What I hope to accomplish in this lesson and this 4-chapter book some things you've never thought about this story, and more importantly how it affects our faith as Christians.
 - b) First, let me give my title, "Far more than a fish story". Just as my father struggled at that time to accept that story as true, so most people don't realize all the amazing miracles that occurred in Jonah, the least impressive of which is the fish or whale swallowing Jonah.
 - c) Let me also give you a clue how important this story is. In synagogues around the world, what is considered the most Holy Day of the year is "Yom Kippur". The short version is it is supposed to be a day of repentance for one's sins. It always occurs in the fall about two weeks after the Jewish New Year. What most non-Jewish people do not know is the story of Jonah is always studied on that Jewish holiday. My point is the story of a prophet from Israel going to a foreign city to preach repentance is a great model of how we're supposed to be a witness to God not only among ourselves but to the world as well!
 - d) The obvious lesson for us is that God expects us Christians to be a witness for Him as well even in places we may not be crazy about going to. To use Jonah as an example: Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. When Jonah was alive, it was the headquarters of the Assyrian Empire. The best comparison I heard would be like God telling an Orthodox Jewish person living in New York City to go to Berlin during World War II and announce to the Germans to repent of their hatred of the Jewish nation. I suspect that if an Orthodox Jewish man was given that order, he'd like Jonah would go as far as he can in the opposite direction to get as far away from where God wanted him to go! That essentially is Jonah's story. Nineveh was a large city at the time of Jonah. That's why the greatest miracle in the book is the fact they repented at Jonah's preaching. When we get to Chapter 4, we'll get a few more details about Nineveh itself. However, now it's time for my "Who, what, where and why's of Jonah:
2. Jonah lived about 750 BC, more or less. He was probably a contemporary of the prophet Amos in Israel at that time. However because Jonah was called to preach to a foreign land, we don't know much or anything about his role as a prophet in Israel if any. There is a reference in 2nd Kings to Jonah and the point is he came from a town near the Sea of Galilee. In the Gospels, a Pharisee did make a comment that "No Prophet came from the Galilees". (John 7:52). We can argue that Jonah came from that area, but the Pharisee may have been technically correct, as Jonah didn't preach to the Israelites. The story of Jonah takes place, in a harbor on the border of Israel, somewhere in the Mediterranean Sea, and finally in or just outside of Nineveh, which is in Iraq today. That city was eventually destroyed, but that destruction was about 150 years after the time of Jonah.

- a) If nothing else, you can tell that I inherited my father's love of history from these lessons!
 - b) We get a reference to Jonah in 2nd Kings 14:25, which is how we know when Jonah lived. That reference told us where Jonah was from, and he lived about the same time as Hosea as well as Amos. Since I already covered the "who, what, when and why's of Hosea and Amos" when I taught those books, I'll stick to Jonah here.
 - c) This leads to the important question of how do we know this story is real and not just the "big fish story" of the Old Testament. For starters Jesus Himself said that as Jonah lived in the belly of a fish for 3 days and 3 nights so He'll be in the earth that long. (Matthew 12:40, et.al.) I'm not going to get into "was Jesus really dead 3 full day debate". My point is if we believe Jesus is God, then since He claimed Jonah was a factual story, that's my validation that Jonah's story is true.
 - d) Also keep in mind that Jonah must have written his book after all of this took place. After all, he didn't have a pen and paper in the belly of the fish! Therefore I'm pretty positive of Jonah recalling the facts of the story and wrote them down afterwards to form this book.
3. Before I discuss the first two chapters, stop and consider how many miracles there are in this little four-chapter book. God caused a great storm to pop up that scared professional sailors. God also caused that storm to instantly stop. God had this great fish at the right place and the right time so Jonah could be swallowed up. God caused or made this fish to "spit up" Jonah on dry land. God then made it possible for Jonah to travel many hundreds of miles east to Nineveh. Yes, the Spirit of God encouraged the residents of Nineveh to repent. I haven't even touched the miracle of the sailors on that boat with Jonah who were not Jewish praying to the God of Israel. There's also the story in Chapter 4 when God made a big plant to grow to give Jonah shade while he is outside of Nineveh and God miraculously killed that same plant. I want you to realize Jonah's book is full of miracles and the least impressive one to me is a big fish swallowing Jonah. Now you can tell why I picked the lesson title I did about this story being more than a fish tale!
