

# **The Church of the Servant King**

## **Prophecy Series (Proph14i\_Prophecy in the Prophets\_Jonah\_Chps 2-4)**

### **Introduction**

In our previous study of the book of Jonah, we studied some key items important to the study of any book: the author, date, historical setting, literary form of the writer, and the principle message or theme. Then we reviewed briefly the contents of the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter. In that chapter, we saw that Jonah had been commissioned by God to go to Nineveh, a large city of the emerging Assyrian empire. Nineveh had a population of about 600,000 people who were for the most part idol worshipers, even though an advanced society. It had been founded by Nimrod on the eastern banks of the Tigris River in Mesopotamia (Ge 10:8-10); therefore, it had a history of rebellion and rejection of Yahweh as Nimrod is noted to have been a “mighty hunter before the Lord” (Ge 10:9).<sup>1</sup>

Nineveh was a wicked city, its rulers coarse, lustful and sadistic. Young women, including the wives of Assyrian nobles, danced naked before royal guests; human sacrifice was practiced; the emperor was unimpeachable, his word, law; the palaces were guarded by eunuchs, young men stripped of their virility; temple prostitutes, so designated, practiced their trade openly before idols, half-man, half-beast. Among the gods, Ashur (from which the Greeks derived the word “Assyria”) was first, above all. Justifiably, perhaps, the Assyrian kings bragged that they had built Nineveh “for all times” and “for lordly pleasure.”<sup>2</sup>

Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C. at the hands of the Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians, an event which is the theme of certain oracles found in Nahum 1-3 and Zephaniah 2:13-15.<sup>3</sup>

Jonah, in rebellion against the Lord's instruction, sets sail to Tarshish, a city in the opposite direction and far enough away (~ 2000 miles if it was indeed on the southern coast of Spain as many believe) that Jonah probably hoped that the journey would take longer than the period of grace before judgment that God had allowed (see 3:4).

In chapter 1, several important points should be highlighted. Note the following points of interest:

- God's sovereignty over nature and circumstances is emphasized:
  - It wasn't just a storm, but the Lord sent it (v. 4)
  - The casting of lots so that the lot fell upon Jonah when the sailors were trying to determine who was at fault was a reflection of God's sovereignty (v. 7)
  - Jonah acknowledges the Lord as the maker of all creation (v. 9)
- Jonah's rebellion against the Lord is emphasized by the repetition of the phrase “from the presence of the Lord” [vv. 3 (twice), v. 10]

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<sup>1</sup> The name Nimrod seems to be connected to the verb for “rebel” (*marad*) and tradition has associated him with tyrannical power. See Allen P. Ross, “Genesis” in John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1985), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold C. Brackman, *The Luck of Nineveh* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1978), 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> Jack P. Lewis, *Historical Backgrounds of Bible History* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1971), 56, 73.

- ❑ Note that Jonah “fears” the Lord and acknowledges Him as Creator, but later events prove that He had not appropriated that knowledge into a daily walk of faith. He had failed to fully comprehend God’s essence in relation to those who were not Jews (e.g. specifically the combined function of God’s essence attributes resulting in God’s mercy).
- ❑ The Jews were not a maritime people. Jonah was willing to risk the seas as a result of his prejudice.
- ❑ God’s permissive will (one aspect of sovereignty) allowed the negative volition of one of His own to run its course, but God used the circumstances that resulted from Jonah’s negative volition to discipline and redirect Jonah while at the same time extending His mercy to unbelievers in Jonah’s periphery (vv. 10-17).

### **Jonah’s Prayer Psalm of Repentance – Chapter 2**

In chapter 2, Jonah gives evidence of his repentance in the form of a Psalm of thanksgiving and praise to God. Its form is typical of other Psalms of praise such as Psalms 32 and 34 and follows the same literary structure. Verse 1 is a summary statement of the psalm’s theme – a cry to the Lord because of adversity and praise because of His answer. Verses 2-7 provide details of the adversity and the Lord’s deliverance. Verses 8-9 provide a point of application and instruction.

Once again, the Lord’s sovereignty is emphasized in these verses. Note the actions that Jonah attributes to the Lord as examples of God’s sovereignty:

- ❑ “You cast me into the deep” (v. 3a)
- ❑ “Your billows and Your waves passed over me” (v. 3b)
- ❑ “You have brought up my life from the pit” (v. 6)

Jonah viewed the sea as Sheol. Sheol was a reference to the grave usually without any indication of righteousness or wickedness (Ge 37:35; 42:38; 1 Sa 2:6; 1 Ki 2:6; Job 14:3; 17:13, 16) and sometimes only of the wicked (Psa 9:17; Prov 23:14). Jonah recognizes his hopeless and helpless condition (v. 4a, 5, 6a) once he was cast into the sea. He even despaired that he might drown (v. 7a). When the great fish swallowed him, he had a glimmer of hope restored (v. 4b). He repented (v. 7b) and he praises the Lord for his deliverance (v. 6b).

