

# The Whale's Belly

## I. The Jews: Custodians of God's Word

Jonah was a prophet of God who was called to minister in a city called Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. It was a very large city with a population of approximately one million. This ancient city had over 1500 skyscrapers. The wall of the city was wide enough for ten chariots to run around the wall side by side. Nineveh was one of the most impregnable cities of the ancient world. To walk from one end of the city to other took three days!

Assyria was one of the most cultish Gentile areas of the world in its day. People often say, "The Old Testament was strictly written to and for the Jews." It is true that God spoke to the Jews as recorded in the Old Testament, but His purpose was so they would evangelize the world. It was never God's plan for one race of people to receive all of His benefits while all other races were left out. God chose one particular race of people to be custodians of the Word to spread it throughout the earth.

The Jews did receive the law, the prophet, and the Word of God but they held on to them because they did not want any other race to receive what they had received from God. Instead of sharing the Gospel, they tried to keep the law, but God never intended for the law to save. Jonah was a Jew and he did not want to share the Gospel with the Gentiles.

## II. Jonah Runs

### Jonah 1:1-3:

*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.*

*But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.*

God spoke to Jonah and told him he was to go to Nineveh to preach to the people. Jonah obeyed God by going, but instead of heading toward Nineveh, he got on a ship going in exactly the opposite direction. He was headed for Tarshish, which in Jonah's day was considered the end of the world. People believed the world was

flat and if you arrived at Tarshish you would fall over the edge of the world. Jonah made the decision to go the farthest place on the face of the earth known to man.

At this time in Jonah's life he was very carnal and did not care about serving God.

#### **Jonah 1:4-5:**

*But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.*

*Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wards that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.*

While Jonah was asleep in the lower compartment of the ship, a great storm arose. The storm was so strong, even the men on board were frightened. These men were mariners and were very familiar with storms at sea, but this was such a violent storm, they were afraid. They finally awakened Jonah and in essence said, "We've been praying to our gods. We have our little idols out and none of them seem to be working to stop this storm. Why don't you get your God out and pray to Him. Let's try every one of the gods and see which one will work."

#### **Jonah 1:8-10:**

*Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?*

*And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.*

*Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.*

Jonah told the men the storm was his fault. When you are out of fellowship with God, your sin does not only affect you—it affects many people around you. Jonah's sin affected all of the men who were on the ship. These old sinner fishermen were more concerned about Jonah than Jonah was about the people of Nineveh.

#### **Jonah 1:11-16:**

*Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? For the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.*

*And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.*

*Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.*

*Wherefore they cried unto the Lord, and said, We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou O Lord, hast done as it please thee.*

*So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.*

*Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows.*

The fishermen did not want to throw Jonah overboard. They first tried to row ashore before they would try to throw him off the ship. But Jonah said "The only way this storm will calm is if you throw me overboard!" The fishermen finally listened to Jonah and threw him off the ship. The moment Jonah hit the water and went under, the storm ceased and the seas calmed. Those mariners immediately revered the Lord and were saved right there on that boat!

### **III. Swallowed by a Whale**

**Jonah 1:17:**

*Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

As Jonah sank below the water he was swallowed by a whale. Many people believe Jonah was running away from the call on his life and they will say, "You better not run from the call of God because there's a giant whale out there waiting to swallow you!" But Jonah was not running from the call on his life—that was not the issue. Jonah ran because he did not want to preach at Nineveh and see the people of that heathen city saved. We have all known people at one time or another who were so bad we may have been tempted to not care whether or not they ever got saved. Nineveh was so horrible and the people so evil in Jonah's mind even Hell was too good for them. Jonah was not running from the call. He had already accepted the call, was already a missionary, and was already a prophet. He simply did not want the people of Nineveh to be saved.

### **IV. Released from the Birthpangs of Death**

**Acts 2:23-28:**

*Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:*

*Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.*

*For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved:*

*Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope:*

*Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.*

*Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.*

Beginning in verse 25 we have a quote from Psalm 16:8-11. When David said, "I foresaw," he was referring to a future event. He was prophesying. David was a prophet and was operating in that anointing when he wrote the book of Psalms. Where was David when he foresaw the Lord? He was in Paradise. David foresaw Jesus being held by the birth pangs of death. Jesus was three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. He was held in the womb of the earth while Satan was trying to deliver Him into death. Satan was actually trying to birth Jesus into death. But Hell could not contain Him. Hell could not hold Him. On the third day God raised Jesus from death, hell and the grave!

