

# **STUDIES IN JONAH**

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## **1. JONAH THE DESERTER Based on Jonah 1:1-3**

**Jonah is one of the most famous books of the Old Testament. It is known of by masses of people who never read any of the Bible. Strange as it may seem it was the first book of the Bible to be translated into Chinese. The trouble with all the widespread knowledge about Jonah is that it is all trivial and centered on the non-essential. The great issues of Revelation are neglected and ignored. To most people the book has no connection with foreign missions and God's universal love. To most people it is just about a whale and whether or not such a creature can swallow a man.**

**It has been proven beyond a doubt that a whale can swallow a man, but this is a hollow victory if it leaves us thinking that God devoted one whole book of the Bible to reveal the swallowing capacity of a whale. There is a whale of a lot more to this book than that. No book in the Old Testament is so clear as to its missionary message. It is the clearest revelation of God's concern for the Gentiles, and that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The power of God's Word is nowhere seen to be so effective, and the value of repentance is nowhere seen to be so effective in pleasing God. Eislen says Jonah "..is the most Christian of all Old Testament books."**

**It is not a prophecy, but an autobiography. The only prophecy in the book is the warning that judgment is coming, and it was not fulfilled in the 40 days predicted because the people repented. It is among the prophets because Jonah was a prophet, and their task was as much to forth-tell as to fore-tell. We want to look at Jonah's commission to be a foreign missionary, and his cowardly attempt to evade his duty. First we look at-**

## **I. HIS DUTY DECLARED.**

**It was the word of the Lord that came to Jonah, and this made his duty obvious. There was no uncertainty as to the source of his orders to justify any hesitation or disobedience. His duty was clear and simple-"arise and go." With this commission Jonah becomes the Paul of the Old Testament. He was the Apostle to the Gentiles. The other**

**prophets were sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but Jonah was to leave his people and go to the Gentiles. It was this distinction that discouraged him from doing his duty.**

**"Go to Nineveh." We can hardly find an equivalent in our day to help us imagine the shock of such a commission. It was contrary to the whole system of prejudice in the Jewish mind. The Gentiles were not chosen people, and they deserve only the judgment of God. When the heathen were destroyed it was considered a blessing to Israel. The goal of Israel was to have all nations subject to her, but God did not always share the view of His people. The Jews had God given evidence to know that He had a plan for the Gentiles as well, but they did not want that evidence to get in the way of their theology.**

**That was Jonah's problem as well, and God refused to abide by Jonah's theology. Nothing is so aggravating to a theologian as having God demonstrate His ability to act contrary to His system. Men like to get God defined and confined so they know exactly what He is going to do, but God refuses to submit to the theology of men and remain in the box where they want to confine Him. Paul in Rom. 10 makes it clear that Israel knew God had a plan for Gentiles. In verse 19 he asks, "But I say, did not Israel know? First Moses said, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you." Then in verse 20 he writes, "But Isaiah is very bold, and says, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest**

**unto them that asks not after me."**

**Why was Isaiah so bold to say that? It was because it was heresy to the theologians of the day. It was heresy to Jonah, and he wanted no part of foreign missions. God is the God of the Jews, and we are going to keep it that way. Keep the heathen out of this, and especially the Assyrians of Nineveh. God made it clear to Abraham that his plan was to bless all nations through his seed, but the Jews were continually fighting to keep God exclusive.**

**In spite of his prejudice, however, God gave him orders to go and cry against Nineveh. Those are interesting orders for they reveal God's attitude. Sometimes the most effective approach is negative. Jonah was to go there and be against their wickedness, and to warn of the wrath to come. As far as the record goes there was nothing positive he had to say. There was no Gospel. All was negative and pointed to judgment.**

**If Jonah would have been told to go and deliver a lecture on contemporary ethics and moral values at the University of Nineveh he probably would have gone gladly. He knew that all men can stand a polite sophisticated recommendation that they cease to live for the devil. If you can just dress up condemnation of sin with politeness and qualifications, the devil himself will praise your eloquence. It is like the man who did not want to step on toes and so he preach, "Repent-as it were, and be converted-so to speak, or you'll be damned-to some extent." Jonah feared the power**

**of negative thinking and preaching because he was afraid it might work.**

**Jonah could have obeyed if his message had been different, but he was told to cry out against the people. He could have preached a social gospel gladly, for had he done so he knew the result would be judgment. He also knew that if he preached judgment the result might be a moral transformation of the society. Men must turn to God before they can be godly men. They must be saved before they can live saved lives. They must be changed in character before they can be pleasing to God. Jonah was fearful that his message might produce these very changes. But here were his orders, and they were as clear as a bell.**

## **II. HIS DUTY DESERTED.**

**In verse 3 we see Jonah rose up to flee. He didn't waste any time making a response. He obeyed God's first word to the letter. He arose, and technically he did the second also, for he went. But the problem was that he went the wrong way, and he headed, not to Nineveh, but to Tarshish. He missed the boat by catching a boat going the wrong way. If he had gone the right way it would have been by land, but he headed for the sea in the opposite direction. He dodged his duty and it was a downward spiral. He went down to Joppa, and down into the ship, and then down into the sea and down into the whale. Fleeing from God is a downward road all the way.**

**The first thing we can learn about his rebellious desertion of his obvious duty is that rebellion does not always indicate that what is rebelled against is evil. Sin began as rebellion against God, and we see it again in Jonah. Evil rebels against good as well as vice versa. The secularist tends to think that if the majority of people rebel against a standard of morality it must be that the standard is wrong. They fail to consider the reality that man often rebels against God's standards, which are ideal. They are not subject to majority vote.**

**Even God's own servants can rebel against His will, and it is usually, as I said, because God refuses to share their provincialism, and He insists on contradicting their theology. Jonah knew God loved all people, but he didn't like it, and he was going to do all he could to keep God exclusive, and limit His blessings to Jews only. This is not just a guess, for you can read his own confession in 4:1-3. It is not right, but there are many of God's people who are prejudice against all other peoples.**

**The miracle of being preserved for 3 days in a whale cannot compare with the miracle of God using such a prejudice man like Jonah so successfully. He was a deliberate, determined, disobedient deserter of duty, and yet he was an instrument of God for the salvation of many. That is the real wonder, and not the whale experience.**

**Jonah is running from revealed responsibility. He is dodging divine duty as he flees to Tarshish. What a picture**

of the sin of believers. What he was doing was as amoral as anything could be. He wasn't doing anything wrong. He wasn't a stow-away, for we see that he paid his fare. Jonah's sin was like so much of the sin of believers. He was doing what was right at the wrong time. The only reason it was sin for Jonah to be where he was had to do with the reality that God's will for him was that he be somewhere else. We so often think we can't sin if we don't do anything wrong, but this is not so. Even good activities are wrong if they are known substitutes for God's appointed duties. A trip to Tarshish after going to Nineveh could have been a blessed vacation in God's will, but not when it was a dodging of His will.

Duty is not always desirable. He who thinks that obeying God is always pleasant clearly reveals how seldom he obeys. God's ways are often in conflict with our own desires for ease and softness. Someone said, "I slept and dreamed that life was beauty; I woke and found that life was duty." Doing that which is dutiful is not always beautiful. Sometimes you will need to grit your teeth to do the will of God, and then cry out for mercy because you are so far from being like Him. It was miserable for Jonah to be in the center of God's will. He was happier in a state of disobedience, and it is often the case that the backslider enjoys the relief of not being in the will of God.

You may wonder why God uses man at all. He is so weak and often unwilling, but as the book of Jonah makes clear, God has no other plan. "How shall they hear without

**a preacher?" They won't, and that is why the story of the whale. God must by His providence and miracle get Jonah to Nineveh, for He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Jonah deserted the most important duty a man can ever have. It is the duty of bearing witness to the lost of God's provision for salvation. Jonah could only write this book about his desertion because he finally learned his lesson. The purpose of the book for us is to warn us against taking the same foolish path he took. May God help us to respond to God's commission with the attitude of the poet who wrote,**

**Take the task He gives you gladly. Let His work your pleasure be.**

**Answer quickly when He calls, Here am I, send me, send me.**

**Here are some of the lessons we can learn from this book of Jonah:**

- 1. God is willing to save anyone who will repent.**
- 2. God's love is universal.**
- 3. Miracles are no problem for those who spell their God with a capital G.**
- 4. It is better to obey disagreeable orders than to try and escape them.**
- 5. God can bring good out of evil and disobedience.**
- 6. God does not give up on achieving his purpose.**
- 7. God's people do not always like what they believe about God.**
- 8. God's people can be very un-Godlike in their attitudes.**



**9. Missions is a universal duty of all believers.**

## **2. JONAH'S FLIGHT LESSONS Based on Jonah 1:3**

**Many of you have no doubt heard several times of the boy who drew a picture in Sunday School of an airplane with four people in it. The Sunday School teacher asked him what part of the Bible he was illustrating, and he said it was a picture of the flight of Mary and Joseph with Jesus into Egypt. When she noted that there were four and not just three in the plane, she inquired who the fourth one was. He responded, "That was Pilate." We are using that same pun in reference to Jonah's flight to Tarshish. Mary and Joseph fled to escape the enemy of God's plan, but Jonah fled to escape God's plan itself. There are two important lessons we can learn from this flight. The first lesson is on-**

### **I. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD.**

**The lesson on providence in this verse is unique in relationship to all that the rest of the book teaches. All through the book we see how God works by means of nature in storms, growth of plants, in living creatures, like the great fish, and by means of a worm to accomplish His goal. In this verse, however, the emphasis is not on what God did, but on what He did not do. Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish in direct opposition to God's command, and God does not interfere**

**immediately to stop him. He lets Jonah carry out his own plan.**

**Notice that Jonah knew where he wanted to go. He wanted to go to Tarshish, and with that in mind, he goes down to Joppa, and there he finds conveniently and coincidentally, a ship going, of all places, to Tarshish. What luck! That is just where he wanted to go. Things couldn't have worked out better for Jonah in his effort to successfully disobey God.**

**The lesson that many point out here is that we learn by this experience that good timing, and all things working out to aid you in your plan, is no necessary proof that it is God's will. Even the most evil of schemes can work like a charm, and have all the breaks in its favor. Therefore, we must beware of judging God's will only by the smooth operation of our plans. Sometimes Christians just assume if the door is open and the way is clear to act, that that means it must be God's will. This is not necessarily the case at all.**

**Charles Spurgeon was a zealous Calvinist, who preached a high concept of the providence of God, but also pointed out how providence can be distorted and used to justify anything. He said, "If you sit down and try to find in the ways of God to you and excuse for the wrong which you mean to commit, the crafty devil and your deceitful heart together will soon conjure up a plea for providence." In other words, sometimes evil plans work out great, and God does not stop them. Jonah could say, "Well, I must not be so**

**bad to flea after all. Things are working out just fine. It is almost as if it was providential.**

**The racketeer who sees a perfect setup by which to gain a great deal of money illegally could as well plead providence. So also with the thief who finds the back door unlocked, or the keys left in the car. It makes his theft so much easier and with less risk. But who would be so foolish as to consider it providential? The value of seeing the way things worked out well for Jonah in disobedience is that it wakes us up to do some serious thinking about God's will. We are hereby warned against trusting too much to circumstances, and we are trust back to depend upon the Word of God.**

**David had an experience which is a perfect illustration. You recall that when Saul was chasing him, David found him lying down asleep. Saul was out to kill David, and now David had the perfect setup to take Saul's life. Abishai even encourages him to see the hand of providence in this situation, and he said, "The Lord has delivered him into your hands. Let me pin him to the ground."**

**(I Sam. 26:8). In spite of the favorable circumstance and advice, David chose to let him live because the Word of God said it was not right to lay your hands on God's anointed. He made his decision based on God's Word, and not on other factors that were strongly in favor of acting contrary to that Word.**

**You might be in a situation where you have an urgent need for five dollars, and suddenly you find yourself in a**

situation where the clerk has forgotten to take the money of a previous customer. He has left the room for a moment, and you are all alone with a five dollar bill in front of you. You could well argue that the Lord knows how you need that five dollars right now. The circumstances seem perfect for you to take it, and no one would know the difference. The Word of God, however, says that you should not steal, and this out ways all the other factors. Convenience does not determine God's will, but just the opposite when it is convenient to do what God forbids. It is never God's will to do wrong and call the success of it providential because it goes so smooth.

