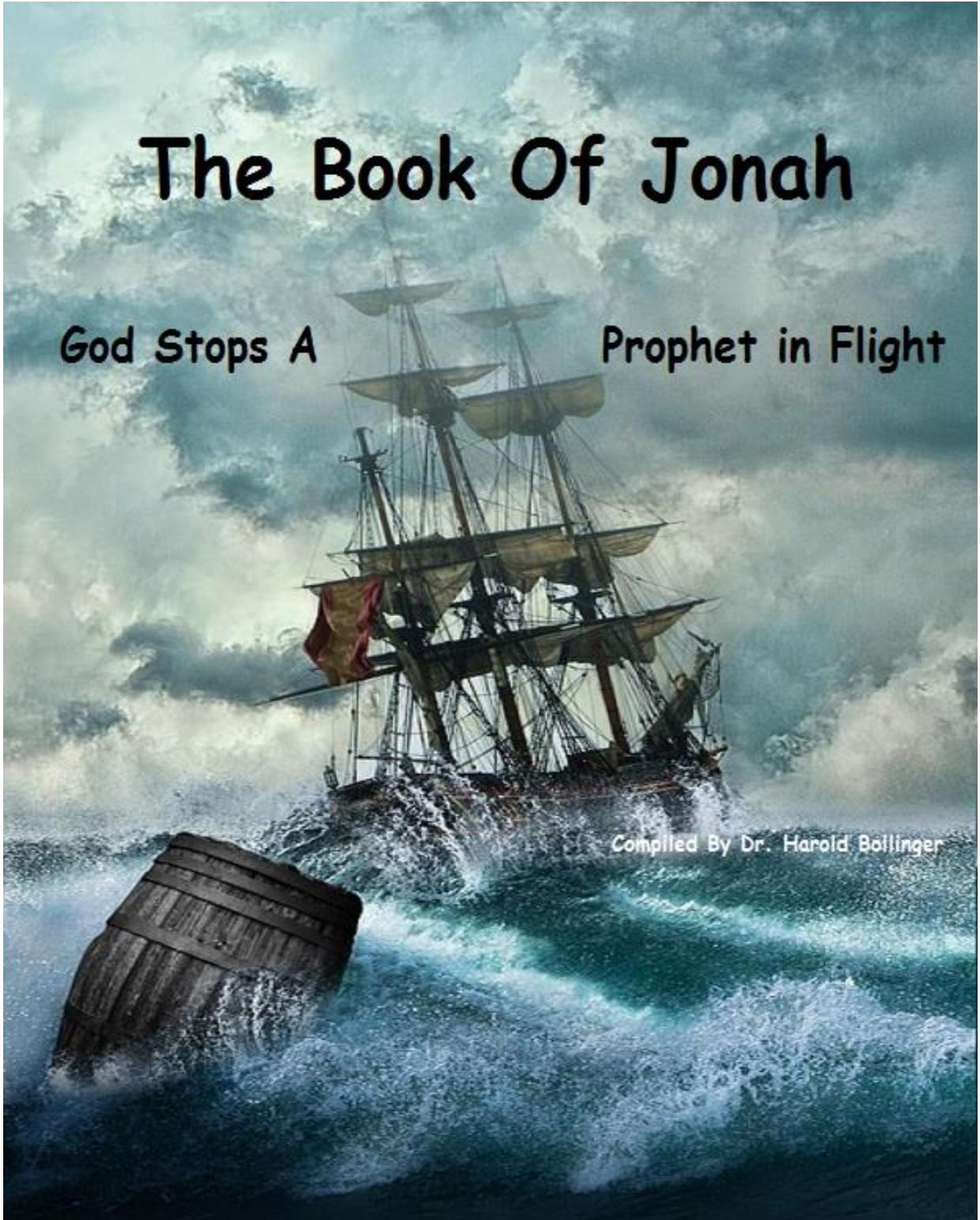


The Book Of Jonah

God Stops A

Prophet in Flight

Compiled By Dr. Harold Bollinger



Jonah

OVERVIEW: SIN runs rampant in society—daily headlines and overflowing prisons bear dramatic witness to that fact.

With child abuse, pornography, serial killings, terrorism, anarchy, and ruthless dictatorships, the world seems to be filled to overflowing with violence, hatred, and corruption. Reading, hearing, and perhaps even experiencing these tragedies, we begin to understand the necessity of God's judgment.

We may even find ourselves wishing for vengeance by any means upon the violent perpetrators. Surely they are beyond redemption! But suppose that in the midst of such thoughts, God told you to take the gospel to the worst of the offenders—how would you respond?