David was able to see from Paradise into Hell. Many are familiar with the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Both of them died and went to two different compartments under the earth. Lazarus went to Abraham's bosom and the rich man went to hell or the place of torments. Lazarus and the rich man could see one another. Abraham was speaking to them and the rich man said, "Why don't you send Lazarus over to cool my tongue with water." Abraham responded, "He can't do that. We cannot come over to your side and you cannot come over to our side. There is an impassable gulf between us." Even though they could not pass from one compartment to the other, they could still see one another. The rich man then asked, "I understand he can't come here but how about sending him back up to one of my five brothers to warn them." Abraham again said, "I can't do that either."

If David was in Paradise, his body was in the grave. But in verse 26 he said, "*Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope.*" David's inward man rejoiced but how could his flesh rest in hope? David's flesh could rest in hope "*Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption*" (verse 27). David was about to witness the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ which would make it possible for his body to one day be resurrected from the grave. The Holy One referred to in this verse is Jesus. David could rest because he saw Jesus bare the curse. He saw Jesus three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. He saw

Jesus being held in hell. David observed all of these events across an impassable gulf and finally saw Jesus resurrected from the dead!

David actually witnessed the coronation day of Jesus when God the Father said to His Son, "Sit on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool." One moment David was in Paradise and the next he was in Heaven to see Jesus seated at the right hand of the Father. David along with all other Old Testament saints were taken up to Heaven for the coronation of Jesus!

## V. Spiritual Death

Many believe it is blaspheme to say Jesus died spiritually. They acknowledge He died physically and took sin *upon* Himself, but they do not believe Jesus *became* sin. They basically believe Jesus was no different than the scapegoat in the Old Testament. They believe Jesus bore our sins but did not become sin. Jesus *bore* righteousness but did not literally *become* righteous. This belief means we live under Old Testament teaching. We are not literally saved, just accounted as saved. We are still sinners saved by grace.

### 2 Corinthians 5:21:

*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

Jesus *became* the curse. He *became* sin. We were not accounted righteous. We *are* righteous. If we were only *accounted* righteous we would be no different than the Old Testament believers. We could not go directly to heaven. Instead, like David we would go to Paradise. We could not go boldly into the throne room of God because we would not be righteous, only accounted as righteous. The truth is, Jesus *did* become sin and paid the ultimate price to redeem mankind. He suffered for us and because He was made sin, He was banished from God's presence. But after Jesus paid the price of redemption, He was raised from the dead. Satan no longer had a legal right to hold Jesus in Hell.

### Psalm 88:1-3:

*O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee:*

*Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry;*

*For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave.*

The word "grave" is a mistranslation. It is actually the Hebrew word *sheol* and should be translated "hell." Jesus was saying, "My life is drawing near to hell."

**Psalm 88:4-5:**

*I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength:*

*Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand.*

Jesus said He was “counted” or “numbered” with those who go down into the pit.

The word “free” in verse five actually means “abandoned” and “grave” is correctly translated.

**Psalm 88:6-12:**

*Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.*

*Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah.*

*Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth.*

*Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: Lord, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee.*

*Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah.*

*Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?*

## **VI. He Became Sin**

**Psalm 88:13:**

*But unto thee have I cried, O Lord; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee.*

The Hebrew for the phrase “prevent thee” is , “come to meet you.” Even while in the grave and in hell Jesus knew He would be resurrected. People have often asked what sustained Jesus while He was in hell. Some say it was the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit was not with Him in hell. Hebrews 1:3 says, “...when he had **by himself** purged our sins.” Jesus did not have the Holy Spirit to help or comfort Him. When Jesus became sin, God turned His back on Him. Jesus was all alone. What sustained Jesus on the cross and sustained Him in hell was His knowledge of the Word of God.

Joseph is a strong type of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was beloved of his father. Joseph's father did special things for him. One day Joseph was with his brothers and they betrayed him and sold him into slavery. While in Egypt, Joseph was wrongly accused of a crime and thrown into the dungeon, the lowest part of the prison. He was thrown in prison for the wrong of another—Potiphar's wife. Joseph's deliverance came when he interpreted a dream for the king. As a result, he was exalted to the highest position in the kingdom with the exception of the king himself. Joseph was given the authority to rule and reign over the entire land of Egypt. Joseph also married an Egyptian.