4. With that said, a few quick words about Chapters 1 and 2, and then I'll start on the details. In the opening chapter is the story of God calling Jonah to go preach to Nineveh. Realize that Jonah got the idea that God is everywhere and Jonah can't run away from Him. What scared Jonah was the fact he realized he disobeyed God but he'd rather see Nineveh suffer than go preach to them. It's as if he was thinking, "God can only use me, and if I disobey Him, then my will gets done and not His will!" To state the obvious, God explained His "incentive plan" a little more clearly and that's how Jonah eventually traveled many hundreds of miles in the opposite direction to go where He wanted Him to go. That's the "short version" of Chapter 1.
- a) Then Chapter 2 is only 10 verses so I'm sneaking that chapter in this lesson as well. That's the chapter where we read of Jonah repenting about turning from God and praying to be used by God as He desires. Yes there's more to the prayer, but that's the essential idea.
 - b) Anyway hopefully you've learned more about Jonah than you've ever knew as a child as I try to explain why the story of Jonah is far more than a fish tale. With that said, let's start to read the details as we try to learn what God wants us to learn from this story!
5. Chapter 1, Verse 1: 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."
- a) In Verses 1 and 2, we find out Jonah's full name and what are his marching orders. To call a person "son of x" is like stating one's full name. The same first and last name is stated in 2nd Kings 14:25. That reference tells us when Jonah lived as it's in the same time frame of King Jeroboam II. If you didn't read my Amos or Hosea study, the short version is he was the king at a time of prosperity in the Northern Israel Kingdom and the "North's" last king before the Assyrians came and destroyed that kingdom. It's important to understand how Jonah was called to preach to the largest city of the Assyrian Empire and let's just say that city was not the most "Jewish friendly" place to be back then.
 - b) Let me sneak in a little background about Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire. That empire lasted for 700 years with high and low moments. Nineveh was the capital of that empire.

- i) The city was located on the banks of the Tigris River. It was located in Northern Iraq. The City of Babylon which formed a separate empire that conquered the city of Assyria and eventually took over that empire as well as expanded it, is located in the Southern Part of Iraq. While the city of Babylon is more famous and it was known for having walls so thick, chariot races occurred on top of those walls, the city of Nineveh was actually a larger city based on the area inside its walls. From what I've read the population was estimated to be about 600,000 by the time Jonah was called to preach to that city.
- ii) For the record, when the Persian Empire came on the scene about 200 years in the future, they destroyed the city of Nineveh. It's said that when Alexander the Great who formed the Greek Empire marched his army through that area, he didn't even know he was passing through that city as it had been destroyed that well. That's a brief history of "Who ran the Middle" East from about 800BC to 300BC back then.
- c) Anyway, between the 2nd Kings reference and the story of Jonah, we do know he's called to be a prophet. We don't know what that entailed in his life other than this story, but I'm suspecting there had to be more to it than this, or else we wouldn't have his name listed in the book of Kings to begin with. That chapter of 2nd Kings is essentially saying when that kingdom was about to fall, most of the Israelites turned from God. There were exceptions as God fearing prophets including Hosea, Amos and Jonah.
 - i) The bible doesn't list any meetings between those prophets. My essential point is all we know about Jonah is when he lived (around 750BC) and he was based out of a town near the Sea of Galilee in the Northern Israel Kingdom.
- d) I sort of picture God tapping Jonah on the shoulder saying, "I've got a new job for you and you'll have to travel to a foreign country to deliver this message. You won't like it, but it's what I want you to do right now!"
 - i) That leads me to classic question, how do we know what is God's will for our lives at any given moment? The best way I can describe it is we do what we can't stand not to do! Me, I love teaching the bible and through a bunch of trials and errors, I ended up with this ministry. My first rule of "God's will" is He'll never demand of us to do something unbiblical. My second rule is, "What is it we can't stand not to do" and find a way to combine what we enjoy or are good at in a way to go make a difference for Him". One of my favorite little prayers is, "God, you are in charge of my time, how can I use it for Your glory today? Make it obvious to me what's Your desire for me to do." Personally, I find that God can't resist a "surrender prayer" of our will to His!
 - ii) It makes me wonder if Jonah asked, "Dear God where in the Northern Kingdom of Israel do you want me to preach today and what's Your message?" I visualize His response as "You want to do My will?" Let's begin by "thinking out of the box" and realizing that I (God) desire you (that's us) to do what is His will at this moment in time. I should probably add that doing God's will is not always an elaborate task. Often God's will is simply to do what's logical at that moment. I've learned that I can't force God to work on my timing. I always figured that God has my "phone number" and if He wants to tell me something, I don't have to strain to hear it, as He'll make it obvious to me on His timing and not mine!