No matter how amazing the combination of coincidences might be it is not God's will if it is opposed to His Word. Everything that goes well is not of God. Spurgeon cried out, "No! No! There are the devil's providence's as well as divine providence's." God's providence is always at work to bring men back to Him, as the following verses of Jonah illustrate. He is not responsible for the convenience by which Jonah, or anyone else, succeeds in their flight from Him and His plan.

E. Stanley Jones received a letter from a woman to whose husband he had given his book, *The Way*. It was laid on a shelf where it gathered dust. She went to a university where she became very negative and cynical. She began to trust no one, and became hateful and bitter. She became so depressed she decided to take her own life. She bought some pills and hid them until her plan was perfected. When the

day came she got her pills from the drawer and headed for the bathroom to get water. She stumbled on the rug and bumped the bookcase, and that book that sat for years on the top fell to the floor in front of her. She thought it was strange, and so she picked it up and read it. She was transformed by what she read. She became a convinced Christian with a new life. This is what we mean by providential. God is working in lives all the time to confront them and bring them back to Himself. The end result is what matters. If circumstances lead us to God, then it is truly providential. If circumstances lead us away from God, it is the devil's providence. We need to keep in mind always that bad things can go well, and not assume that they are providential because they go well. The second thing we want to look at is-

## **II. THE PRESENCE OF GOD.**

Notice that two times in this verse it is stated that Jonah's flight was for the purpose of escaping the presence of God. Jonah was the first missionary who tried to take his furlough before he even reached the field. Some try and suggest that Jonah had such a limited concept of God that he thought he could really escape his presence. The heathen had many gods like that. A god for each country, and one for the sea, etc. They were territorial gods whose power only extended to certain boundaries. We know that Jonah was not thinking like that, however, that the God of Israel was limited to Israel. It is true there was progress in the Jewish mind as to the greatness and omnipresent nature of God, but

**Jonah had reached a high concept. He was no babe-he was a mature Hebrew and in v. 9 he states his fear of the Lord: "The God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." He knew God as the creator of all, and knew He was over all, and was everywhere present.**

**The omnipresent nature of God was revealed in Gen. 28. We read there of Jacob's dream and of God's promise to be with him wherever he goes, and then in verse 16 we read, "Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." He, and all the chosen people, had to learn that Jehovah was the one God and creator of all, and was everywhere present, and not just in Israel, or in the temple, as was the case of the gods of the heathen. They often forgot this, however, and because of their small and weak concept of God they tried to escape their loyalty to Him, and the result was judgment.**

**David gives us the clearest description of a high concept of the omnipresence of God in Ps. 139:7-10. "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast." Certainly Jonah knew this Psalm and the theology behind it. He was not so foolish as to think he could really escape the presence of God, and yet the text says that was his object.**

**The first thing we can learn is that our theology does not**

**always direct our actions. You can honestly believe one thing, but then act contrary to it. That is why knowing the truth is not enough if one does not act in accordance with it. Jonah did not lack knowledge, but he lacked wisdom which is the ability to apply knowledge practically to a worthy end. How often we lack wisdom, and, like Jonah, rise up to flee from Him whom we know to be everywhere. Like Jonah we become completely inconsistent. He was to go to the Gentiles to warn them, but he did not want to, and so he goes to the Gentiles for help to escape. Jonah did not mind receiving the services of Gentiles, nor did he mind their presence, as long as they were not his equal before God.**

**Many people feel this way about those of another race. Their theology says all men are created in the image of God with eternal souls, and all are people for whom Christ died. They do not mind receiving the services of these people who work in hospitals, businesses, and public facilities, but they still do not want to accept them as equals. Jonah was not opposed to anything but this one thing that God commanded, and that was that he should go and give the Gentiles the same chance as the Jews have had to repent and be forgiven. The hardest barrier to break is that of putting all men on your level in relationship to God. If that barrier is broken down, it will destroy all others, and that is why it becomes the last strong hold of prejudice.**

**Jonah is proof that one can be a man of God and still be controlled by prejudice toward other people. He could not give up his prejudice, and at the same time he could not**

**stand to have it revealed by being in the presence of God. Jonah was trying to escape the consciousness of God's fellowship, for the presence of God was a rebuke to his ungodlike attitude. He was, in effect, resigning his office as a prophet. He wanted to be a secret believer from now on. Prejudice and prophecy just did not mix, and he chose to give up his duty rather than sacrifice his prejudice.**

**God, however, did not accept his resignation, and pursued him to teach him the folly of trying to act contrary to his theology. God showed Jonah that theology is the most practical thing in the world, and those who think they can ignore it, and escape it, are preparing themselves to be fools. God is everywhere present, and that fact together with His providence makes it both sinful and senseless to try and escape His command. Let us remember that it holds true for our standing orders as well-"Go into all the world and preach the Gospel."**

### **3. AWAKENED BY A PAGAN based on Jonah 1:4-6**

**Jonah and Paul were alike in that they were both commissioned by God as missionaries to the Gentiles, and both were alike in their desire to go to Spain. Both of them had the experience of being on a storm tossed ship with pagans. These superficial similarities, however, become**



**material for a study in contrast when we consider the motives involved. Jonah fled to the sea to escape obedience, while Paul went to the desert to prepare for obedience. Jonah wanted to reach Spain to avoid serving God, but Paul wanted to get there to serve Him, and to proclaim the good news to those in darkness.**

**Paul on the storm tossed ship was the source of the pagan's deliverance, but Jonah in the same situation was the source of their danger. Paul was wide awake directing and assuring the pagans, but Jonah was fast asleep and had to be awakened and directed by the pagan captain of the ship. In this event it is the children of darkness who are active and central, while the rebel believer is passive, and even an obstacle. It is no wonder that the conclusions of these two sea stories should also be in utter contrast. Paul's situation was such that the only hope was to remain with the ship. In Jonah's case the only hope was for Jonah was to be tossed off the ship. We want to look at this story that reveals how even a pagan captain can be used of God. We want to consider three things about this captain. First-**

## **I. HIS REBUKE OF THE PROPHET. v. 6**

**Just why it was the captain who came to awaken Jonah is not certain, but it is likely his authority was needed, for Jonah had paid his fare, and was a model passenger as far as staying out of the way. If one of the sailors had gone and awakened him he may have told him to get lost. There is nothing wrong with sleeping in a storm at sea. Jesus did so**

**Himself when He was exhausted. His disciples rebuked Him because they felt sleep in such an hour of danger seemed like a callous indifference to their safety. This was likely the motive that brought the captain to wake Jonah as well.**

**Jonah was sound to sleep when every hand was needed on deck. The sailors were likely aggravated as they had to sacrifice their cargo by throwing it into the sea, and Jonah sleeps as if nothing was wrong. Even a pagan has enough sense and fight for life. After all the racket of hauling things up and throwing them into the sea did not wake Jonah, the captain felt it was his duty to go and wake this foolish sleeper. Jonah was fleeing from God, and yet he was not deeply troubled, but could sleep soundly. Even a godly man can be going in a direction out of God's will and not necessarily be troubled by his disobedience.**

**Jonah was not the first servant of God to be rebuked by a pagan. Even Abraham, the father of the faithful, was rebuked by Abimelech because he lied about Sarah. He said she was his sister, and because of that lie Abimelech almost took her as his wife. When he learned the truth he rebuked Abraham in Gen. 20:9 by saying, "What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should not be done." Can it be that sometimes the world can justifiably rebuke the church? It is a sad day when it is so, but such sad days do come. Almost all of the criticism that the church has received has been valid at some point. Christians need to pay attention to the rebuke of**

**unbelievers, for often they are correct, and Christians can learn from this rebuke.**

**I once talked to an atheistic professor of history who said the church in his thinking is totally irrelevant. He said, "I live in a world of desperate need and anxiety, with great ignorance and prejudice on every hand. I am constantly compelled to disillusion my students about the glories of history and their heroes. I try and shatter their illusions so they can see life as it really is-tragic, fearful, and awful. All the church does is to try and support their illusions." He was thoroughly disgusted with the church's lack of concern for the critical problems in the world. Even though he was compelled to admit his agreement with Christ's principles, and with the fact that only theology could give ultimate meaning to values, I could never bring him to change his view of the church, for his view is often true that it is hard to refute.**

**Here was another pagan rebuking the church, and we need to be awakened by such rebuke. The Evangelical Church was at one time the greatest social force in America. This was during the Great Awakening under Jonathan Edwards, and again later under the revivals of Charles Finney. Thousands upon thousands of people were converted, and the whole character of society was changed. But today the church is often asleep as the world is tossed about by raging storms. The church is in the world just as Paul and Jonah were in pagan ships, but the church must cease to follow Jonah's procedure, and put Paul's into**

operation. It needs to become a leader, and give direction as Paul did, and save itself as well as the pagans. Paul gave leadership, but Jonah was part of the problem instead of part of the answer, and he deserved rebuke. Next we see-

## **II. HIS REQUEST OF PRAYER.**

Imagine a pagan pleading with a prophet to pray. It is not surprising that a pagan would pray in such a situation, but it is surprising that he should have to urge a servant of God to do so. The storm was unusually fierce, and even these men who had been at sea for years were fearful. The Hebrew root of the word mariners in verse 5 is salt. They were old salts, and if they were afraid, it was time for everyone to start praying.

Each of them had his own god he cried out to, and the captain urged Jonah to pray to his God also. It was probably with the thought that the more gods the better. One of them will certainly be able to stop the storm. Matthew Henry said, "He who would learn to pray let him go to sea." All men recognized when they are at the mercy of natural forces that if there is no God to help, there is no help, for only supernatural power can save from such forces.

The captain was ready to bow to any god who could help them, and so he requests that Jonah pray to his God. What would you do if you were asked to join in on a pagan prayer meeting? Jonah, true to his rebellious nature, probably did

**not honor the request. If he had, the storm may have been stopped, but Jonah was not going to admit he was wrong. He would rather die than do that. A faithful servant should be able to join any group in prayer. If they are pagan and superstitious, it will not affect the validity of his prayer.**

**Jonah was supposed to go and rebuke the heathen, and now the heathen are rebuking him, and pleading for his cooperation. We see a picture of the tragic results of prejudice and a false sense of superiority. Jonah, because of his ungodlike attitude, becomes a poorer example of piety than the pagans he looked down on. They at least seek God's help, but Jonah does not. They care for his life, but he has no great love for their souls. Never argue with people who say there are non-Christians who are better than Christians because it is a fact of life, and the Bible supports it.**

**The pagans may be pleading in ignorance, but the fact is God heard their prayer and they were spared. We have no right to expect pagans to be theologically trained. We must begin on their level to lift them to where we have been lifted by revelation. The only way we can aid people to grow from their inadequate ideas of God to mature concepts is by starting where they are. God condescends to use even their superstitions to guide them. This does not mean we are to become like them, but that we condescend to their form of communication in order to relate to them, for only then can we ever lead them to higher and true concepts of God. Next we look at-**

### **III. HIS RECOGNITION OF GOD'S POWER.**

**Even a pagan has a concept of the providence of God. He knew that God was behind the storm, and that only He could stop it, and like the Greeks of Paul's day, he was willing to turn even to the unknown God for help. He was right, and God did think of them, and had no intention of seeing them perish for the disobedience of Jonah. God is not the author of arbitrary destruction. He sent the wind and storm, but He did not take their lives.**

**We must beware of universalizing what the Bible does not. This whole event was an act of mercy. God must display His displeasure at deliberate disobedience. He needs a man to bear His message, but He can use nature to get His man. If we say, however, that all storms are the result of a wicked act on the part of some person, we are thrown back to paganism and superstition, which compels us to go witch hunting to find the guilty party, and then sacrifice that person to placate the anger of God.**

**We see no such thing here. This is a particular case in which God acts uniquely in nature. The timing is what makes it special providence. The storm itself is natural, but the timing is for a specific purpose. If you argue that all storms are for a specific purpose you are in the difficult position of saying that God tries to teach us certain things without telling us what it is, so that we are never really sure. As a method of teaching it is not very appealing or effective. When God wants to teach us something through trial and**

suffering it is usually clear, and if it is not, there is not likely a message being taught.

