

Who was he this man Jonah? He is mentioned several times in the New Testament but only in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. His name was taken for the name of Peter and Andrew's father the fisherman from Galilee, stated as bar-Jonas which is taken into the Greek. He is mentioned in the Book of the Kings of Israel in 2 Kings 14v25 where he is described as being "the servant" of Yahweh, the son of Amittai the prophet which was of Gath-Hepher, in the reign of Jeroboam the son of Joash, who reigned over the southern Kingdom for a period and restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain according to the word of this prophet.

Gath- Hepher is in Zebulun see Joshua 19v13 which is in the north near Galilee. Like Jesus he was brought up in that part of the world which was regarded as a spiritual backwater, *"for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet"* John 7v52, they said! They had not done their due diligence, as Jonah was from that very place. He was not a very popular prophet because he preached unto the gentiles and therefore seems to have been overlooked. His name is eternal those who maligned him are forgotten.

Jonah means dove, and that bird is a symbol of peace. Amittai his father's name means true or truth. True peace only comes after the storm. The calm that descends after the intense agitation of energy has been dissipated in the violence of the storm. That he lived in a time of upheaval is clear. The Davidic dynasty was in suspension because of the death of the evil King Amaziah who had fled from Jerusalem to Lachish, one of the three Judaic kings missing from the genealogy of Joseph in Matthew 1v8 between Jehoram and Uzziah. Exodus 34v6,7. The northern King ruled for a period of 14 years until the last King's son was elevated in the place of his father when all the people rose up and crowned him King instead of his evil father. Jonah witnessed these events and had seen the tragedy of a nation ruled over by others, and the fear and panic of those who had not put their trust in the God of Israel but instead had run away.

As Amaziah King of Judah had reigned over the northern tribes of Israel for 15 years, after the death of Jehoash, now Jeroboam the second his now grown-up son, reigned over the southern tribes for 14 years. Were they both at last to be remerged together under one king? No, not yet these events were temporary but Messianic signals were being sounded out throughout the land. Elath, modern day Eilat, on the Gulf of Aqaba part of the Red Sea was restored to Judah by the young King who had been too young to take the crown when his father had died and thereby the power vacuum had been filled by the northern ruler. This was a restoration towards the glories of the Solomonic reign. With the northern seaboard also restored at Hamath to the far north, the two kingdoms were re-expanding into the larger boundaries of former times. This provoked the concern of their neighbours including the Superpower of the day, the fearsome Assyrian Empire centred in Nineveh. They were being watched.

As his father was Amittai, this might suggest that he grew up in the environment of truth, as that name carries that meaning, and he learned to reject falsehood in all its forms. Truth was to be a central part of his character and would be a key litmus test to his life's choices. He rejected the usurper Jeroboam who was an evil King, as were all the northern Kings without exception, even though he recovered Damascus and

Hamath to Judah for Israel whilst ruling over both these Kingdoms. See verse 28 of 2 Kings 14 without the italics.

Jonah also would have rejected the false Messiah Uzziah who fancied himself as a priest-king after the order of Melchizedek when he offered incense in the temple as a priest and was struck with leprosy for his sin, 2 Chronicles 26v16-18. *“When he was strong his heart was lifted up to his own destruction”*. He did reign for fifty-two years so how far into that reign Jonah lived we are not told.

The work of this prophet is not restricted to the Book of Jonah. We have already seen that he was involved with prophetic work regarding Israel itself. No doubt there were other things he did which are not expressly recorded. He is not specifically mentioned in the list of the faithful in Hebrews 11, but it is clear that he did have faith and that he is therefore included in those called prophets in 11v32-34. He did subdue mighty Assyria through his preaching and wrought righteousness in their repentance, but that is the subject of the second talk today. Verse 6 *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him”*. Jonah believed that God existed and he was pleased to do His work until the mission to go to Nineveh was thrust upon him.