 - iii) The shorter version is if we've got an idea of how to use our time for God, and I'm assuming the idea doesn't violate any biblical principals and all of that, just take a leap of faith, pray through it and we'll know by trial and error if it's His will to do.
- e) Meanwhile, I left Jonah probably standing there in shock as God just told him to travel to the capital of the Assyrian Empire and preach repentance there. Again realize that empire covered a vast territory of the Middle East and were the "big boys on the block" back then. From Verse 3, we'll learn that Jonah wasn't crazy about the plan and decided to run away!

6. Verse 3: But 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.
- a) As I said in the introduction, if I was an Orthodox Jew living say in New York City during World War II, and God told me to preach to Berlin, I too, might want to hop of a boat that is headed say to China. This is a classic case of wanting "our will done" and not God's. By Jonah heading in the opposite direction of where God wanted him to go, Jonah's saying to God, "I quit, go get someone else to be Your prophet!"
 - b) Let me give a few quick technical notes here. Joppa was a seaport on the Mediterranean Coast of Israel. If memory is correct, it was built during the time of King Solomon. What the point is, is that Jonah lived up by the Sea of Galilee, which is a lake in northeast Israel. He traveled west to this port town and paid the fair to travel to Tarshish.
 - i) The second technical point is where is Tarshish. Scholars debate over this one, but the best evidence points to a city in Spain. Spain as a name or country didn't exist at that time. Realize that Nineveh is about 500 miles east of Israel and Jonah wants to travel as far as he could in the opposite direction. Jonah must have thought, "He can't use me to preach that message if I'm not in the area!" That is of course, before God explained His "executive incentive plan a little better!"
 - c) So why does the text mention how Jonah paid the fair to travel there? It is so we know he didn't sneak aboard the ship. We'll learn in the next few verses that the crew wasn't from Israel. Most commentators suspect the crew were Phoenicians. That's because the city of Tyre and Sidon (in what is Lebanon today) were known for sailing and trading all around the Mediterranean. Anyway, the main point is we're reading of Jonah making an effort to not only ignore God's will but to run away in the opposite direction. Of course, Jonah did know that "God is everywhere". Jonah just figured that if he ran in the other direction, it's not very likely that God would continue to ask Jonah to perform this message.
 - d) Realize that we can be devout Christians and willfully chose to ignore God's will. He will never force His will upon us. If we ask to do His will, He may make it obvious to us what is His will, but there is no "gun to our head". However, when God does want us to do His will, He'll often explain what I jokingly call "His executive incentive plan" clearer!
7. Verse 4: Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ All 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. ⁶ The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish."
- a) The first thing to remember as you read this passage is that Jonah was aboard a ship that's full of professional sailors. They have probably all been through many a storm. Notice in Verse 4 it says, the LORD (all capitals, God's most holy name) sent the storm. My point is this storm was no "ordinary one". It was bad enough that the crew feared for their lives!
 - b) Verse 5 mentions the ship had cargo. Remember that the ship's crew were paid to deliver stuff from one place to the other. The ship was in the "transportation" business and taking on an extra passenger was a bonus to taking the cargo. Notice this storm was so bad, that the crew was no longer interested in the delivery fee as they threw the cargo overboard to try to lighten the load of the ship.
 - c) I was considering, how was Jonah asleep during a horrid storm? Grant it the lower center of a ship is the calmest area, but it still had to be rocking back and forth! How can anyone sleep through a violent storm? Most likely, Jonah felt a lot of stress as he knew it was his fault the storm was raging. He knew he was running away from what God's desire at that moment. I think the stress of realizing all of this, wore Jonah out. That's why he was fast asleep during a horrid storm.
 - d) The next issue to bring up is prayers to different god's being made at that time. Let's start:

- i) The first question is, does "The" God listen to prayers made to other gods? I know that God is perfect and knows all things. Therefore my answer is yes, and if it's His desire to answer such a prayer, it's no shock to me. The one thing I have learned is that God works to draw people closer to Him. Therefore if people are praying to a foreign god and a representative of the true God is "there", I can guarantee you He wants that person to be His witness of "The" God at that moment.
 - ii) Notice the captain took the time to find Jonah and ask him to pray to his god. The captain knew this storm was really bad and after doing everything they practically do to stay alive, he knew it was time for everyone to pray. Like most nations that existed in the Middle East at that time, there were a number of gods to pray too. I suspect the captain wanted to "cover his bases" and make sure there was not some god that he forgot about causing this storm, so he wanted to make sure that all the "gods" were considered who could end this storm!