In Jonah, the purpose is obvious, and so it is helpful to all involved. Both Jonah and the pagans knew there was purpose and power behind this storm. Jonah, however, had the advantage of revelation, and was superior to those who had only the witness of nature. Man can know that God exists by nature, but he cannot by nature know the God that does exist. Martin says that you can go to an art gallery and by reason and observation know that the paintings there did not just happen, but are the products of skill. You can learn of the style, taste, and love of design of the artist, but for all this, you cannot by this method know the artist. Only as he reveals himself can you know him. Reason falls short of revelation. Even a pagan can recognize the power of God, but only by revelation can he know the person of God.

All it takes for many pagans to become children of God is a faithful prophet who will awake at their rebuke; pray for their preservation, and begin to proclaim the person of Christ. The story of Jonah ought to make all of us aware that sometimes the heathen of the world are closer to the kingdom than many professing believers. May God help us to wake up to the message of His Word, and not wait to be awakened by a pagan.

#### **4. THE LORD OR LUCK Based on Jonah 1:7**

**A speculator, who won and lost money by instinct, was discussing success with a business man who had done very well. They were discussing whether success was attained by planned judgment, or by mere luck. The business man said judgment, but the speculator held out for luck. He pointed out to the business man that he was a forty-niner, and that that was an adventure, but he responded that it was not so for him for it was planned. "Well then," said the speculator, "You came to New York just when the investment of your money would bring the highest returns, that was luck." "No," insisted the business man, for it had been his own wise judgment. After several more examples to which he received the same reply, the speculator concluded, "Well, you'll have to admit you are mighty lucky to have such good judgment."**

**The whole issue of providence and chance; sovereignty and free will; the Lord or luck, is a complex one, but one that we must think about seriously since it governs much of our attitude toward life and circumstances. Lack of thought at this point causes many Christians to be very inconsistent in their ideas. Sometimes we are like the professor who was going to lecture on the III World War. He announced his two major points in his introduction. First he said we will consider why there will be no war, and second we will consider what to do when it comes. Christians get into the same fix when they say nothing is of chance, and then condemn gambling because it is not of God. We want to**



**look at the sailors method of accusing Jonah as a starting point to try and reconcile the concepts of luck and the sovereignty of God.**

## **I. IS LUCK REAL?**

**The sailors certainly did not think that casting lots was a matter of luck. They wanted to know on whose account the storm had come, and they believed that the gods revealed their will through the lot. Since, however, this practice as not in conformity with belief in the one true God, we must recognize that their views amounted to superstition. These sailors did not make this up for this occasion. It was a practice of life, and they had doubtless made other decisions by lot. Are we to suppose that all decisions of ancient or modern pagans are guided by the Lord, as this one was? If so, then we are led to the conclusion that superstition was not wrong after all, and that the pagan world was guided by God by superstition, as was His chosen people by revelation.**

**This conclusion is contrary to all the facts, for the vast majority of pagan practices and superstitions were an abomination to God. God did use this particular event of lot casting to reveal His will, but certainly He did not do so in all cases. Most pagan decisions were decided by what we would call luck. They were events which were not decided by God's will, but by chance causes which were not known or predictable. In other words, many innocent people suffered as being guilty not because God willed it but because foolish men made their decisions on the basis of**

**chance. It was deciding which of two men accused of murder would be guilty by the flip of a coin. People use to determine guilt by binding a person up and throwing them in the river. If they drowned they were presumed innocent, and if they floated they were presumed guilty.**

**I cannot believe that all such folly has been the will of God. It has, instead, been the result of blindness to His will. I am convinced that all that happens in life is not God's will, for if it was, it would be meaningless to pray thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus taught us to pray this, therefore, it is clear that God's will is not always done on earth as it is in heaven. This makes me question the easy and superficial attitude of many Christians who say nothing happens by chance, or there is no such thing as luck. If they mean that nothing happens without a cause, then all can agree, for every effect has a cause. But to say that all causes are God's will is to contradict the clear teaching of His Word that sin is not His will, and the effects of sin are not His will.**

**Events and things that happen that are not intended by God, and are not caused by the will of man, is what I mean by luck. Calvin believed that all that happens is the direct will of God. He even rejected the idea of God's permissive will. God does not merely permit anything, but He actively causes everything. God does not just permit murder He ordains it for His own glory. How all the evil of the world glorifies God Calvin does not say, but he points out that God's ways are not our ways, and His plan is beyond our**

**comprehension. Many people who are godly Christians believe this, but I cannot. This view exalts God's sovereignty at the expense of His love. Certainly no evil can happen without its ultimate cause being in God, for He is the cause of all that is, but it is still true that He is not the direct cause, for things and events can happen which are not His will.**

**There are millions of acts of sin going on all the time which are not God's will, and they will cause many to suffer eternal judgment which is not God's will, and many will never repent, which is His will. The Bible says very little about chance, for it is revelation, not of what is purposeless events, but of what is God's purpose in life and history. There is no place in revelation for luck since it is a book of God's action. This casting of lots is recorded, but all other lot casting of the pagan world is not, because this particular occasion was used of God to accomplish His purpose.**

**The word chance is found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, and there are a number of passages where the idea of chance is obvious. Consider Exodus 21:12-14, "Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate. But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death." We see two kinds of situations here where a man is killed. One is considered murder and is directly opposed to God's will, and it is not to be tolerated. God does permit it in the sense that He does not stop it, but He will not permit it**

**to go unpunished. God permits murder only because He cannot consistently stop it and still leave people free to make moral choices. He cannot let a man be free to disobey His law and at the same time compel him to obey it. This is the price God was willing to pay to make a man with free will.**

**If, however, you kill a man accidentally, you are not be killed, and the reason is because you did not choose to disobey God's law. It happened by circumstances and not by your act of will. It was a matter of chance and not a matter of choice. Berkley has verse 13 like this, "However, if he did not plan it, but God allowed an accident..." We see that some things God permits to happen, and some things he causes to happen, and still other things He does not want to happen at all, but must allow them to be, but will judge those who do them. This means there is much in life that is not God's will, but is the result of man's sin, foolish actions, whims and mere chance combinations of his actions and decisions. Liberalism and modernism and all attacks on God's Word, plus the lethargy of Christians are all against His will, and it can be little short of blasphemy to suggest that God ordained all that He clearly hates. This would be saying that God wills all that He says is not His will.**

**If nothing is the result of mans false thinking and poor decisions which brings about all kinds of messes, then what is the sense of controversy? It is the pastime of fools, for what possible objection can we have if those who disagree with us do so by the will of God. If all is of God then even atheism and the cults are part of God's will. My conclusion**

**is that much happens by chance, and that luck is very real. The second question is-**

## **II. IS GOD SOVEREIGN?**

**Without argument we can say yes, but the problem is, can yes be said to both questions without contradiction? Is this trying to have our cake and eat it too, or can the two be reconciled to show that they are not only compatible but necessary? I think so. The first thing we have to do is get out of our minds a false meaning of sovereignty. The idea that the omnipotence of God means He can do absolutely anything without limitation is not valid. This would mean that God is the cause of all evil, for if He is all powerful and yet does not stop evil, it must be that it is His will. The Scripture makes it clear that God has imposed self limitations on His own power.**

**It is impossible for God to lie the Bible says. There is something God cannot do because it is contrary to His very nature. Holiness and lies are incompatible, and so a holy God cannot lie. No contradiction can exist in reality if it is absolute. It is impossible for the same object to be both a square and a circle at the same time. While it is one, by its very nature it excludes the other. So it is no limitation to sovereignty to be unable to do a contradiction. It is no limitation that God cannot lie or make a square circle, and, therefore, it is no limitation either that He cannot make a man free and at the same time make him conform to His will.**

**Why didn't God stop Adam and Eve from sinning? He certainly had the power, and it seems like it would have been so easy. But it was not only not easy, it was impossible, for the very plan of God was to have a creature who was free to obey or disobey Him. It is impossible to have a truly free being, and at the same time have them not be free to disobey. How then is God still sovereign if so much can happen which is not His will? He is sovereign in that He knows the end from the beginning. Man does not know the outcome of his chance decisions, but God does, and God works in them to accomplish His will. He used the chance acts of the sailors to accomplish His will with Jonah. He used the lot often in the Old Testament. The twelve tribes used the lot to determine what land they got in Num. 26:55. Quite often the lot is used to settle arguments. Prov. 18:18 says, "The lot puts an end to disputes and decides between powerful contenders." In Acts 1:24-26 Matthias was chosen by Lot to be the 12th Apostle.**

**Most chance is just that. We flip a coin to see who goes first in many games, but when crucial decisions are to be made and we do not know what to do, God can even use chance to reveal His will and to guide us. Therefore, though the Christian can believe in chance, he is always ready and eager to look for God's guidance even in the chance circumstances of life. If God can use evil to bring forth good, how much more can He use luck to demonstrate His own Lordship.**

## **5. THE FEAR OF GOD Based on Jonah 1:8-10**

**We live in a world where words are weapons. Someone said, "Words are weapons and we must wield them well if we would win." Much of the success of cons and cults is the direct result of their clever use of words. So many arguments are often based on a perverted manipulation of words, but we dare not, on that account, neglect our obligation to take words seriously and be precise and as accurate as possible. Words are important and their misuse can be dangerous. Like the man who thought words always mean the same thing. If he said he had good vision or that he had good sight, it would make no difference, for they mean the same thing. But then he realized it would be verbal suicide to say to his friend, "Your wife is a vision, and mine is a sight."**

**We want to look at the subject of fear. It is only a simple 4 letter word, but it can lead to confusion if we assume it always means the same thing. There are 14 Hebrew nouns and 2 different Greek nouns that are all translated into English by the word fear in the KJV. That means all of the distinction in the original must be gathered from the context, and this can sometimes be difficult to see. In II Tim. 1:7 Paul said to Timothy, "For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." I wondered about that many times because I know Christians do have fear. Peter even tells Christians to**

**pass the time of their sojourning here in fear. In Acts 5:11 he says that great fear came upon all the church. Paul, the very man advising Timothy confessed to the Corinthians in I Cor. 2:3 that he was with them in weakness and in fear.**

**How do we reconcile these verses on the basis of the word fear? The only way is to go to the original Greek. We see then that the word fear in II Timothy is not phobos as it is in the rest of the verses. It is the word deidia, which means timidity. This resolves the contradiction. Does this mean that the average person will never be able to find the distinctions in words because they do not know Greek? Not at all. If you take the Berkeley Version you will find the word cowardice and not fear. The RSV and NIV have timidity. A person who will take advantage of other translations can find the different meanings of words. We cannot depend upon one translation alone. An accurate understanding of what God has revealed calls for the reading of a number of translations. Unless we convey the right meaning we do not convey the Word of God, but the misunderstanding of man.**

**A study of the fear of God is one that calls for care and accuracy. The word fear in relation to God can mean very opposite things. There is a fear of God which is terror at his might and wrath, and there is a fear of God which is reverence, or worship. There is still another which is knowledge and wisdom of God. The setting in these few verses of Jonah give us an opportunity to see two different kinds of fear in relation to God. First we see-**



## **I. THE FEAR OF THE PAGANS.**

**Their first fears were the natural fears of men in a crisis. They feared less they should perish, as the captain says in verse 6. This fear was directly connection with their fear of God, or rather the gods, for they were ignorant of the true and only God. They knew that some god was angry and was punishing someone. They feared being caught in the middle where they would have to suffer for someone else's sin.**

**Many commentators point out here the social nature of sin. You cannot keep the consequences of evil limited to the offender. The drunken driver endangers all the innocent on the road. The peddlers of dope may sleep like Jonah while masses of their victims cry out in agony and fear. No husband, wife, or child can act disgraceful without the rest of the family suffering. These pagan sailors were far from innocent, I am sure, but they recognized that their guilt is not the cause of their danger. They were willing to cast lots to find the guilty one, and when it fell to Jonah they asked him in verse 8 to tell them on whose account this evil has come upon them.**

**The whole account reveals the nature of their fear of God. It was a fear of terror. God was not one you had fellowship with, but one you tried to please just because of his power to destroy you if you didn't. This is characteristic of paganism, but of perverted Christianity as well. Martin Luther suffered under a false concept of God for years. God was capricious and easily offended. He feared lest as a**

priest he violate some sacred place, or mispronounce some magic formula. He lived with terror and fear for years until he discovered the biblical doctrine of justification by faith. He was trying to please God by merit, and he knew he was weak and unworthy. The result was that he lived in fear of God. He came to understand the grace of God in Christ and gained the peace of God. His pagan fears departed when he discovered the true nature of God.