Was Jonah a coward who just ran away from danger? Did his faith collapse and he decided to travel into other countries away from the promised land? Unlike Abraham who travelled to the land of inheritance Jonah did the opposite and took passage to Tarshish from Joppa. He sought to leave the presence of the LORD. See Jonah 1v3. He was to witness against the wickedness of Nineveh. Would he not relish just such an opportunity to criticise these sinners and remind them of divine justice that would accrue for their transgressions? There are two main issues in the consideration. First that a gentile nation of immense power had come or was coming into the orbit of divine prophecy from the God of Israel, implied that they were interacting or were about to interact with the people of God. He was not sent to the ancient Chinese far to the east nor the African dictators of the south nor the meso-American peoples of the Andes to the far west but to a closer neighbour who would be eying the upstarts based in Jerusalem and Samaria who were now expanding their borders once more and emerging as a rising power in Eden. Only powers that interact with the Holy land or its people form part of the divine pronouncements of prophecy. Jonah therefore knew that the threat of Assyria was very real, it was a threat against the Jewish people, his people.

Secondly, he knew that people repented and aware of the power of the Word and the reasonableness of the condemnation, it is possible that he feared their repentance because that would mean they would be spared from the destruction that was otherwise their due and be freed to descend upon his fellow countrymen, which did subsequently happen, in future generations as recorded in 2 Chronicles 28v16,20 and 2 Kings 18v9-12 in the days of Hezekiah. What we do know is that when asked he gave firm testament to his faith *“I am an Hebrew and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven which made the sea and the dry land.”* He also suggested that he be thrown into the stormy sea, so he was no coward, but was willing to die for his beliefs.

Jonah was called to do a work, from where we get our word for Church, ecclesia, those called out. He was also sent to Nineveh, which is the idea of apostleship, one sent. The

prophet resisted this calling and rebelled which is as the sin of witchcraft! A grave offence indeed and one for which he is infamous. He fled to Tarshish which is not a place of safety even if it is a land where the Hope of Israel is known. In Jonah's day this may well have been Spain as Tarshish is the land of tin and tin was obtained from the Iberian peninsular in ancient times. Latterly that switched to Britain, the tin islands. Now a place where the Truth does reside.

The sea is a figure of the wide span of humanity, Jews and gentiles alike. As it says in Isaiah 57v20 *"But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, said my God, to the wicked"*. The sea of nations was no place for the prophet Jonah. His place should have been doing God's will in either Israel or by going to anywhere else where he was specifically sent.

The sea is also a figure of baptism, as a body of water into which Jonah was immersed. The death of Christ is associated with baptism, as the Holy Spirit teaches in Romans chapter 6, where there is a clear link established between Jesus being put to death, and the watery grave of baptism. It seems fitting at this association is also established here in the book of Jonah.

Matthew 16 verse 4, *"A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah."* What was this sign of the prophet Jonah? The great sign of Jonah is of course the record of him re-emerging from inside the great fish after three days and three nights, which is a direct reference cited by the Holy Spirit of the period of time in which the Lord Jesus Christ would emerge from the tomb after being crucified three days and three nights before. Tomorrow is Easter Sunday, where orthodox Christianity remembers and celebrates the resurrection. However maintaining that he died on Good Friday as billions of Christians do, demonstrates that they pay little attention to the actual scriptural information, and instead impose their own teachings, which are generally accepted without any diligent inquiry. It is not possible for Jesus to have been dead for three days and three nights if he died on a Friday and was raised early on Sunday morning before the sun rose, there literally just is not enough time in such a circumstance. This fact is not a problem to those who accept church teaching in contrast to Bible truth. If you question this, you are the one who is wrong and divisive even though you are just insisting on the accuracy of what the Bible says, in contrast to traditions which have arisen from human opinion.