 - iii) The next thing to catch is that even though Jonah is running away from what God wants him to do here and now, Jonah still realizes that he's God's representative to the world around him. Maybe Jonah was still sleepy when he was told to pray to God, but for whatever reason, Jonah was still a good witness "here and now" as we will discover in Verse 8 and did explain who the God was that he worshipped!
 - iv) You have to admit, this would be a fun scene to picture. Imagine a ship that was rocking really hard in every direction. The captain already ordered all the things that can be done practically be done! It's like the old saying, "There is nothing left to do but pray, and that's why the captain made sure everyone was doing that!" It is an effort to "try anything and everything" to save one's life and it meant telling the guest on the ship to wake up and go pray to his god, whoever that is! One can imagine the shock the captain and crew was going to get from the next scene!
8. Verse 7: Then 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.
- a) I'll say this for the sailors on the boat. They were religious. They don't believe in the God of the bible at this point, but they did believe that one of the "god's" was responsible. It is not a matter of just saying we're in a really bad storm, it must be something even greater!
 - b) Let me explain casting lots. This is a method used in the Old Testament to determine His will. The closest I can explain it would be like rolling a pair of dice and if they kept up to say a pair of one's, either one would conclude the dice were fixed or "gods" are controlling the results. Let me state right now, that I don't believe Christians should ever consult this type of method for determining God's will. It's like the old joke of turning to a page of the bible at random and obey those results. The joke is what if one accidentally comes on the page where Judas kills himself? All I'm saying is that's not how God wants Christians to determine His will. The correct answer is to not violate any biblical law and then do what is the logical thing to do in any situation. It's usually by trial and error when we make the effort to do something for Him that we figure out His will.
 - c) In the meantime, I left the sailors tossing back and forth on a very rough sea, trying to see who is responsible for this storm. Notice Jonah didn't interrupt the action to say, "Yes it's me, let me save you some time and trouble!" Remember that Jonah knew he was violating God's will but he's either sitting tight or still waking up from being asleep.
 - d) The other thing to catch here is that the "dice kept coming up snake eyes" for Jonah, so the crew was convinced it was his fault. Realize the sailors didn't know Jonah was Jewish, let alone a prophet of God. He was just a guy who paid to travel on their ship.
 - e) With that said, time for "that type of introduction" in Verse 8. Before I do, realize that we'll be in situations sometime, where God calls us to be His witness when we don't expect it in the first place. God never called Jonah to go on this ship, but since he's there, God's going to use him. It shows even when we're turning from God we can still be used by Him.

9. Verse 8: So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" ⁹ He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land."
- a) Remember that most likely the sailors were Phoenicians. They were the dominant country for sailors and they were in port in Israel to pick up cargo. I say that because they would know what Israelites were and the fact they worshipped the God who created all things.
 - b) The word "Hebrew" is associated with Jewish people. It literally means "one who comes from across the river". By using that term Jonah is saying, we're the one's God planted in the land of Israel. Again, keep in mind that Jonah is running away from what God called him to do. In spite of that, he's still in his own way, being a good witness for God as he is not lying about his background or the god he worships. That's why I made a big deal of the fact one never knows when or how we'll be a witness for Him, in spite of ourselves!
 - c) By Jonah referring to God as the one who made "sea and the land", Jonah is teaching them the idea that God created all things and He is above all things, and He's not limited to any one piece of geography as the local gods were at that time.
 - d) These verses are a nice little reminder about how to be a witness for God. Too often I see Christians trying to hit a "home run" with every stranger they meet. Often it's better if we just "hit a single" and give people a little information about God to digest without having to go into all the details about our religion. The way I view heaven is no one will be there who God didn't mean to be there. Therefore, He doesn't ask each of us to "close the deal" on every person we meet, but often it's best just to give our target audience something to think about. That's what Jonah does in Verse 9.
10. Verse 10: This 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.) ¹¹ The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"
- a) What they are asking is "What's the magic prayer we can say, that'll make life better?" We all know what Jonah wants them to do, but based on what's coming up, they don't want to do that. Remember these sailors now realize from the "Loaded dice" that it is God who is behind this. Remember how I said hitting a "single" for God is often the best way to be a witness for Him? Well, here it got the sailors in effect, "what can we do to be pleasing to "The" God who Jonah claims created all things and is responsible for this storm?"