The story of Joseph is a type of Jesus. Jesus was betrayed by His brethren, the Jews, and falsely accused. Jesus went to hell for something He did not do. But just as Joseph was one day delivered, Jesus was resurrected, delivered from prison, and was seated at the right hand of the King—God Himself! Since that time Jesus has taken a Gentile bride, of which every believer has become a part!

## VII. Two Scapegoats

In the Old Testament there were two scapegoats. One was slain as a sacrifice for sin and the other was sent into the wilderness. The scapegoat that was slain is a type of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus' physical body was crucified, slain, and put into the grave. The scapegoat that was sent into the wilderness is a type of the spiritual man of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus' inward man could not be destroyed. Spiritual death is never annihilation. The spirit of man cannot be annihilated. Whether a person is born again or not, the inward man cannot be destroyed. Death simply means separation. In the Old Testament, when the scapegoat was led out into the wilderness, it was led by a man, a force with more strength than the goat possessed. The stronger man left the goat in the wilderness and there was no way the goat could return. This too, is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus' body was put on the cross and a strong man led Jesus into the dungeons of hell. Satan was the strong man but on the third day, Jesus arose from the dead and *He* became the stronger man! God bound the strong man, Satan, spoiled all his goods, arose from the dead and gave gifts to men. God established the fivefold ministry gifts in the Church. Jesus led captivity captive and took David and the other Old Testament saints to heaven. David wrote about the coronation day when God said to His own Son, "Sit on my right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool!"

## VIII. Jonah and Jesus

**Matthew 12:38-41:**

*Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.*

*But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall not sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:*

*For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

*The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.*

The scribes and Pharisees wanted Jesus to do a miracle—to walk on water or cause the sky to turn pink, or some other outlandish sign to prove He was the Son of God. But Jesus had been performing miracles every day. These men had seen the lame walk and the blind see. If Jesus had given in to their request He would have become a slave to religion. Jesus refused to perform a sign for their sake.

What an indictment Jesus made against these scribes and Pharisees! Jesus basically said to them, "Jonah preached to the most wicked nation in the world and even they received his preaching. I have come to My own people, the Jews, and preached a message greater than Jonah's and you refuse to receive it. On judgment day when you stand before the Great White Throne Judgment of God, the men of Nineveh will rise up and point to you because you did not receive the One Jonah prophesied of!"

#### **Jonah 2:1-7:**

*Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly,*

*And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.*

*For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.*

*Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.*

*The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.*

*I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; 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 in unto thee, into thine holy temple.*

The whale was planted by God. It was a provision of God. Where would Jonah have been if that whale had not been in the right place at the right time? He would have been at the bottom of the ocean floor!

When this passage says Jonah prayed to “the Lord his God,” it is referring to Jehovah Elohiym. Jehovah is the personal member of the godhead and this is who Jonah is praying to.

I believe Jonah died in the belly of the whale and was literally resurrected before being spit out on the shores of Nineveh. Nothing in Jonah’s life was working out. But when death engulfed him, he remembered the Word. This is a lesson for believers today. If everything in life is not working out, even if you are at fault, remember the Word. Jonah did not go to Paradise. He said, “You have brought my life from corruption.” Jonah is a type of Jesus. Jesus went to a place He should not have gone, but He too, remembered the Word! The difference is Jonah found himself in the wrong place out of disobedience but Jesus went to the wrong place out of obedience to His Heavenly Father!

## **IX. Obedient at Last**

### **Jonah 2:8-10:**

*They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.*

*But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving: I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.*

*And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.*

Jonah finally submitted to God’s will to go to Nineveh. He said to God, “I will pay that that I have vowed.” In other words, “Alright God, I’ll go.” The moment he submitted, the whale spit him out on the beach at Nineveh! God spoke to the fish and the fish was more obedient than Jonah had been!

After three days, hell had to spit Jesus out. It could not longer hold Him. And when Jesus walked out of the tomb, He walked out preaching! Jonah walked out preaching the simple message, “Repent or Nineveh will be destroyed in forty days.” The god of the Assyrians was Dagon, half fish and half man. When the people of Ninveh saw that a man was spit out by a whale, they were ready to listen. The entire city of Nineveh repented, from the king to the lowest in the kingdom.

The message of the Gospel is simple. It does not depend on the eloquence of man’s words. It is simply answering the question “What must I do to be saved?”