However, there is of course, additional information about Jonah, which is also part of the sign of this prophet. After his resurrection, the truth was preached to the gentiles and they responded. This is also the spiritual pattern seen in the 1st century in the Apostolic era after the Lord Jesus Christ had ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. The sad contrast of the repentance of the Assyrians as opposed to the Wickedness of the children of Israel, is an indictment against those who regard themselves as being the holy people and that evil shall not come nigh unto us. This spirit of rebellion through pride, should have been obvious to Jonah, and it seems that he could not understand why his efforts were to be directed to seek repentance in the gentiles and not repentance from the twelve tribes of Jacob. Why did God not send him amongst his own people, as so many of the other prophets had been sent? It would seem that he struggled with this point and was therefore reluctant to fulfil the divine mission.

Although a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, Jonah was no Messiah. Clearly, he did not obey God But instead sought to flee from the presence of the LORD. Is it actually possible to flee from the presence of the LORD? Does not His spirit fill creation and being both omnipotent and omniscient, did not Jonah believe that God is everywhere? Most assuredly the prophet Jonah had a correct understanding of the God who made the sea and the dry land, as he witnessed to the Mariners.

Jonah needed self-reflection. He needed to interact with himself regarding the battle between the old man and the new, the same struggle which is within us all who are the descendants of Adam, which of course includes the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Jonah disobeyed God and fled, thereby he sinned. Jesus did no sin neither was guile found in his mouth however he did have mental anguish with regards to the dangerous and unpleasant aspects of his mission. Luke 22 verse 44 reminds us of this. *"And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; And his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."* That Jesus was successful in standing up to the old man inside himself in contrast to all others including the prophet Jonah, is what sets him apart from others, sharing the same nature as all mankind, he needed not that any man tell him, but he knew what was in man, John 2 verse 25.

Jesus gave the parable of the two sons in the gospel record whereby one said he would do God's will but then did not, in contrast to the second who said that he would not, and then subsequently realised what he should do, so he did that. The prophet Jonah is a bit like this because he initially ran away from doing the will of his Heavenly Father, and then later repented. It is important always to look at someone's actual actions, rather than merely consider their words. Jonah certainly was a man of action. He did things. He was also a preacher of righteousness and one who spoke on behalf of God.

Like Jesus, Jonah fell asleep in the midst of a storm on the sea. That he could sleep at a time when the ship was like to be broken, seems to demonstrate a certain Peace of Mind and determination in the course which he set himself. The shipmaster said to him *"O sleeper arise call upon thy God"*. This is a further reference to the prophet Jonah being a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, as one who came back from the sleep of death. Everyone else was in a state of panic and were praying to their own false deities, and casting overboard any wares in order to lighten the ship, as they sought to escape their fate of being drown in the Mediterranean Sea.

Costing lots the Mariners sought to identify, through this process, who was guilty and the cause of the evil which had come upon them. This idea of blaming an individual for every act of suffering and pain is similar to the mistake which Job's three friends made in their accusations against him when they reasoned that God must be afflicting him because of specific transgressions. Proverbs 16 verse 33 states that *"the lot is cast into the lap; But the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD."* This does not mean that every time that we cast lots that God speaks to us through this medium, but only that He can choose to do so, on occasions which suit His purpose. Time and chance happens to all men, there is a degree of randomness in creation in contrast to those who believe in absolute predetermination. That on this one occasion the lots correctly identified Jonah as the reason for the storm, does not allow us to extrapolate such reasoning to other circumstances. We cannot cast lots and expect God to answer in this way.

These Mariners had previously heard about the God of the Hebrews, and His name Yahweh because they became exceedingly afraid when he revealed this information to them. As in the gospel records these things were not done in a corner, and the mission of Jonah to Nineveh, and their subsequent repentance, would no doubt make international news in that day and generation. Also the witness of the Solomaic Temple stood as a permanent reminder to other nations all the teachings of the God of Israel, and the laws of Moses. When Jonah asked to be thrown overboard in order that they might be free from the condemnation which he had brought upon them, they initially refused and instead attempted to row hard to bring the ship to the land. However the seriousness of the storm prevented this from happening. Instead they made a plea as we can read in verse 14 of the 1st chapter of the book of Jonah. *"Wherefore they cried unto the LORD and said we beseech thee, oh LORD, we beseech Thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood; for Thou, oh LORD, hast done as it pleased Thee."* By citing innocent blood, they made it clear that when they threw Jonah overboard, he was receiving punishment as a Sinner and was not free and innocent from any crime. This stands in contrast with the Jews at the crucifixion of Christ who said to Pontius Pilate *"his blood be upon us on upon our children"*. Matthew 27v25. Which was a sad indictment of the guilt of the nation in crucifying their own Messiah.