In verse 8, Jonah makes us aware of the fact that he was aware that God offered “mercy” to all, but those who regarded idols as worthy of worship (e.g. the Ninevites) forsook that mercy. However, Jonah’s problem was that he was not content to remain God’s faithful messenger and leave judgment in God’s hands. Jonah allowed his correct analysis of the situation to translate into a presumption that he had been given the prerogative of executing judgment, a judgment reserved for God alone. This self-righteousness prevented Jonah from being the minister of God’s word to others that God desired him to be. This is reflected later in the fact that when the Ninevites repented and judgment was averted, Jonah became angry (see chapter 4). Jonah’s self-righteousness blinded him to his own status before the Lord – a recipient of undeserved mercy who had the same need as the Ninevites.

**Principle:** Self-righteous arrogance blinds the believer to the spiritual realities of God’s activities in life.

**Principle:** Self-righteous arrogance blinds the believer to recognize opportunities for spiritual ministry to others.

**Principle:** Self-righteous arrogance is antithetical to an attitude of humble service.

**Principle:** Self-righteous arrogance is a repelling force; humility is an attractive character or attribute.

**Principle:** Even the self-righteous believer is capable of praising God for his own salvation even while blinded to the full extent of his own depravity.

**Principle:** Self-righteous arrogance is always manifest through prejudice.

**Principle:** Self-righteous arrogance manifests itself through rebellion against God's revealed will. (Contrast Nineveh's history of rebellion with Jonah's act of rebellion as God's man).

**Application:** Do you have any self-righteous arrogance?

**Application:** Have you become so accustomed to God's grace and mercy that you take it for granted? Do you think that you somehow deserve it because of your station in life?

### Jonah Preaches At Nineveh – Chapter 3

In this chapter, Jonah receives the command from the Lord to go to Nineveh a second time (v. 2) and he obeys (v. 3). As we've noted, Nineveh was a large city and the phrase "a three day journey" (v. 3) may be a reference to the larger administrative district of Nineveh which was made up of several cities with a circumference of about 55 miles.<sup>4</sup> Other descriptions of the city follow:

Dotted with majestic palaces, temples, canals, and gardens, its walls rose 200 feet above the West Asian plain. Fortified by 1,500 watchtowers, the walls were so thick, it was said, that three chariots easily drove abreast upon them. Like the kernel of a nut protected by outer husks, Nineveh was defended by five walls and three moats. Each of the city's fifteen gates was guarded by castellated ramparts. And within its perimeter were more than thirty temples, "each shining with silver and gold."<sup>5</sup>

The penalty of sin is certainly spiritual death in this life and the next (Eph 2:1-3; Re 20:11-15). But, there is good news and we, like Jonah, are responsible for conveying it to others. God used Jonah's appearance and experience to dramatize his message all the more. The Assyrian gods were not noted for mercy. Even minor infractions resulted in the severest penalty. It was apparent to them that Jonah had suffered much and yet, he was delivered and came to their city to deliver them. This realization must have encouraged them to petition God for compassion.

The repentance and belief of the Ninevites is startling considering their cruel history. Some scholars question such an extensive turning to Yahweh since no mention of it is found in ancient Assyrian records discovered to date. Yet, such an absence of an event in official chronicles is not unusual, especially any such event that might embarrass the official government. Egyptian records do not record the Red Sea crossing and Assyrian records do not record the loss of 185,000 soldiers at the hand of Yahweh (2 Ki 19:35). The result was that judgment for the Assyrians was averted for about 150 years.

One of the highest tributes paid to the Ninevites of this period was that hundreds of years later, Jesus Himself cited their faith and repentance as a condemnation of His own generation of Israelites who refused to repent (Matt 12:41). The lesson of chapter 3 is that unexpected results can come from the most unlikely sources if God's people humble themselves to His will.

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<sup>4</sup> Earle Radmacher, gen. editor, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1498.

<sup>5</sup> Arnold C. Brackman, *The Luck of Nineveh*, 2.

#### **Jonah's Anger and God's Kindness – Chapter 4**

This chapter provides us with a totally unexpected ending to the book. Jonah is unique among all of God's prophets in the sense that he is the only one to openly defy God's will for him to deliver a message by fleeing from the responsibility. We would expect Jonah to rejoice over being restored from disobedience, rescued from the great fish, re-commissioned in the Lord's service and returned to Nineveh to preach a great revival. Like Nineveh, Jonah had been the object of God's extreme displeasure, but he had been shown mercy. Chapter 4 contrasts the attitude of a self-righteous man with God's deep love and compassion for all people. Jonah was very aware of the Lord's nature of mercy and compassion.

Earlier, Jonah had prayed to live and rejoiced when God delivered him from death. However, now he acted like a spoiled child who was unable to get his way and he prayed to die. Jonah's self-righteousness led to his own spiritual defeat by promoting an attitude of self-centered thought. He became discouraged with God because God did not deal with circumstances the way he thought God should. He imposed his agenda on God. Note the progression in chapter 4 in Jonah's attitude: discouragement, depression, defeat, death wish.

God could have taken Jonah's life. Instead, God demonstrated love, mercy and patience through His provision. Jonah missed the blessing of God's provision due to his self-centered attitude. He never once thanked God for His provision. Jonah had more compassion over the death of the gourd than he did for the deaths of people. The message of chapter 4 is that God's people should be objective enough to understand that God's purpose in history and others lives is greater than any one of us.