11. Verse 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."
- a) Here's something to ponder: If Jonah knew the solution was to throw himself overboard, why didn't he just jump? If the ship was shaking that hard, why not just go near the edge and fall off? Why did he want to be thrown off?
 - i) First let me consider a practical reason. Jonah knew it was a sin to commit murder and suicide is murder. (For those of you who've had a loved one commit suicide, I don't consider it an unforgivable sin as Jesus effectively said the only unforgivable sin is a lifetime denial that He is God.) I think Jonah just figured that if he told the crew to do it, he could face God and say, "I was pushed". Yes, it was his idea to be pushed, but it's a bad legal way to get around that commandment!
 - ii) There's another view to consider. One of my rules for studying the bible, is when a passage doesn't make sense, try putting Jesus in the middle of the passage to see if it "works". Just as Jesus was killed by Gentiles, so Jonah died of "second degree" murder (murder where one participates but it wasn't one's idea) and like Jesus, he was resurrected. I admit, it's not a perfect analogy, but some Christian scholars do see Jonah that model so if it works for you, go with it.
 - b) Realize why Jonah wanted this solution. It's not that he was crazy about dying. Jonah did desire to avoid going to Nineveh and Jonah figured by dying will "solve that" for good!

12. Verse 13: Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. ¹⁴ Then they cried to the LORD, "O LORD, please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O LORD, have done as you pleased." ¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. ¹⁶ At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.
- a) First question, why were the sailors so hesitant to throw Jonah overboard? The answer is because they realized from casting lots the God of the bible was behind this storm. They are not interested in ticking God off, and they figured throwing a prophet of God over the side would doom their fate forever.
 - b) Isn't it interesting that a group of nonbelievers who knew little about God now want to be pleasing to Him by not killing Jonah! The point is the sailors were better witnesses for the God of the Universe than Jonah was, who was called by God's prophet in the first place!
 - c) Verse 13 says the first solution was try to row to land. Then the storm got worse. Again if we want to figure out God's will, "trial and error" is often the correct solution. Anyway it became obvious that rowing wasn't going to help so now they figured they had to go do it Jonah's way. Before they did, they fired up a prayer to God to not hold them accountable for killing Jonah.
 - d) I don't know about you, but I suspect those sailors are in heaven right now. They took the information they had about God and honored him based on that information. Did any of them know the 10 Commandments or the Torah? Doubt it! However, once the storm did calm down, they offered some sort of sacrifice (probably part of their food) to Him out of gratitude for calming the storm. In that sense, Jonah succeeded as God's missionary!
 - e) Notice we've gone 16 verses and we haven't even come to the great fish yet. At the least, it teaches us there is a lot more to Jonah than the swallowing part! In fact, this is essentially the end of "Scene 1". "Scene 1a" as I call it will now take place in the belly of the fish!
 - f) If we get nothing else out of Chapter 1, it should be the fact that even if we're disobeying God's will at any moment, as long as we're breathing, we can still be a witness for Him in some capacity that may not have even crossed our mind!
 - g) OK then, fish time!
13. Verse 17: But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.
- a) If you ever read commentaries about Jonah, a lot of them will tell stories of people who've survived being inside a whale for a day or two. I hold a personal view (that I can't prove) that Jonah actually was dead in the whale and just as Jesus said He was three days in the "belly of the earth" (i.e., dead) so I suspect Jonah died too. Could I be wrong? Sure. It is just what I suspect. I'll ask Jonah one day when I meet him.
 - b) While I'm in the neighborhood let me quickly touch on the controversy whether Jesus was dead three full days or three partial days. I still recall Pastor David Hocking telling that at different times in his life, he's held the "Wednesday view", the "Thursday view" and even the "Friday view" of when Jesus actually died. In Hebrew grammar a partial day (most of it) can be counted as a full day. Therefore, one can argue three partial days or full ones as to when Jesus was dead and still be right. Personally, I've gotten to a point where I'll just ask one day and let the debate go on. That little detail never mattered that much to me. It can be argued a number of ways, and I'll let the professional debaters tackle that one.
 - c) Speaking of things I don't have an answer too, as I've stated in my introduction, I figure if God is God, He can make fish that can swallow Jonah whole and keep him alive in there. Remember he was alive long enough to pray, which is the main topic of Chapter 2 coming up. Could it be a whale? Sure. Could it be some other large fish? One of the miracles of this story isn't just that Jonah was swallowed by this big fish or whale, but that the animal was at the right place at the right time! "Coincidence is not a kosher word!"