The fear of the pagan sailors grew even worse when they heard what Jonah had done. They were exceedingly afraid, and their fear actually made more sense than Jonah's false sense of peace. They said in shocked amazement, "What is this you have done?" They had enough sense to recognize the folly of trying to flee from a God who made land and sea. Even a pagan can see that obedience is the only sensible thing when you serve a God like that. The folly and inconsistency of believers is a marvel to unbelievers. They look at our profession, and then our conduct, and they say, "What have you done?" Non-believers feel it is inexcusable for Christians to live as they do, and they are shocked when Christians do foolish things so contrary to their own beliefs.

One scoffer said that avowed skepticism cannot do a tenth of the damage to faith as the constant spectacle of Christians living a worldly life. It is a legitimate fear to associate with a believer who is fleeing away from God's will. In the light of Jonah's folly, these sailors had good reason to be afraid. It is a legitimate form of fear to associate with one in rebellion against God. Next let's look

at-

## **II. THE FEAR OF THE PROPHET.**

**You would think that Jonah would have been fearful facing all their questions that they so rapidly fired at him, but he seems very calm after his nap. He explains that he is a Hebrew. This name is always used to distinguish Jews from Gentiles. It is used 33 times in the Old Testament, and always as opposed to Gentiles. Jonah felt superior to them, and he adds, "And I fear the Lord, the God of heaven." This certainly does not seem to fit the circumstances. Jonah is fleeing from God in open rebellion, and yet he says that he fears the Lord.**

**The word here is not the fear of terror. Jonah is not saying that he was afraid of God. That was one of his problems, for he would not be fleeing from God's will if he had a proper fear. He was like a spoiled child who had no fear of punishment. The word for fear here actually means reverence and worship. Jonah was simply telling them that he worshiped the God of heaven. Here we see the opposite danger of a false fear of God like that which Luther suffered. This other extreme is familiarity with God. Our culture is in this area of danger. Few people in America have an abnormal fear of God, but masses have a familiarity with Him.**

**God is sung about freely by popular singers, and God is made to be the buddy for everyone who puts their hand in**

**His. There is a Gospel without Christ; without atonement for sin, and a call to holiness. Like the true Gospel, it is all free, and it has lead masses of people to belief in God without any biblical connection. If it was only outside of the church it would be tragic enough, but this false sense of the fear of God is in the church as well. It was in ancient Israel also. In Isa. 29:13 we read, "And the Lord said, because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote..." We note that the fear of God was only by memory work. Jesus quotes this passage in Matt. 15:9, "In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men." It is possible for the very servants of God to fall into the snare of a superficial fear of God.**

**Jonah worshipped God, but did not have fear enough to flee from evil, and to crush disobedience in his heart. He did not fear God enough to give his all to reach a lost world. The tragedy is that Jonah is not an isolated case. Dr. Dale of England said, "Nobody is afraid of God anymore." We can expound our theology of God as creator of land and sea, and we can continue to worship Him, and still be careless about doing His will. Jonah never forsook his creed. He could quote it anywhere, and even on a storm tossed ship where death was facing everyone. But he did forsake an obedient relationship to the God of his creed. This is as evil and dangerous as the pagan fear of terror.**

**We need to combine these two concepts of fear in order**

**to have a truly biblical fear of God. We must have an awe and reverence at the majesty of God, and worship Him in the fear that allows for confidence and boldness in His presence. Yet we should beware of letting this lead to presumption, and check that danger by a real fear of the terror variety because of disobedience. We should be afraid to be careless about God's will. We should be afraid to neglect our opportunities to serve and witness. We should fear the judgment of God on those who seek first the pleasures of life and ignore the plan of God. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Jonah's experience of learning the hard way is recorded so that we may avoid his folly.**

**Moody was a great evangelist who did not try to produce fear in men in order to get them to repent. He seldom preached on repentance. He found that men responded more to a positive message of love. He wrote, "Now, my friends, repentance is not fear. A great many people say I don't preach up the terror of religion. I don't want to-don't want to scare men into the kingdom of God. I don't believe in preaching that way.....If I wanted to scare men into heaven I would just hold the terror of hell over their heads...But that's not the way to win men. They don't have any slaves in heaven. They are all sons, and they must accept salvation voluntarily. Terror never brought a man in yet."**

**There are many who use this method, however, and I have seen it. It does work as far as moving people, but it**

**does not necessarily get people into a right relationship to God. A. W. Tozer put it this way: "The current trick of frightening people into accepting Christ by threatening them with atom bombs and guided missiles is not scriptural, neither is it effective. By shooting off firecrackers in the face of a flock of goats you could conceivably succeed in herding them into a sheepfold, but all the natural fear in the world cannot make a sheep out of a goat."**

**Jonathan Edwards preached his famous sermon, Sinners In The Hands Of Angry God, and it won many. John Bunyan said, "No fear, no grace. Though there is not always grace where there is the fear of hell, yet to be sure there is no grace where there is no fear of God." We need to understand that there can be a healthy fear that does cause us to repent and turn to God. When we have a sense of awe at the holiness of God we will dread to displease Him. This healthy fear will cause us to avoid disobedience. Jonah could have used more of this spirit of fear. We all need to fear lest, like Jonah, we lose a proper fear. Some poet wrote,**

**"Fear not waves nor winds that bring  
The unbridled hurricanes;  
Fear not cold nor the sleet's sting.  
Flaming heat nor leveling rain;  
Fear not even fear itself,  
Fear not pain.  
Only fear the eye grown dull;  
Only fear the heart grown bland  
That applauds the beautiful**

**With condescending hand.  
Only fear the green fields covered  
By the sand."**

**Jesus said we are not to fear those who kill the body, but we are to fear Him who can destroy both body and soul. The wise believer is one who will combine both a fear of the pagans, and the fear that God expected Jonah to have, but which he neglected, and that is a reverence for God that keeps you always on a path of obedience.**

## **6. SCRIPTURE AND SUICIDE Based on Jonah 1:11-12**

**The book of Jonah gives a very favorable account of the attitude and character of the pagans involved. In fact, they are at points pictured on a higher level than Jonah himself. At last, however, we see a change in Jonah, and some of his good character breaks through. The sailors had all the proof they needed to condemn Jonah, including his own confusion, but they did not unmercifully attack him. They approached him for advice. These pagans had a high concept of the value of life. They did not take lightly the idea of destroying a man's light, especially one who was the servant of God.**

**The storm was getting worse, however, and time was at a premium. Life was hanging in the balance, and a decision had to be made immediately. In desperation the jury asks the guilty convict for advice on what his punishment should be. Such concern for justice on his behalf must have broken down the wall of Jonah's prejudice. The scales of blindness fall from his eyes, and sees his action as wicked and ungodly. He was the cause for endangering their lives. He did not want Gentiles to be saved, but they cared so much about his safety, and the contrast made him realize there was only one honest solution, and he would have to sacrifice his life to save them. Most guilty men, if they had a choice of punishment, would not select capital punishment, but Jonah with the first sign of nobility in his character choose just that.**

**You are probably wondering what all this has to do with suicide. The answer is, practically nothing, but since this is true of the whole Bible, the subject can as well be considered from this text as any. Note that Jonah said to them to take him up and cast him over. Jonah knew nothing at that time about God's plan to save him. He was asking them to take his life. Why not just jump over yourself Jonah? If the solution is your death, why wait for them to throw you over? Just jump and end it yourself. Jonah's hesitation to do this is considered by some to be an indication that self-destruction is such a serious sin that Jonah did not dare to do it. He could submit to death at the hands of others, but he could not take his own life. I think all must agree that this is an incidental observation, and that the account is not**



written to convey any teaching on the subject of suicide. The subject of suicide is, however, not incidental, and is worthy of consideration to determine what Scripture does teach on the subject.

It is a subject of gigantic proportions in the world. I never realized until recently that there are literally thousands of people doing research, writing books and articles, and in many ways dealing with this major problem. It is the ninth leading cause of death in the United States. Over half a million attempt suicide every year, but with only a 5 per cent being successful. If we count those listed as accidents such as overdose of drugs, and car accidents, the figure comes to about 50 thousand a year. Anything of such major proportions demands that Christians have some biblical basis for an attitude towards it. I want to examine what the Bible has to say first in the Old Testament.

## **I. OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING.**

The first impression one gets from a study of the Bible is the lack of information. There are laws against almost everything, but none against suicide. The Bible has a high view of life and the recognition of God as the author of all life, and so the assumption is that suicide is evil. The lack of any stated condemnation, however, has led many to conclude that it comes under the command thou shalt not kill. It does not say thou shalt not kill others leaving self-destruction as legitimate. Self-murder is certainly as evil as murder of another. But since there is no penalty for

**attempted suicides which fail, it seems that the only conclusion we can draw is that suicide was not a social problem among the Israelites.**

**The few cases recorded in the Old Testament have some very definite characteristics that make it clear it was not then the kind of problem it is today. We do not have records of that period as we do today. Every nation has statistics going back over a hundred years that lists suicides according to sex, age, religion, occupation, etc. But the Bible only gives us a few examples that we want to examine.**

**1. Ahithophel in II Sam. 17:23 we see that he hung himself. The parallel with his experience and Judas in the New Testament is amazing. He was David's beloved counselor, and it is said that consulting him was like consulting the oracles of God (II Sam. 16:23). When Absalom rebelled against David he won Ahithophel to his side. This hurt David, and he prayed that God would turn his advice into foolishness. Absalom rejected the advice of Ahithophel as to how to defeat David, and when he heard it he went and set his house in order and hung himself. Like Judas he had become a traitor, and he failed, and to save face he took his life. The text simply says that he died and was buried in the tomb of his father. This indicates that they did not desecrate the body as they did later in Christian lands.**

**In Europe and England the bodies of suicides were often dragged through the streets and mangled, and then thrown in public sewers, and all his property confiscated by the state.**

**Even the great John Wesley advocated the dragging of the naked body through streets as a deterrent to suicide. It was an ancient custom, for Seneca the Roman said centuries earlier, "Whosoever murdereth himself, let him be cast forth without burial." The Jews did not do this even to such a traitor as Ahithophel. His betrayal led to a tragic end, and the only teaching we can gather is that those who forsake the path of God lose all hope, and suicide becomes a logical end. The next example is-**

## **2. SAUL ISam. 31:4-5**

**Again, the pattern is similar. One chosen of God, but who through disobedience became an enemy of God, ended his own life. Again it was a face-saving situation. The Philistines had killed his three sons, and wounded him seriously. He knew if they took him alive it would mean cruel torture for their sport. He, therefore, asked his armor-bearer to thrust him through with his sword. He was afraid to do it, and so Saul fell on his own sword. His sin had gotten him into such a predicament that probably no one blamed him for doing so. He had no hope, and this usually is what leads to suicide.**

**3. The armor-bearer of Saul. This is a different matter, and little can be said. He feared to take his king's life, but when he saw Saul dead he fell on his own sword. It was again the face-saving motive. He could not face the future knowing he let his king die, and what others would think of him for letting that happen. The future looked so bad that he took his own life. All we can learn from this example is that the**

**sins of one can drag others down with them.**

**4. Zimri in I kings 16:13-20. He was a servant who slew his king and took the throne of Israel. He murdered masses of men, but his reign did not last long, for Omri came in battle, took the city, and Zimri went into the kings house, set it on fire, and burned with it. The context points out he was a very wicked man, and his end was the logical outcome of his evil life.**

**5. Abimelech in Judges 9:54. Again it is a wicked power hungry man. He was the son of Gideon who slew all his other sons to gain supreme authority. He was attacking the city of Thebes when a woman dropped a stone from the wall and crushed his skull. It did not kill him, and so he asked his armor-bearer to kill him so it would not be said he died at the hand of a woman. His armor-bearer did kill him, and so it was not suicide technically, but it was practically.**

**6. Samson in Judges 16:23-31. This final example is different than the others. Like**

**them it has a military setting, and it is in battle with an enemy. The face saving**

**factor is there as well. Samson had to end his life because of disobedience to God. What makes it different is that he is the only one who took his own life who was a man of God, and one that was saved and will be in heaven. We know this from Heb. 11:32 where he is listed as an example of a man of faith. So in spite of his failure he was still God's own. He**