Jonah was perhaps too confident in his own abilities, too presumptive of any results he personally might achieve. God knew Jonah needed to be honed in both these areas, and the work of fashioning a sinner into the mould of the new man of the spirit was well under way in this account of one of the faithful. He shared the faith of Abraham, Moses and David and had the records of their lives to teach and instruct him in his spiritual journey just as we have this record to assist us in our walk. Faith is always to be built up in the same way.

The offering of one is a figure of the future sacrifice of Jesus, as the second Adam who brings life after the first Adam brought only death. What is not taught here in the book of Jonah, is any substitutionary sacrifice. Jonah was not put to death instead of the Mariners because it was they who deserved to die not him, rather the reverse, it was because Jonah was personally guilty, and they were not, of the sin against which God was taking action, that they threw him overboard. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and all deserve the wages of sin, but on the occasion of the storm on the sea, it was Jonah who had to die, not the Mariners. They would die later for their own sins, unless they subsequently repented and embraced the hope of Israel, as all must do in their own day and generation.

*"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."* What is this great fish a whale? In Genesis 1 v 21 it says that God created great whales. This is the Hebrew word tannin which means serpent or snake and has also been translated as the English word dragon. The actual creature that God had prepared to swallow Jonah cannot be so easily identified. In the Greek New Testament it has whale where this incident is cited. As many have pointed out, whales have filters in their mouths which prevent larger objects from being swallowed. Regardless of what we imagine this great fish to be, it was real and Jonah was not hallucinating when he fell into the water. That he either died and was

resurrected or was preserved alive inside the belly of the whale, divine intervention was needed. This was a miracle in one form or another, just as assuredly as the only way that Jesus emerged from the tomb after three days and three nights was because God raised him from the dead miraculously.

In a similar but not identical way the Apostle Paul was a day and a night in the deep, not inside a great fish but alone floating on the waves of the mighty sea with fathoms of waters beneath him and facing a probable death.

Jonah prayed to God out of the fish's belly. He must have been alive then when he was first swallowed even if he subsequently died as there is no device in the grave, our very thoughts all perish. In that prayer he regarded himself as being dead, as he talks about the belly of hell, or the grave. He had not descended into some fiery underworld but was very much in the land of the living at that time although in dire straits!

Jonah said *"I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I look to Thy Holy Temple"*. Psalm 73 comes to mind verse 12 – 17.

Isaiah 28 v9- 13 teaches the slow and careful approach that is necessary in teaching the principles of the Truth. Jonah would no doubt reflect upon his experiences and would have merged as a changed man, shaped by the hand of the Almighty, and his responses to God's interventions. Jonah turned away from those who had made lies their refuge and had hid themselves under falsehood, we must do the same.

Consider the experiences of the big fish which ate Jonah, it possibly had indigestion and other stomach aches, blocked internals, other inner body reactions to the presence of Jonah, this alien inside itself. Is this like God who has to stomach the waywardness of mankind despite being so uncomfortable with his interjection into the divine sphere. The great fish was glad no doubt to be rid of the irritant inside. At the time of His choosing, three days, and three nights, God spoke unto the fish and Jonah was vomited out upon the dry land.

The next chapter in the new life of the resurrected prophet Jonah would now begin.

A Voice from the Altar

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Prepared from notes from our Brother Michael Noonan who was unable to travel south for the special study day to be with us personally.