14. Chapter 2, Verse 1: From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God.
- a) My first question here is why did Jonah wait until now to repent? I assume Jonah realized he was facing death on the ship itself and even when he was thrown overboard. Why is it Jonah prayed when inside the fish? First, I suspect he had nothing better to do other than a big effort to try to stay alive. Give the way Jonah must have struggled to stay alive at this point, some suspect Jonah was going in and out of consciousness and he prayed to God as he dealt with the situation at hand as best he could. I'm sure he wrote down what he did recall from that prayer and that prayer ended up being God inspired and part of the bible.
 - b) It's my personal belief that Jonah was convinced God was "behind" the fish. Jonah figured out that "Coincidence is not a kosher word" and that big fish didn't just happen to be there when he was thrown overboard. Did you ever stop to think about why a wood cross was available when Jesus was sentenced to death? Most likely it was because it was there for a man name Barabbas (See Matthew 27, et.al.) who Pilate let go instead of killing. Again, it's about realizing, "Coincidence isn't a kosher word". The other thing that kicked in here was the built-in instinct to want to survive.
 - c) Bottom line, despite the difficulty of the situation, Jonah prayed to God. The text of which is the next and final nine verses of this chapter.
15. Verse 2: He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry. ³You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me.
- a) I've never believed there were "rules" for praying. For example, I don't believe God wants us on our knees or standing in order to pray. I think what God respects is our attitude as we pray. The reason He respects fasting is it shows our seriousness to seek His will as we do pray. When we do pray, I do believe God respects "Gratitude". If He knows all things He knew that Jonah would be rescued from that big fish (or whale). The reason we show gratitude is not that God's unaware of our situations, but as a way to remind ourselves of how God is working in our lives. Joyful people are grateful people. If you're grateful for what God's doing in your life you can't help being a more happy person!
 - b) I open with that comment as that's what we see Jonah doing here. He was well aware that he ran away from God's desire of him traveling to Nineveh. In these verses, Jonah relives just what he went through during his time in the fish. The internal temperature of a great fish or a whale is the same as ours: 98.6. The point being that it was hot in there. One can live, but it's not comfortable. Again, I've now heard a bunch of stories from commentators on Jonah and most of them tell of historical stories of people who've survived inside a big sperm whale, although not comfortably. The most common trait stated was that the ones inside the whale stated they would have died of starvation, but not much else. They also state how their skin permanently changed to all white from the whale's stomach acid as it permanently affected their bodies. My point of all of this is simply that Jonah survived it in tact, but I'm willing to bet he came out of it "white as a ghost". I also suspect that how he looked became one reason why Nineveh accepted his message.
 - c) Stop and think about this story another way: God could have thought of lots of ways for Jonah to go where God wanted him to go. God could have made it impossible for Jonah to travel on that boat. The reason God picked this particular method to humiliate Jonah was for him to realize "God's still in charge, deal with it and live as He desires". We read of Jonah humbling himself here as it's sinking in, that God still desires to use him as His witness to Nineveh and God designed this "executive incentive plan for Him."
 - d) The reason I'm giving this speech is I suspect there are those reading this who've thought at some point in their lives, "I've really blown it as a witness for God. I know I did "this" and it's a sin and now I can't be used by Him!" If nothing else, Jonah teaches us that God is not looking for ability but availability, and that can apply to any of us at anytime!

16. Verse 4: I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'
- Meanwhile, I left Jonah showing gratitude from the belly of a fish as waves of water and I suspect a lot of "stomach acid" washed over him while he was in that belly.
 - As Jonah was recalling what he prayed in the fish, I suspect Jonah went back and forth as he prayed is "Will I survive this?" Jonah realized that being inside that fish (ok whale, if it is what we think it was, the Hebrew word can imply either one), means that he thought of himself as effectively dead. Jonah realized that God is giving him a second chance to be a witness for Him. The temple that Jonah refers to is "THE" one in heaven where God rules the world from. (My support is the heavenly temple is referenced again in Verse 7.)
 - If nothing else, this verse should serve as a reminder to us that if we're trusting in Jesus as our complete payment for our sins, past, present and future, and believe He's God and He is in charge of our lives, then we can't sin enough to blow that salvation. I think Jonah did figure that out inside the whale. I can just imagine how much guilt Jonah had, as he knew that God called him to go to Nineveh and his response was to run as far as he could in the opposite direction. I'm sure Jonah thought, not only have I blown my witness for God, but also his salvation. My point is part of the gratitude of this prayer is that Jonah realized in spite of his sins, God is still giving him a "second chance to be a witness for Him" and that his salvation is still secure. That's what we need to remember when we "blow it" through sin. We may be a bad witness for Jesus at some moments, but as long as we're trusting in Jesus for our salvation as I've outlined in this paragraph, our salvation is secured.