**died in the act of killing his enemies after awful humiliation at their hands. It seems different than the usual act of destruction. It seems more like the sacrifice of self for a cause. Japanese divers use to destroy a ship by crashing their planes into it. This was like Samson's self-destruction. It was not that he wanted to die, but that he was willing to die.**

**This does provide at least one exception to the idea that suicide is always evil, and that only an evil person can do it, and that those who do are not forgiven. There are situations in which a believer can be the cause for his own death and not be condemned. What does this survey of the Old Testament teach us?**

- 1. Suicide was rare among the Jews, and not a social problem demanding any special legislation.**
- 2. When it did occur it was by violent methods and always successful. This in contrast with the vast majority of unsuccessful attempts in modern days because of less violent methods. Modern studies show more men succeed than women just because they do use more violent methods.**
- 3. All examples are of men. This fits modern studies as well. It stands to reason since face-saving is connected with each case in the Old Testament. Women did not get involved in such situations as did men. Today more women do get involved and the result is more of them take their life. The face-saving concept, though not a part of our conscious thinking, as it is in the Orient, is still with us in the feeling of pride, and many Americans end their life to save face.**

**4. It is almost always connected with a life that has forsaken God and ended in hopelessness and despair. Modern studies indicate that Western suicides are mostly for the basic causes of depression and hopelessness.**

**5. None are connected with mental illness. There is not a hint of the popular belief that only insane people can take their life. Every example in the Old Testament is conscious and deliberate with a very definite purpose. The insanity concept is a myth perpetuated by those who refuse to believe that people with wealth and fame can be so unhappy. Studies indicate the more civilized the nation becomes the more rapid the increase of suicide.**

**Suicide has had meaningful purpose in the Orient, and no connection with madness. Hara-kari was strictly a face saving device. In India it was a custom for the wife to cast herself on the burning funeral pyre of her husband and perish with him. Christian missionaries fought for years and finally succeeded to eliminate this practice. Neither the Bible nor the facts of history support the mental illness myth connected with suicide.**

**Jonah was not insane, and he had no good reason to take his own life. He was in a face-saving situation. He wisely submitted his life as a sacrifice for a cause, and that cause was the salvation of the innocent sailors. His case was just opposite of Samson's who sacrificed himself to destroy his enemies, but both of them were self-sacrifice. Life is so sacred to destroy, but even life can be sacrificed if God's will and plan require it. Jesus became our Savior by laying down His life for the cause of atoning for sin, and His**

**sacrifice made our salvation possible.**

**Suicide is almost always folly in our culture, for it is basically just a means of escape. It is usually based on ignorance of the future. People think their present situation is permanent, and they cannot stand to think of living with their present burden for the rest of their lives. This is especially true of young people who have not lived long enough to understand how life can change radically no matter how bad they feel in the present. Their lack of long range vision blinds them, and they take the easy way out. In Acts 16:25-34 we have the story of the Philippian jailer who came close to ending his own life because it looked like he was in a terrible unsolvable mess. It was all a delusion, however, and a totally false picture of reality. The fact is he was near the greatest blessing of his life, for that was the night that he received salvation by trusting in Jesus as his Savior. By being spared he not only gained life for himself, he gained eternal life for himself and his whole family. Many near to suicide need to recognize that they are just around the corner from the best thing that could ever happen to them if they would turn to Christ.**

## **7. PAGAN PIETY Based on Jonah 1:13-17**

**Total depravity is not the concept that man is as bad as**

**he can be, for we all know that there are many degrees of evil among the lost, and this holds true even among the saved. Some redeemed people are less sinful than others, and some lost people are less sinful than others. Total depravity, when rightly understood, means that there is no part of man that has escaped the taint of sin. He is spoiled in every faculty. In body, soul, and mind he has fallen, and there is nothing left of purity that can be used in any way to merit salvation. It does not mean that he is worthless, for he is still of such great value to God that He would send His Son to die for His redemption.**

**If you looked at used cars and saw one with a poor body, worn tires, and cracked glass, but with a good motor, you might say there is some merit in it that makes it worthy of being purchased. It might be the other way around, and the motor is bad, but the body and tires may be very good. But a car that would fit the total depravity category has a poor motor, rusted body, worn tires, broken windows, clouded mirror, leaky tank, and some defeat in every part. In other words, there is nothing about it that compels you to admit that it merits escape from the junkyard. If it is kept and restored, it is only by grace. What would ever lead one to restore it? It would be because of the original nature and value of the car. It could be of great value again if restored.**

**This the idea behind God's salvation plan for man. Man has no claim on God's mercy. There is nothing about him that makes him worthy of a place in God's presence. If he ever gets there, it is only by God's grace. Man was once**



perfect and in fellowship with God, and if he is redeemed he can be restored to that original value and relationship. This means that man at his best is still evil and lost, but it does not mean that he is no good. On the contrary, he is still the most valuable creature in the world. He is valuable enough for God to make a way for him to be restored. He is still the only creature made in the image of God. He is like a Rolls Royce, or some other unique model. By its very uniqueness it opens the hope of being worth it to put labor into its restoration. What is once was it can be again, and that becomes a motivation to restore it.

The point I am getting at is that we must avoid carrying the concept of depravity to the point of absurdity and belittling the whole plan of God to redeem man. It was not an arbitrary act on the part of God to save men. He had planned to do so even before man fell because He knew that man had the capacity to be like His Son. Even in his depraved state he can do what is good in the eyes of God. Jesus said to His disciples, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more should your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them who ask Him?" If man who is evil can still do good, how much more can God, who alone is untouched by all sin. The book of Jonah is a clear revelation that just as good men can do evil, so evil men can do good. Let's look at this beginning with verse 13.

**Verse 13.** Jonah has been found guilty of sin against God, and of endangering the lives of everyone on the ship. Men of

**greater culture would have quickly agreed with his request to be thrown into the sea, but to our surprise these men who were so fearful are now willing to risk their lives for the sake of Jonah. Jonah must have felt quit small, for here were Gentile dogs, who were not a part of the covenant of God with Israel, and yet they would do for him more than he would ever consider doing for them. Even God's command could not bring him to bother with Gentiles, and now he sees Gentiles risking everything for his skin.**

**We don't want to get carried away to another extreme, so we must recognize this as a unique situation. Without a doubt the vast majority of pagans would have thrown him over just for the sport of it. The story is trying to convey, not that all pagans are just great guys after all, but that men are worth saving regardless of who they are, and to fail to try is greater sin than man's natural depravity. Jonah portrays that some pagans do have high standards of conduct, and are willing to make sacrifices to do what is humane. Calvin believes that the motives behind their attempt to save Jonah was true piety. They believed him to be a prophet of God, and they believed in his God, and they did not want to injure his servants.**

**It is of interest to note that Paul also received kindness from Julius, his pagan guard, while he was on a ship. Acts 27:3, "An Julius courteously and treated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends..." In both cases the kindness was rewarded. In both cases we see an example of the promise that even a cup of cold water given to Christ's**

**servants will be rewarded.**

**Verse 14. The sailors rode hard, but to no avail, for the sea only got worse and there was no alternative but to throw Jonah over. Before they did, however, they prayed, and this time they all cried out to the Lord, and not to their own pagan small gods. Two times they mention the Lord in one sentence. Some people wonder if God hears the prayers of non-believers. It all depends on what you mean. These were pagans, but they believed, and God heard their prayer. God does hear the prayers of non-Christians if their prayer is one of belief. God is not afraid to do a favor for any sinner not yet saved. Jesus said that if we love only those who love us we are not God-like. God shows His grace to many before they become His children. Theologians call it prevenient grace.**

**This prayer was for salvation of the body and not of the soul, but it is not likely that they distinguished between the two. We see here an example of how God can use evil to bring forth good. Jonah disobeyed and did the opposite of God's will, and yet there was no loss, for by his act of evil he was led providentially to bring the knowledge of the true God to these men. Who knows how far it may have spread from them? When they arrived in Tarshis the story of their adventure, no doubt, spread like wildfire.**

**Notice that they say, "Lay not on us innocent blood." They had a conscience on this matter, and they did not feel right about killing a man. The law of God was written on**

**their hearts. Like Pilate, they wanted on part of killing the innocent, but Pilate sought to wash his hands in water, and these men sought the forgiveness of God. It made the difference between salvation and damnation. As far as they were concerned, this was a matter between Jonah and God. They called him innocent as far as his relationship was to them. He had done nothing worthy of death against them. They threw him over, not by choice, but because circumstances compelled them. They recognize that God's will demands it.**

**Verse 15. So they reluctantly and with regret take up Jonah and throw him over. When God requires it, it can be right to take another life. The immediate effect proved that it was the only acceptable solution to their problem. It was an immediate confirmation that God had heard their prayers and granted their request. The sea ceased from its raging, and we see the first miracles of Jonah. The storm itself was not unnatural, but it was produced by natural causes such as wind. The sudden stop, however, was very unnatural. It was like the stilling of the storm by Christ, and it was recognized immediately as an act of God.**

**Verse 16. The pagans feared the Lord exceedingly. It was not the fear of death, or the fear of disobedience as before. Here was fear which was reverence. This was greater fear at the calm than at the storm since it was so obviously supernatural. The mystery of it would cause anyone to fear. The only response they could think to make was the obvious one of offering thanks by sacrificing to God. What they**

**sacrificed is not known, but likely they had provisions for such a sacrifice, for it was common in the ancient world.**

**Many feel that they embraced the God of Israel and became proselytes. This is similar to the experience of Naaman after he was healed. He said in II Kings 5:17, "..for henceforth your servant will not offer burnt offerings or sacrifice to any god but the Lord." It is likely that Jonah must have met these men again later. He probably went back to the port at Joppa to purposely see them and let them know what happened, and also to hear of their reactions, for how else could he know of their decision to make vows to the Lord? We may very well see these sailors in heaven as examples of the good fruit that God can reap even from the disobedience of one of His servants. By trying to avoid Gentiles he actually ends up saving more than originally planned.**

**Many wonder if the vows were kept because it is typical of men to make promises when they are in danger, and then to forget them later when all is well. The one factor in their favor is that they made their vows after the danger was over. It was out of gratitude and not in order to placate God with the hope of escaping the danger. The record seems to speak highly of the piety of these pagans.**

**Verse 17. Men have gone to great length to try an escape the miracle in this verse. One even says that it means a ship picked him up which was called the whale, because a whale was its figurehead. Another says that a huge carcass of a**

**whale floated by and Jonah took refuge on it. Others say it was all a dream he had in his troubled sleep, and others simply call it an allegory. Men have thought of every possible way to escape the obvious. Men have made so much fun of this event that sensitive scholars feel they must show that God really didn't do anything so silly. What they fail to consider, however, is that nothing could be more logical out in the middle of the sea to demonstrate, beyond a shadow of a doubt, to Jonah that it was not an accident but the grace of God that saved him. It is so sensible that all the substitutes are what becomes truly funny and ridiculous.**

**As far as the whale goes, there has been much ado about nothing. The word in Hebrew and Greek is a general term for all large sea creatures. It can mean a whale, but it is not limited to one. It could have been a white shark, for they have been known to swallow men. It could have been a whale too, for several species of them can also swallow a man. The biggest tragedy is that all the controversy over the whale has cause men to lose the primary message of the book. It is the mission emphasis of God's love and concern for all people. It reveals the folly of prejudice, and demands that we have a universal perspective. It is folly to debate details and never get out of the belly of the whale.**

**For the sake of accuracy, however, it is good to know just what the miracle is. Most take for granted that it was the swallowing of Jonah, but that has happened before, and so why would it be miraculous in Jonah's case? This was a**

case of special providence and not a miracle, because nothing impossible happened. The miracle consists in his preservation for 3 days, and then being spewed out. That is what is unnatural and an obvious sign of divine intervention. Jesus used this as an illustration of the greatest miracle of all-his resurrection. Like Jonah, he was in the grave of darkness, and, like Jonah, he was brought forth again to life. This is the true miracle of God. He saves from the impossible. It was not a miracle that the pagans were saved, however, for that was what we call the providence of God. God worked in their lives to spare them, because they were true examples of pagan piety.