Jonah was given such a task. Assyria—a great but evil empire—was Israel's most dreaded enemy. The Assyrians flaunted their power before God and the world through numerous acts of heartless cruelty. So when Jonah heard God tell him to go to Assyria and call the people to repentance, he ran in the opposite direction.

The book of Jonah tells the story of this prophet's flight and how God stopped him and turned him around. But it is much more than a story of a man and a great fish—Jonah's story is a profound illustration of God's mercy and grace. No one deserved God's favor less than the people of Nineveh, Assyria's capital.

Jonah knew this. But he knew that God would forgive and bless them if they would turn from their sin and worship him. Jonah also knew the power of God's message, that even through his own weak preaching, they would respond and be spared God's judgment. But Jonah hated the Assyrians, and he wanted vengeance, not mercy. So he ran.

Eventually, Jonah obeyed and preached in the streets of Nineveh, and the people repented and were delivered from judgment. Then Jonah sulked and complained to God, "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 4:2).

In the end, God confronted Jonah about his self-centered values and lack of compassion, saying, "But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand

people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (Jonah 4:11).

As you read Jonah, see the full picture of God's love and compassion and realize that no one is beyond redemption. The gospel is for all who will repent and believe. Begin to pray for those who seem to be furthest from the kingdom, and look for ways to tell them about God.

Learn from the story of this reluctant prophet and determine to obey God, doing whatever he asks and going wherever he leads.

THE BLUEPRINT

Jonah was a reluctant prophet given a mission he found distasteful. He chose to run away from God rather than obey him. Like Jonah, we may have to do things in life that we don't want to do. Sometimes we find ourselves wanting to turn and run. But it is better to obey God than to defy him or run away. Often, in spite of our defiance, God in his mercy will give us another chance to serve him when we return to him.

1. Jonah forsakes his mission (Jonah 1:1-2:10)

The Lord gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai: [2] "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh! Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are."

[3] But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction in order to get away from the Lord. He went down to the seacoast, to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, hoping that by going away to the west he could escape from the Lord.

[4] But as the ship was sailing along, suddenly the Lord flung a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to send them to the bottom. [5] Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. And all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold. [6] So the captain went down after him. "How can you sleep at a time like this?" he shouted. "Get up and pray to your god! Maybe he will have mercy on us and spare our lives."

[7] Then the crew cast lots to see which of them had offended the gods and caused the terrible storm. When they did this, Jonah lost the toss. [8] "What have you done to bring this awful storm

down on us?" they demanded. "Who are you? What is your line of work? What country are you from? What is your nationality?"

[9] And Jonah answered, "I am a Hebrew, and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." [10] Then he told them that he was running away from the Lord.

The sailors were terrified when they heard this. "Oh, why did you do it?" they groaned. [11] And since the storm was getting worse all the time, they asked him, "What should we do to you to stop this storm?"

[12] "Throw me into the sea," Jonah said, "and it will become calm again. For I know that this terrible storm is all my fault."

[13] Instead, the sailors tried even harder to row the boat ashore. But the stormy sea was too violent for them, and they couldn't make it. [14] Then they cried out to the Lord, Jonah's God. "O Lord," they pleaded, "don't make us die for this man's sin. And don't hold us responsible for his death, because it isn't our fault. O Lord, you have sent this storm upon him for your own good reasons."

[15] Then the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once! [16] The sailors were awestruck by the Lord's great power, and they offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him.

[17] Now the Lord had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights.

[2:1] Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from inside the fish. [2] He said, "I cried out to the Lord in my great trouble, and he answered me. I called to you from the world of the dead, and Lord, you heard me! [3] You threw me into the ocean depths, and I sank down to the heart of the sea. I was buried beneath your wild and stormy waves.

[4] Then I said, 'O Lord, you have driven me from your presence. How will I ever again see your holy Temple?'

[5] "I sank beneath the waves, and death was very near. The waters closed in around me, and seaweed wrapped itself around my head. [6] I sank down to the very roots of the mountains. I was locked out of life and imprisoned in the land of the dead. But you, O Lord my God, have snatched me from the yawning jaws of death!

[7] "When I had lost all hope, I turned my thoughts once more to the Lord. And my earnest prayer went out to you in your holy Temple. [8] Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God's mercies. [9] But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfill all my vows. For my salvation comes from the Lord alone."

[10] Then the Lord ordered the fish to spit up Jonah on the beach, and it did.

2. Jonah fulfills his mission (Jonah 3:1-4:11)

Jonah 3:1-4:11

Then the Lord spoke to Jonah a second time: [2] "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh, and deliver the message of judgment I have given you."