17. Verse 5: The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head.
- One has to remember that whales are air breathing mammals. They come to the surface for air and there is air pockets in their stomach. Picture Jonah inside a big stomach with lots of seaweed all around him let alone water gushing in and out as well as the stomach acids. I am just saying, it's not a situation I'd like to be in. To repeat my running joke of this lesson I desire to do God's will is I wouldn't like to suffer God's "executive incentive program" as we see an example of that in this lesson let alone this verse.
 - If you get nothing else out of this lesson, you should get the idea that if God's called us to go do something, and we willfully disobey that request, God can in His own ways make it obvious to us that He wants His will done and He'll work in our lives to get to that point.
 - I recall from many years ago a story of a man who went to seminary with a famous pastor who told this story. The short version is the famous pastor ran into this man many years later. The verbal exchange was something like, "Yes I know I should have been a pastor, I would say that God's made my life miserable ever since then, and my life is a living proof of the danger of running from God all my life!" I'm not saying He calls all of us to go into the professional ministry. I'm saying God's willing to use anyone willing to make time to do His will. Jonah suffered for ignoring that desire just as we can suffer when we ignore our commitment to be a servant of Jesus when we gave our lives to serve Him.
 - Meanwhile, I left Jonah in a messy situation. Let's continue:
18. Verse 6: To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God.
- This is Jonah's colorful way of saying, "I was as good as dead in that fish! I was buried in a way never to come back alive." Then Jonah lists God's most holy name as if to say, You've given me a second chance and I've learned my lesson the hard way!
 - One of my favorite examples of hitting "rock bottom" came from a television show back in the 1970's called "Taxi". One of the main characters had a gambling problem. He was in a bathroom trying to borrow money from another character who lived like a bum. The bum said, "You're in a bathroom stall, begging me for money! Welcome to rock bottom!" I like that analogy to realize we don't have to sink that low in order to ask God for help!

- c) Let me try this situation from a different angle. Suppose someone who was a Christian is in a horrid situation and died from that situation. Why didn't God rescue them from that? Why did He allow that suffering to continue? My answer is we live in a cursed world and if it was God's will to end that life, that's His business and not ours. I state a lot that if God doesn't exist, this world would be a very unfair place to life. If there is no next life, we are wasting our time preaching Jesus and we should just try to get all the happiness we get in this life. Paul made that same point in 1st Corinthians 15:32. My point is one reason why the bible is so full of predictions is to prove to us He's real and the greatest purpose we're called to live is to use our lives for His glory. That's what Jonah figured out in the whale. I am hoping that people reading this figure out that no matter how badly our lives are at this time, He can and does still desire to use each of us for His glory and no one's beyond His reach as long as we're still breathing, even if we are "white as ghost inside a whale"!
19. Verse 7: "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.
- a) As Jonah was in this whale, he must have thought, "This is it, I was thrown overboard on that ship. A whale swallowed me, and that's fair punishment for me deserting what God called me to do". However, one can only feel sorry for oneself for so long! Eventually in order to appreciate life, we must realize we're helpless unless we realize there is a power greater than ourselves who can lead us to a better life! I'm not saying God is "generic" and just believing in a "Higher Power" is enough. The God we worship makes demand on us, which is why the bible is full of rules to obey. I want to equally emphasize that we are not "more saved" by obeying those laws. We obey them, as that is the best way to live out our lives! We're saved by realizing God Himself is and always will pay the complete price for our sins. We live in obedience to Him as that's the best way to live out our lives.
- b) OK while I'm busy "preaching to the choir", Jonah recalled as he was in the whale, how he prayed and God answered his prayer. How did Jonah know God answered it? Because of the fact Jonah got to live to tell about it. When we get to Chapter 3 next week, I've always pictured Jonah white as a ghost walking around a large city with a big "sandwich board" saying, "40 days and then you're toast ". The shocking thing is it worked! However he did deliver that message, the point is Jonah repented from turning from God and he will now live in obedience to God despite the fact he doesn't want to do this job and we'll read how he still regretted it when we get to Chapters 3 and 4 in the next lesson.