## **8. A HOPELESS SITUATION    Based on Jonah 2**

The early settlers of the New England Colonies knew what it was to suffer and to endure great difficulties. They had frequent days of fasting and prayer on which they would bring their distresses before God. Constant dwelling on the sorrows of life led them to be gloomy and discontented. Some even decided to go back to their fatherland and face persecution. Finally, at one of the meetings where it was proposed to appoint a day of fasting and prayer, one of the old colonists who had apparently been doing some deep thinking, stood and said that he thought they had done enough brooding over their misfortunes and that it was high time they started to

**consider some of their blessings.**

**He went on to point out that the fields were increasing in harvests, the rivers were full of fish, the woods were full of game, the air was sweet, the climate was good, and they possessed what they had come for, which was full civil and religious liberty. His advise was taken, and they proclaimed a day of feasting and praise, and that is why we have a day of Thanksgiving arising out of a situation that appeared to many to be hopeless.**

**Thanksgiving is a necessity in the life of a believer, for without it there is a tendency to dwell on the dark side of life. It is real, but it is not eternal. It is not an adequate foundation on which to build a life of faith. Jonah realized this, and he is one of the best examples in Scripture of what a believer's attitude ought to be in a hopeless situation. When I say hopeless, I mean from a human standpoint, and without divine intervention. This is the kind of situation Jonah was in when he was cast into the sea. We want to examine his reaction because it holds much instruction as to how a believer should respond in a hopeless situation. The first thing we want to establish is the timing of Jonah's prayer.**

**In 2:1 we read the word then, and the question is when? If we take it in chronological order from 1:17, it would be at the conclusion of the 3 days and nights in the fish's belly. Does it make any difference when he said it? Yes, for the time of it explains why it is strictly a prayer of thanksgiving**



**and dedication without any requests. If this was a prayer at the beginning of his experience, it would be one of crying out for deliverance, but here he refers back to that original cry for help in the past, and now he give thanks that it was heard. He recalls his experience of sinking in the sea, and of his cry for help after he had lain unconscious in the fish for 3 days. Now he has regained consciousness just before he is vomited out.**

**This means that Jonah is still in a humanly hopeless situation, but he does not look at it from that angle. He dwells instead on the fact that God heard his prayer and has kept him alive. He is thankful in the midst of a horrible and hopeless situation. He does not at this point have any promise that he will be delivered, but he has faith to believe that if God spared him from drowning, He will also spare him from the fish as well. He didn't even ask for it, however, for he was so grateful for his deliverance thus far that he could only think of commitment and vows. This ought to be our attitude always. We have been delivered from the greatest crisis in the universe. We have escaped damnation through Christ, and our gratitude ought to outweigh all the aggravations and burdens of present trials. The basic attitude of the Christian is to be one of thanksgiving. It may sound unrealistic, but it is really not if one is fully aware of what it means to be saved. Jonah was still in a mess, but he was so conscious of the mercy and presence of God that he could be joyful even in the very jaws of death.**

**One of the values of prayer is that it is possible when nothing else is. If one is conscious, one can pray anywhere at any time under any circumstance. No prayer was ever offered from a more perilous place than this prayer of Jonah, and yet it was heard with no more difficulty than if offered from a church or prayer room. If God can hear and answer prayer from the depths of the sea, He can do so under any possible circumstance. This prayer of Jonah makes it clear that where you are and what your position is makes no difference. Sam Walter Foss wrote this poem about the prayer of Cyrus Brown, which illustrates the point.**

**The proper way for a man to pray,  
Said Deacon Lemuel Keyes,  
"And the only proper attitude  
Is down upon his knees."**

**"No, I should say the way to pray,"  
Said Reverend Doctor Wise,  
"Is standing straight with outstretched arms  
And rapt and upturned eyes."**

**"Oh, no, no, no," said Elder Slow,  
"Such posture is too proud.  
A man should pray with eyes fast-closed  
And head contritely bowed."**

**"It seems to me his hands should be  
Austerely clasped in front**

**With both thumbs pointing toward the ground."  
Said Reverend Doctor Blunt.**

**"Last year I fell in Hidgekin's well  
Headfirst," Said Cyrus Brown,  
"With both my heels a-stickin up  
And my head a-pointin down."**

**"An I made a prayer right then and there,  
The best prayer I ever said,  
The prayingest prayer I ever prayed,  
A-standin on my head."**

**In verse 2 Jonah refers to the past in his prayer, and in doing so he gives a biblical example of the validity to do so. At one point I became skeptical of the reality of much public prayer. I use to think it was foolish to tell God what He already knew. It was obvious that the person praying was informing the rest of the people and not God. This seemed like a defect until I saw that this is a common characteristic of biblical prayers. Prayer is a human activity and must, therefore, have the limitations of man's finite abilities. When we pray we must inform those with us of the circumstances and background, and all sorts of facts that God knows perfectly. Public prayer is conversational communion with God, and it would be rude to make it a private line experience and not let others in on the nature of the conversation.**

**Jonah is in a private situation, but even there it is**

natural for us to refresh our own minds on God's past mercies, and to speak in prayer for our own benefit. Prayer is revisiting the blessings of God and His guidance, and then thanking Him for it. Jonah goes back over the horrible experience he had passed through. He called to God out of his distress when he was drowning. He refers to it as the belly of hell-the place of death. In other words, he had the feeling that this was the end and all hope was gone. But yet all hope was not gone, for he still prayed. Where there is life there is hope is always true for the believer, for God can and does deliver even when it appears to be too late.

In verse 3 we see Jonah reviewing the tragic experience, and he makes it clear that he has no ill will against the pagan sailors. He does not even mention them, but attributes the casting over into the sea directly to God. This was typical of Jewish thought. They would ignore all secondary causes, and refer to God as the direct cause of things. Our thinking tends to bring in the means, and so we say God did such and such a thing by means of His Word, or through His servants, etc. People debate such things as whether it was the pagans or God who threw Jonah overboard. There are many such foolish debates, and they are foolish because both sides are correct. God does things by means of people and so both are the cause.

Jonah gives us a description of what it felt like to be drowning. The waves and billows were his first impression because he was thrown into a raging sea. In verse 4 we see that he felt forsaken of God. He felt that this was the end.

**We know, however, that God was present, but His presence does not depend upon our feelings. Jonah felt forsaken, but it was a subjective experience. He is a believer who has reached the end of his rope. It is a hopeless situation, and yet it is just here where the believer's hope is to go on shining, and that is what Jonah's hope does. In the very breath he uses to confess his hopelessness he also confesses his hope.**

**He says, "Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple." How can he mix such confidence with such a calamity? Some feel that he refers here to a hope of life beyond in God's heavenly temple. If so, we see an indication of hope for forgiveness and cleansing after death. If he referred to the temple in Jerusalem, it means he had confidence that God would rescue him from death. Either way it is an amazing hope to have in a hopeless situation. The heavenly temple seems likely, however, for he mentions it again in verse 7, and it is not likely that he was thinking of worship in Jerusalem, but rather of his hope of being in God's presence soon. This is a more likely thought of a saint at the time of death, and Jonah felt this was the end for him. Since it was an Old Testament concept that God's temple would be in heaven, there is no reason to doubt Jonah's hope of life after death.**

**Jonah went down to Joppa in disobedience to God, and then he went down into the ship to sleep, and now he has gone down to the depths of the sea. He has been on the downward path ever since he fled from God. Now he has**

reached the bottom, and seed weeds are wrapped around his head. He has reached the end of the line. In verse 6 he expresses his hopelessness again, for he was sunk beyond help, and he would be in this prison of water forever. That was his feeling at the moment he was there, but now he has awakened in the fishes belly. He is alive, and the second part of the verse expresses his present reaction. It was a hopeless situation, but even so he says, "Yet thou hast brought up my life from corruption O Lord my God." We see the parallel with the resurrection of Christ who saw no corruption.

Jonah had reached the bottom, and yet God pursued him and brought him up. Here is a theme basic to the whole plan of God. It is the Gospel, for man however corrupt and forsaken by God is still the object of God's love. The most depraved of men whom God must despise is still a man for whom Christ died. In this case Jonah is a an example of a backslider who has forsaken God's plan, but God has still not forsaken him. Jesus broke through the very gates of hell to restore man to the fellowship of God.

Verse 7 makes it clear that Jonah was still a believer even though he was a backslider and guilty of terrible disobedience. He never had any intention of forsaking his faith. It was only his duty that he was forsaking. He turned to the Lord and in his distress he found that God will not cast out any who come to Him. In verse 8 he realizes the folly of putting anything ahead of God's plan. He had let nationalism become a superior loyalty above God. It was an

**idol, and the result was that he lost the mercy and grace he might have had by putting God first. This is a warning to all believers who put a good ahead of the best. Loyalty is not an absolute virtue. If one is loyal to anything, no matter how good, but which is less than God, one has turned what might have been virtue into a vice.**

**In verse 9 Jonah closes his prayer with thanksgiving and commitment to obedience and praise. Jonah had learned the hard way that obedience is a supreme virtue. He is grateful to God for the chance to put it into practice.**

## **9. THE SHORTEST SERMON   Based on Jonah 3:1-5**

**As we all know, the Bible is very brief on its account, considering all the centuries that it covers. It was not designed to tell us everything and to give an exhaustive and detailed record of God's working. It was designed to give us basic truths, principles, and examples of their operation and application in specific lives. Even with 4 accounts of the life of Christ, the vast majority of their content deals with the last week of His life, and the record is blank for many of His early years. The whole of creation is summed up in 2 chapters, and the most famous Psalm in the world, which is the 23rd, is only 6 verses long. A great, profound, and powerful message can be communicated in few words. In**

**contrast, some of the most minor and mundane messages can run into endless wordiness.**

**A comparison was made of the number of words used in the great biblical passages, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, and a typical government publication. It was discovered that the number of words used to announce a change in the price of cabbage seed far exceeded all of the words of Lincoln and the Scripture put together. Man is not known for his brevity of speech, and this is especially true of preachers. One morning a pastor entered his pulpit with his finger all bandaged. One in the congregation leaned over to a neighbor and asked, "What happened?" The reply was that he heard the pastor was shaving and had his mind on his sermon, and he cut his finger. The inquirer said, "I hope next Sunday he keeps his mind on his finger and cuts his sermon."**

**A man visiting a different church from his own was surprised when the sermon was only 10 minutes long. The pastor explained that his dog was very fond of paper and he ate the remaining part of his message that he had written out. The visitor met the pastor at the door and said, "I'd appreciate it if you would let me know if your dog has pups. I'd like to get one for my pastor."**

**Sometimes we think that length of a message makes it more powerful, but this is not the case. When Franklin Roosevelt was a young lawyer just getting started in New York he was hired to handle a civil case. The opposing**



**lawyer was very superior as a speaker. He went on and on in his oratory for several hours. Roosevelt noted that the jury was not paying attention after awhile. He had a hunch that he played out when it was his turn. He rose and said, "Gentlemen you have heard the evidence. You have also listened to my distinguished colleague, a brilliant orator. If you believe him, and disbelieve the evidence you will have to decide in his favor. That's all I have to say." The jury was out for just 5 minutes, and brought in a verdict in favor of Roosevelt's client. Brevity had won the day.**

**The great Spurgeon once went into a church where he was invited to speak to check out the acoustics. He decided to quote a Scripture from the platform and said in a loud voice, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." Unknown to him a workman in the church heard this as the voice of God to him. He responded by looking to Jesus and trusting him as his savior. Many years later the man was able to share with Spurgeon that it was his brief word that day that led him to trust in Jesus. God has proven many times that he can make a big difference with a small message.**

**The old Puritans used to preach sermons that lasted three hours. Today most sermons are under an hour long, and the majority probably a half an hour or less. We are going to look now at what is probably the shortest sermon ever preached in history. It was also one of the most successful ever preached. No one could ever accuse Jonah of being long winded or complicated on the basis of this**

**message. We want to examine this shortest sermon in terms of its source, delivery, and effect. First-**

## **I. ITS SOURCE.**

**The brevity of this sermon has its origin in God's will and not Jonah's wisdom. We see in verse 1 that the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time. Here is a marvelous example of God's grace and persistence. He is going to get a message to Nineveh, and no amount of disobedience is going to block that goal. Unfaithfulness can hinder and postpone God's schedule, but it will not be allowed to stop the fulfillment of His plan. So it is with the church. It will fail time and time again, but God's standing orders to every generation are still, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel." God will persist until that plan is accomplished, for only then will the end come.**