[3] This time Jonah obeyed the Lord's command and went to Nineveh, a city so large that it took three days to see it all. [4] On the day Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: "Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!" [5] The people of Nineveh believed God's message, and from the greatest to the least, they decided to go without food and wear sackcloth to show their sorrow.

[6] When the king of Nineveh heard what Jonah was saying, he stepped down from his throne and took off his royal robes. He dressed himself in sackcloth and sat on a heap of ashes. [7] Then the king and his nobles sent this decree throughout the city: "No one, not even the animals, may eat or drink anything at all. [8] Everyone is required to wear sackcloth and pray earnestly to God. Everyone must turn from their evil ways and stop all their violence. [9] Who can tell? Perhaps even yet God will have pity on us and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us."

[10] When God saw that they had put a stop to their evil ways, he had mercy on them and didn't carry out the destruction he had threatened.

[4:1] This change of plans upset Jonah, and he became very angry. [2] So he complained to the Lord about it: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you were a gracious and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. I knew how easily you could cancel your plans for destroying these people. [3] Just kill me now, Lord! I'd rather be dead than alive because nothing I predicted is going to happen."

[4] The Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry about this?"

[5] Then Jonah went out to the east side of the city and made a shelter to sit under as he waited to see if anything would happen to the city. [6] And the Lord God arranged for a leafy plant to grow there, and soon it spread its broad leaves over Jonah's head, shading him from the sun. This eased some of his discomfort, and Jonah was very grateful for the plant.

[7] But God also prepared a worm! The next morning at dawn the worm ate through the stem of the plant, so that it soon died and withered away. [8] And as the sun grew hot, God sent a scorching east wind to blow on Jonah. The sun beat down on his head until he grew faint and wished to die. "Death is certainly better than this!" he exclaimed.

[9] Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry because the plant died?"

"Yes," Jonah retorted, "even angry enough to die!"

[10] Then the Lord said, "You feel sorry about the plant, though you did nothing to put it there. And a plant is only, at best, short lived. [11] But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?"

MEGATHEMES

THEME: God's sovereignty

EXPLANATION:

Although the prophet Jonah tried to run away from God, God was in control. By controlling the stormy seas and a great fish, God displayed his absolute, yet loving guidance.

IMPORTANCE:

Rather than running from God, trust him with your past, present, and future. Saying no to God quickly leads to disaster. Saying yes brings new understanding of God and his purpose in the world.

THEME: God's message to all the world

EXPLANATION:

God had given Jonah a purpose—to preach to the great Assyrian city of Nineveh. Jonah hated Nineveh, and so he responded with anger and indifference. Jonah had yet to learn that God loves all people. Through Jonah, God reminded Israel of their missionary purpose.

IMPORTANCE:

We must not limit our focus to our own people. God wants his people to proclaim his love in words and actions to the whole world. He wants us to be his missionaries wherever we are, wherever he sends us.

THEME: Repentance

EXPLANATION:

When the reluctant preacher went to Nineveh, there was a great response. The people repented and turned to God. This was a powerful rebuke to Israel, who thought themselves better and yet refused to respond to God's message. God will forgive all those who turn from their sin.

IMPORTANCE:

God doesn't honor sham or pretense. He wants the sincere devotion of each person. It is not enough to share the privileges of Christianity; we must ask God to forgive us and to remove our sin. Refusing to repent is the same as loving our sin.

THEME: God's compassion

EXPLANATION:

God's message of love and forgiveness was not for the Jews alone. God loves all the people of the world. The Assyrians didn't deserve it, but God spared them when they repented. In his mercy, God did not reject Jonah for aborting his mission. God has great love, patience, and forgiveness.

IMPORTANCE:

God loves each of us, even when we fail him. But he also loves other people, including those not of our group, background, race, or denomination. When we accept his love, we must also learn to accept all those whom he loves. We will find it much easier to love others when we love God.

TIMELINE

Jeroboam II becomes king; Jonah becomes a prophet 793 BC
Uzziah (Azariah) becomes king of Judah 792
Jonah preaches to Nineveh 785?
Shalmaneser IV becomes king of Assyria 783
Ashur-dan III becomes king of Assyria 772
Amos becomes a prophet 760
Ashur-Nirari V becomes king of Assyria 754
Jonah's ministry ends 753
Israel falls to Assyria 722

An invitation is given to open your heart's door.

Rev. 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Holy Bible: Living Bible Translation

Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print

Matthew Henry Concise Bible Commentary