- c) Meanwhile back at Verse 7, I sort of picture Jonah thinking, "OK God while I was here in a big fish, I realized You and You alone are in charge of my life, and if it is still Your will for me to go to Nineveh, then I'll mount a camel to go there as soon as I get out of this fish!"
- d) The point of course is the next time we're in a tough spot, a great prayer to pray is, what's Your will for my life right now and is there something You want me to be doing? I won't promise that will end our problems, but it is always a good idea to ask God what He does want us to do. I usually find He answers that type of prayer, His way on His timing!
20. Verse 8: "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.
- a) Sometimes people will falsely claim that "God's grace" is only a New Testament thing. It's important to note that Jonah is talking about both Jewish and non-Jewish people who will worship anything and everything that isn't God. I've been taught most of my Christian life that "everybody" has a god. All you have to do is watch where people spend their income or what they do with their free time and you'll find people's gods.
- b) What I believe Jonah's point is the God we worship is full of grace as He is always willing to give us a second chance when we mess up. God never expects perfection, but He does expect us to make that effort to make a difference for Him. That's why His grace always is a part of the bible. That reminds me of another old bible joke: The biggest wasted page in the bible is the divider between the Old and New Testament!

- c) Anyway, the key point of this verse is simply that Jonah is realizing what a waste of a life it is to seek any desire but God's alone! Jonah was guilty of seeking His own desire as he didn't want Nineveh to repent of their sins. However, we'll get more into that issue in the second and final lesson on Jonah. Meanwhile, I've got two more verses to go!
21. Verse 9: But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD."
- a) First let's state the obvious: Jonah wasn't planning on making any sacrifices while he was in the whale! It's Jonah's way of saying as soon as I get out of here, I'm going to prove my loyalty to God by offering a sacrifice to Him.
- b) I'm reminded of the classic bible line where Samuel says, "To obey is better than sacrifice". (1st Samuel 15:22). However, sacrificing here can't be all bad as the next verse says Jonah was vomited out of the fish's mouth.
- c) Let me quickly discuss sacrifices. It was part of the Levitical requirements for the Jewish nation to offer daily sacrifices. People who wanted to show their loyalty to God or if one wanted to say confess a sin, a sacrifice was part of that ritual. It is the old saying that one takes one's commitment to God more seriously if it "cost us something". God accepts the sacrifices not because He needs them, but because He loves our obedience and when we sacrifice we show that obedience.
- d) OK then, why don't Christians do sacrifices? We do, but they're different. Many of those Levitical rituals point to what Jesus did on the cross. However, when we give money at a church, or when we give of our time and resources to further the Kingdom of God, we are doing a sacrifice whether we call it one or not.
- e) Anyway, God's happy that Jonah put "two and two together" that the fact he was alive is a sign from God that he was given a sacrifice. Jonah wanted to show that he didn't want to blow that opportunity to show repentance and he did so by his willingness to offer some sort of sacrifice after he got out of the whale. Speak of which:
22. Verse 10: And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.
- a) As I said in the introduction, the book of Jonah is full of miracles. I consider Jonah being eaten by a whale to be the least impressive of them! I consider a greater miracle the fact that the whale or fish (I'm using those words interchangeably at this point) spit Jonah up on dry land. I don't think I've ever seen a whale spit up anything, let alone do it on dry land. If nothing else, this verse is a reminder that God's in charge of all things and if he wanted to create a whale with a great spitting ability, He can do it!
- b) One has to admit it's a great visual, to picture Jonah, probably all white from stomach acid landing on a beach covered in seaweed and now sand. Personally, other than a desire for food and water at this point, I'd want a long hot shower!
- c) The next scene (next lesson) is God repeating the order for Jonah to go to Nineveh. I don't know if he got the order lying in seaweed and sand, or if God waited for him to clean up. I just know Jonah got from whatever beach he was on all the way to Northern Iraq where the city of Nineveh was located. However, that's for the next lesson.
23. So then, what should we take from this lesson? We get the idea that this is more than a fish story, but what do you want us to take away from it? I'd say if nothing else, then to realize how we've as believers have all been given God's grace so that we have the opportunity to use our lives for His glory! Since I've now written 11 pages, I'll discuss this further in my closing prayer!
24. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, may we never ignore You to the point where we have to suffer to a point where our own "large whale eats us and spits us out". May we realize what is now obvious that You desire to work in our lives and use our lives for Your glory! Help us to use our lives and our time to do Your will and make it obvious to us what that will is. Help us to draw upon Your power to make that difference as we use our lives for Your glory. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.