**God's long suffering is amazing. He is the God of the second chance. Some of the greatest men of God would have gone down in shame and disgrace if God had not given them a second chance. Jonah would have died a deserted, and he would have been known forever as a traitor to God's cause. God gave him a second chance just like He did Samson, David, Peter, Mark and Paul. They were all, like the Prodigal Son, given the second chance. Israel was given even more than a second chance. She failed God over and over again, but God continued to work through a faithful remnant to bring His Son into the world. God took Jonah right back to where he was in the first place before he**

**disobeyed. He was given a chance to start all over again just as if nothing had happened. It is as if the book of Jonah began with chapter 3. What an illustration of the truly forgiving nature of God. By God's grace you can get to where you ought to be, even if you have gone far astray. What L. F. Tarkington wished in her poem is found only in the grace of God. She wrote,**

**"I wish that there were some wonderful place  
In the land of beginning again;  
Where all our mistakes and all our heart aches  
And all of our poor selfish grief  
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door  
And never put on again."**

**Jonah's mistake was passed, and God even used it for good. Now he is back in the land of beginning again. He was restored, not only to life, but to his office as a prophet, and he is sent again to that great city Nineveh where it is estimated there were half a million people.**

**Verse 2 makes it clear that the shortness of Jonah's message was God's idea, for he was to say only what God commanded. The value and power of any message is dependant upon its source. In order to have authority a message must be backed up by an adequate power to carry out what is prophesied. This is why God alone is the original source of all great sermons. He alone can make them great, for He alone can make them true. Jeremiah felt like a poor speaker, but God said He would put His own words in his**

**mouth, and he would have great power. So it was with Moses and all the prophets.**

**Even Jesus made it clear that the source of His message was the Father. In John 12:49 He said, "For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who has sent me has Himself given me commandment what to say, and what to speak." The source of every authoritative message dealing with eternal truths is God the Father, and so it was with this shortest of sermons.**

## **II. ITS DELIVERY.**

**Jonah had learned the value of obedience and the folly of disobedience. He arose immediately and went directly to Nineveh as he was told. It seemed like a big assignment for one man. It was a huge city. It is thought by many that the 3 days journey refers to the length of time needed to walk around the city, and if so it would make it about 60 miles around.**

**Jonah headed right into the task and began to deliver the message that God had given him. He was no longer as sensitive, for it would take considerable courage, conviction and confidence. It is hard to go to the point where nothing but obedience to God counts, but there is tremendous power when one reaches that point. His sermon was apparently delivered on the move as he walked through the streets of Nineveh. This explains the necessity for it being a very short sermon. It had to be heard as he passed by, and so it had to**

**be right to the point. An extended message would be meaningless, for he would be out of hearing range before the message was completed. It had to be a quick 3 points.**

**When? 40 days.**

**Where? Nineveh. What? Destruction. People could disagree and call him a fanatic, but no one could miss the point of the message. Simplicity is a must when it comes to warnings. In the Hebrew this sermon is composed of only 5 words.**

**The nature of a message determines its length. Jesus could not set forth the pattern of life for the kingdom of God in 5 words, or even in 50. The Sermon On The Mount is condensed, but it still occupies 3 chapters. It is a message of instruction, and must by its very nature be longer than a message of warning. Warning messages demand brevity. The Gospel can be preached in minutes, but the whole counsel of God takes years to proclaim. If you see a person in danger of being hit by a car you shout, "Watch out!" Eloquence and reasoning are totally irrelevant and inappropriate. Imagine saying in such a situation, "In the light of the inevitable encounter which you will, from all appearance have with the approaching vehicle if you remain in your present location, I propose that you avoid the unnecessary suffering, which in all likelihood will follow the aforementioned encounter, by transporting yourself to a place of greater security."**

**Such a warning would probably make you guilty of involuntary manslaughter since it is not likely that it would**

**save the victim even if your speech was finished before the car hit. A warning must be sharp, pointed and brief, and that is why Jonah's message of judgment was only 5 words in length. There was no introduction, conclusion, or illustrations. It was just the plain horrible facts. He would have gotten an F in any class on sermon writing.**

**Jonah didn't even have a hint of good news to offer. He did not say repent and be saved, for there was no Gospel in this sermon at all. This is evident by the attitude of the king, which we see in 3:19. If Jonah had given them any hope that God might repent, they would have known, but there was none. No way of escape was pointed out. It was just a warning of judgment to come. It was the shortest sermon ever preached, and probably also the most repeated, for the news of it spread across the whole city. Jonah had done a great job on the delivery.**

### **III. ITS EFFECT.**

**The success of Jonah is hard to believe. Skeptical scholars just flatly deny it. The facts are amazing. Jonah was preaching a message he didn't want to, and so his heart really was not in it. He really hoped it would be a flop even though he obeyed the letter of God's command. We have here a poor instrument to start with, and he is preaching a message with no hope. Jonah was a Jew in a Gentile city. The Assyrians were not noted for their sensitive conscience, or their fear of tragedy. They were cruel and blood thirsty. They were so hard-hearted they were called the Nazi's of**

**antiquity. With all of these factors against the success of his mission, it is no wonder that Jonah figured nothing would come of it all. He likely thought that they would mock and laugh at him for sport, and then go on their merry wicked way to destruction. But it didn't work out that way.**

**The people of Nineveh believed God and repented. It was contrary to logic and commonsense, and nobody could have guessed the response that came. God certainly must have known of the unique state of these people's hearts. They were ripe for repentance. Only God knows what factors were operating to make these people ready to respond as they did, but knowing that we see why he was so persistent in getting the message to them. We need to pray that God would lead us to people He knows are ready to respond to His message.**

**Here were heathen people who believed God on the basis of a single 5 word sermon. The question arises, were these people saved? Were they not just spared from destruction, but were they saved for eternity? A comparison of other cases where the same Hebrew word for believe is used would indicate that they were truly saved. Gen. 15:6 speaks of Abraham, "And he believed the Lord, and he reckoned it to Him as righteousness." It is the same word used in many places to describe true faith. Their greatest proof of their salvation is not based on a word study, however, but on the testimony of Jesus in Luke 11:32 where he says, "The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it, for they**

**repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, a greater than Jonah is here." If they will rise at judgment justified, and then judge the generation of Christ's day because of their unbelief, it is as strong evidence as you could ask for in proof of the reality of their saving faith.**

**Later on Nineveh was destroyed in judgment, but that was a totally different generation of people. We can conclude then that this message of Jonah resulted in many Gentiles being brought into the kingdom of God. A sermon's strength is not its length, and that is abundantly proven by Jonah who had unparalleled success by preaching the shortest of sermons.**

## **10. GOD'S REPENTANCE Based on Jonah 3:10**

**One of the attributes of God is His immutability. This means that He is unchangeable. God cannot change because He is perfect, and any change would be for better or worse. If it was for better, it would mean He was not perfect before the change. If it was for worse, He would not be perfect after the change. God is constantly and consistently the same. Mal. 3:6 says, "For I the Lord do not change." In James 1:17 God is described as one "who does not change like shifting shallows."**

**This attribute of God is great assurance for us who live in**



**the turmoil of constant change. Arthur H. Clough speaks for us when he says,**

**It justifies my soul to know, that, though I perish, truth is so;**

**That howsoe'er I stray and range, whate'er I do, Thou dost not change.**

**I steadier step when I recall that, if I slip, Thou dost not fall.**

**John Campbell Shairp expresses well the contrast between our mutability and God's immutability.**

**'Twixt gleams of joy and clouds of doubt**

**Our feelings come and go;**

**Our best estate is tossed about**

**In ceaseless ebb and flow.**

**No mood of feeling, form of thought,**

**Is constant for a day;**

**But Thou, O Lord, Thou changest not;**

**But same Thou art alway.**

**The doctrine of God's immutability is obvious and unquestioned in Scripture and theology. The book of Jonah, however, brings us to a passage that appears to contradict this doctrine, for it states clearly that God repented and did not do what He said He would do. He changed His mind, and did not fulfill the prophecy that in 40 days Nineveh would be destroyed. Is it really possible for God to change His mind and repent, or did Jonah make a**

**mistake? He certainly knew the fact that God was immutable, so how could he write about God changing, and how could God inspire him to write what appears contradictory? God certainly cannot be unchangeable and at the same time change His mind-or can He?**

**If God cannot change then the contradiction becomes even worse in the book of I Samuel where in chapter 15 verse 29 we read that God "is not a man that He should repent." Then only 6 verses later in verse 35 we read, "And the Lord repented that He had made Saul King over Israel." Certainly no author, let alone an inspired one, could fail to see the contradiction, unless there is, in fact, no contradiction. Our goal is to show that there is no contradiction in the changes that take place in the unchangeable God. In so doing we will gain a greater biblical concept of God, and fulfill Paul's prayer for believers that they increase in the knowledge of God. Let's look at some solutions to this apparent contradiction.**

**I. Some theologians feel the solution is to explain the contradiction away by denying one side of the issue. They say that God does not really repent as the text states. This language is used to make it understandable to our finite minds. In other words, God accommodates Himself to our capacities to understand. He doesn't really change, but only says so for our understanding. Calvin, for example, says, "There is a twofold view of God-as He sets Himself forth in His Word, and as He is in His hidden counsel. With regard to His secret counsel, God is always like Himself, and is**

**subject to none of our feelings; but with regard to the teaching of His Word, He is accommodated to our capacities."**

**It is hard for me to accept this, for if it is true, it means that our revelation of God is not what He really is. If God is unchanging in His real self, but changeable in His revealed self, then what He has revealed is not really revelation at all, but only an artificial God whom men can understand. It seems to me to be dangerous to talk about God as He is in His secret counsel in contrast to His revealed self, for if it is secret there is nothing we can know about it, and for all we know it is identical with His revelation. It is a sure sign of man made theology when we are afraid to think of God as He revealed Himself, and have to go beyond revelation to find some way to explain away what we do not like. This sounds to much like saying I am going to explain how to play monopoly to a child, but I will really explain tiddly winks instead because it is so much easier to understand. If God is not what He reveals Himself to be, then we do not really have a revelation of God.**

**My own feeling is that God is in reality very much like He is revealed to be. He actually does experience emotions of love, joy, anger, and sorrow. Certainly no one can explain the joy and tears of Jesus as accommodation. These were real emotions, and I cannot conceive that all that is said about God's emotions are only an accommodation to our finite minds. When God is revealed as angry there is no reason to think it is not literal anger. It may seem like I am**

**trying to make God too much like man, but no one can deny that God Himself has painted this picture for us. God wants us to think of Him as having all the emotions of a human. It is far better than the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle, and the pure transcendental reason of the philosophers. The God of Scripture is a person, and nothing less than personhood can adequately convey the essence of God.**

**What is the point of all this? It is to say that the solving of the apparent contradiction of an unchanging God who changes by going beyond revelation to a secret counsel of God is only an ingenious man made scheme that solves a minor problem by creating a major one-namely, that what God says in His Word is not what is true in reality, and that revelation is really no revelation at all. This makes the Bible to be glorified fiction. There is another solution.**

**II. The best solution lies in taking the Bible as it stands as a literal revelation of what God really is. He is much more than what He reveals, but what He reveals is reality. When it says He is unchanging, we need to accept that. When it says He changes, we need to accept that as well, and see if the two can be reconciled without denying the truth of either. In other words, we are looking at the question-can a paradox be true? Since the Bible is full of paradoxes, we must say the answer is definitely! The challenge is to see how opposites can both be true.**

**We must first of all make sure that we do not think of God's immutability as we think of the immutability of a**

**rock. God is not a victim of iron-bound rigidity. He is a free and Sovereign Person with infinite variety and flexibility in His nature. He can act in love and compassion, or in anger and wrath depending on the people with whom He is dealing. If men obey God, He is unchanging in His spirit of love toward them. If men disobey God, He is unchanging in His opposition to them. God is consistently just, holy, and righteous, and this being so, He changes as men change. In fact, His changes are the only way to maintain His unchangeableness.**

**For example, God is unchangeably just. He can never be unjust, and so when He sees men who have gone to a point in sin where they must be judged, He cannot overlook it. His just nature demands that there be judgement. Since He is also unchangeably merciful, He gives warning before His wrath falls so that people can repent. When they do God cannot let His wrath fall, for it then would no longer be just, for they have responded to His mercy. If He went ahead and judged them anyway, He would be changing in His nature. He would be acting arbitrary, and without reason for His action. He would be locked in and not free to change in response to the new situation.**

**If God could not change, He would be like a man who decided to tear down his old garage and burn it. If his sons built a new garage on the same spot while he was on vacation, and he came home and felt the need to burn it down anyway, this would be immutability to the point of imbecility. We would consider the man a fool who could not**

**change in response to a change situation. A man is free to change in order to be wise in a changing world. It is folly to think that God does not have this same ability and freedom. God said He would destroy Nineveh, but when they repented they were no longer enemies out of God's will. It would be folly for God to be locked in to judgment, and so be forced to destroy them just when they were willing to obey Him. God changed His response to them just because He is unchanging in His nature. By nature He is merciful and just, and both mercy and justice demanded that He respond in grace toward those who repented.**

**God's nature is always the same, but His actions change in relation to men. The sun is not arbitrary because it melts wax and hardens clay. They are two opposite kinds of action, but the cause for the difference is not in the sun, but in the objects. God can be angry or loving without changing in Himself, for He is both at all times in relation to evil and righteous men. If you go from evil to being righteous, God does not change in His nature, but only in His relationship to you. This means that the changes in God are in relationship to persons, and are not changes in God's nature at all. They are necessary to keep Him unchanging in nature. If God said I will destroy this person in wrath, and then could not change, even if the person repented and responded to God's grace, God would be a slave and victim of His own unchanging nature. But God is free, and He can change His attitude toward men at any time when they respond to His grace. God is unchangingly merciful to the repentant sinner.**

**God could not make it plainer than He does in Jer. 18:7-10. "If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it." So when God said that He would destroy Nineveh, and then changed His mind, and did not do it because they repented, did He change in His nature? Not at all. He acted consistent with His nature, and remained unchangeably committed to His plan to bless all those who repent. God changes not, for even when He changes His actions, it is to maintain His changeless nature which must always judge evil and reward good.**

**The very purpose for God declaring His purpose to destroy Nineveh was that He might not have to destroy them. His warning was to make change possible in His plan. His warning gave them a chance to repent and this change would enable God to change in His plan. Being unchangeable He could not change in His judgment of their evil unless they repented, but if they did then His unchangeable nature of mercy would have to change His plan and not destroy them. The more we look at it the more we see that change is a vital part of God's unchanging nature. If He could not change in response to the changes in man, He would be locked into one side of His nature and not be free to be unchangingly merciful. God's unchanging**

**nature demands freedom to be flexible and ever ready to change in response to changing situations.**

**God could have destroyed Nineveh without warning, but He made sure that Jonah got there, even though it took a miracle to get him there. This is a marvelous picture of God's unmerited favor. Their repentance did not merit God's favor and response of grace, for even that was only because of His grace in getting the warning to them. God could not save them without their repentance, however, for that would be to change His nature and be a supporter of evil. In mercy He had to get them to change before He could change and forgive their evil. God does all He can to get men to change so that He can change from being a God of wrath to being a God of love and grace. He prefers to be this, but He can only be that when men respond to it. So God never changes in His desire to change from being a God of judgment to a God of forgiveness. That is why we have a plan of salvation at all. It is because of God unchanging nature of love and mercy.**

**God's sovereignty demands that He be free to respond to the changes in man, and so we have a necessary paradox. Change is a necessary part of God's unchanging nature. Jonah knew God was a God whose nature demanded He repent if Nineveh repented, and that is why he did not want to go and warn them. Jonah knew that God's unchanging policy of forgiving those who repent would lead to the saving of Nineveh and he did not want them to be saved. He knew God was always the same and would not change in this case,**



**and he did not want it to happen, and that is why he tried to escape. He knew that even though God said He would destroy Nineveh in 40 days, that He would change His mind and spare them if they repented. He knew that the unchanging God would change in a moment if there were changes in men.**

**The paradox of God's changing changelessness is real, and not a mere matter of words. Nor is it a matter of foolishness like the average size man who advertised himself as the world's largest midget and the world's smallest giant. God reveals Himself as immutable in His nature, and He reveals that He changes in relation to the changes in men. Both are true and essential, and to deny either is to refuse to receive God as He has revealed Himself to be. Wise are those theologians who see the necessity of both.**

**John Caird in Fundamental Ideas Of Christianity writes, "Immutability is not stereotyped sameness, but impossibility of deviation by one hair's breadth from the course which is best....In God infinite consistency is united with infinite flexibility." In other words, God is the only person who can be constantly changing in order to be consistently the same in nature.**

**Augustus Strong, the great theologian, wrote, "God's immutability itself renders it certain that His love will adapt itself to every varying mood and condition of His children..." This is the basis of the Gospel, for God will change in an instant if the conditions are met. The thief on the cross was**

**only minutes away from an eternity in hell, and because he turned to Jesus in faith he was only minutes away from an eternity in heaven. Thank God for His unchanging nature that will change a lost man to a saved man in an instant, because He is ever ready to change in His response to the changes in man. Let us praise God that He is willing to repent and change His mind when their is a way to avoid judgment and show mercy and grace.**

## **11. BECOMING WORLD CLASS CHRISTIANS Based on Jonah 3:10-4:11**

**Trying to be a world class Christian can be a world class pain. Ralph Hult learned this the hard way. This Nebraska born Swede at age 32 went to Africa as a missionary, but on his first furlough in 1926 he was told there was no money to send him back. So he started a fruit farm near Springfield, Missouri. He was quite fruitful himself in that he had 10 children with his wife. He wanted to start a home mission church, but again he was told there was no money available. It was 1941 before the board could send him back to Africa, and then two years later he died of a heart attack.**

**His story sounds like a good reason not to bother with a world vision. But his story does not end with his death. His world class perspective was passed on, and 5 of his children**

**became missionaries to Africa and other nations. His attitudes and values live on and fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord. The reason I start with this true story of a missionary who did not accomplish a great deal with his own efforts, yet did a lot by his attitudes, is because that is the key to being a world class Christian. You can read mission books by the dozens, and even go to the mission field, and still not be a world class Christian. It is not where you go and what you do, but it is your spirit that makes you a world class Christian.**

**Jonah is the best example in the Bible of a missionary who did not have a world class spirit. He went to Nineveh and preached the message God gave him, but he did not have the spirit of God at all. Jonah cared only about Israel and not the rest of the world, which was full of mere Gentile dogs. God was the God of Israel and He wanted to keep it that way. He did not want every Tom, Dick, and Harry of the pagan world finding out about the real God. Let them perish with their stupid man-made idols. That is what they deserve.**

**In Jonah we see the dark side that can be in even the most godly people. They can be so narrow in their perspective that they do not care about people who are not like them. They want God to love and care for them exclusively, and not waste His time with the worthless of the world. As far as Jonah was concerned, he wanted God to forsake the Gentile scum and just focus on blessing the people of Israel. When God had compassion on the people**

**of Nineveh because they repented it made Jonah angry. He threw a hissy fit like none other we find in the Bible. He was so thoroughly discussed with God's love for these people that he did not want to live anymore. He did not want to live in a world where God loved everybody.**

**I have heard people say, "Who wants to bring a child into this evil fouled up world where there is so much hatred and violence." But here is a man of God saying, "I can't stand living in a world where there is so much love and grace shown to people who deserve to be wiped out. If that is the way God is going to be, then get me out of here, for I'd rather be dead." If you think that a man of God cannot be filled with bitter prejudice against those who are not of the same race or religion, you had better think again, for here is a biblical prophet who reeks with the foul stench of putrid prejudice.**

**You can't get any worse than Jonah, for he was mad at God for not conforming to his self-centered conviction that the Ninevites did not deserve to live. Jonah would have loved to fire God and get a new God on the throne who could see the need to narrow his focus and knock off this concern for the whole world. Godly people do not life God when He cares too much about the ungodly. The godly leaders of Israel killed the Son of God because He cared about people they knew better than to care about. Here is the ultimate idolatry. It is the worshipping of yor own feelings, convictions, and opinions. Even God is rejected by those who make these things their God.**

**The world is filled with people who are angry at God because He will not conform to their bigoted view point. He goes on loving Ninevites and other minorities all over the world just like someone who never reads the paper to see how despicable they can really be. God would be a lot more popular in every race if He would just love that race exclusively, and promise to send all the rest to hell. Jonah would have praised God and doubled tithed if God would have destroyed the Ninevites. Instead, he is complaining bitterly that God let him down by sparing them. I have heard of preachers being depressed because they feel their sermon did not touch anyone, but here is a preacher who saved a whole city from judgment, and he is depressed because of his success. He was hoping to report a totally fruitless ministry in Nineveh. He was hoping his message was a total flop and that not a living soul would pay any attention to his message.**

**But alas, God failed to cooperate with his plan, and now he is stuck with the reputation of being the prophet whose message saved an entire pagan city. How embarrassing this must have been for poor Jonah. It would have been easier for him to die than to go back to Israel and his fellow Gentile despisers with this kind of reputation. His message brought great success, but he was a big failure because he failed to have a world class spirit. God is the God of all the world, and when His people do not have this perspective of His world wide love and plan they cannot dream His dream.**

**God made it clear in His covenant with Abraham that**

**his seed was to bless all the people of the world. God's plan has never been narrow and limited to blessing just His chosen people. The only reason for having a chosen people was to have an instrument by which He could reach and bless the unchosen people of the world. The Jews were chosen, not so they could be saved alone, but so that they could reach the whole world with the message of God's love for all.**

**The universality of God's plan runs all through the Bible. The Bible is world class from start to finish. All the Patriarchs in Genesis are told that their seed is to bless the whole world. Here are a few texts that give the world class perspective of the whole Bible:**

**Psa. 33:8, "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere Him."**

**Prov. 8:31, has the wisdom of God "Rejoicing in His whole world and delighting in mankind."**

**Isa. 27:6, "In days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit."**

**Jesus sent His church into all the world to be the light of the world, and He says in Matt. 24 that the end will not come until the whole world hears the Gospel. And we know they will for the final scene for the redeemed in heaven reveals that there will be people from every tribe, tongue and nation. Jesus died for the sins of the whole world and He will never be content until there are redeemed people from every part of this fallen world. To be a world class Christian is simply to be Christ like in recognizing that our God is**

**global, our Gospel is global, and our goals are global. To be a good Christian means that you have to care about the whole world.**

**This is easy enough if you are an infinite God everywhere present in the world, but for us finite beings, who are so limited, this is more than we can handle. We have to focus on some parts of the world. That is what every Christian denomination does, and every mission organization. Nobody is trying to reach the whole world, but there are hundreds of different groups trying to reach parts of it, and together they will reach all of it.**

**It should be easier for us to be world class then it was for Jonah, for we live in a world where communication has made the world so much smaller. We can watch the Olympics with world-class athletes. Television brings the whole world into our homes. World-class musicians and singers are in concert. World-class scientists travel, speak, and consult with scientists in the U. S. World-class authors, artists, and leaders in all realms of life are a part of our culture. Being world-class is a part of the whole vast computer world of the internet where you can communicate with millions of people all over the world. The secular mind is becoming world-class, and the point is that Jesus told us to be world-class and concerned about people everywhere. The Christian should be more world-class than anyone, but it is not always so. The Jonah complex still exists in the minds of many of God's people.**

**Who cares about the pagan world and all the masses of sinful humanity in foreign lands? God says that He cares, and that you had better care too, for that is part of His dream for you. He wants you to make some difference in this world where over half of the population have never heard that they have a Savior who died for them that they might have eternal life. To make this happen often calls for us to break out of our comfort zones and pay a price to love people whom God loves. Here is a testimony of a missionary who was asked if he liked his work in Africa. "Do I like this work? No, my wife and I do not like dirt. We have reasonably refined sensibilities. We do not like crawling into huts through goats refuse. We do not associate with ignorant, filthy, brutish people. But is a man to do nothing for Christ he does not like? If not, then God pity him. Liking or disliking has nothing to do with it. We have orders to go and we go. Love constrains us."**

**This goes against the grain of our culture where the idea of sacrifice is taboo, and the goal of life is comfort and pleasure at any cost. The number of career American missionaries dropped by almost ten thousand between 1988 and 1992. It is harder and harder to motivate American Christians to break out of their comfort zone for the sake of a hurting world. Paul Borthwick in his book *How To Be A World Class Christian* quotes Tom Sine who said, "We all seem to be trying to live the American dream with a little Jesus overlay. We talk about the lordship of Christ, but our career comes first. Our house in the 'burbs comes first. Upscaling our lives comes first. Then, with whatever we**



**have left, we try to follow Jesus.**

**There are none of us who can plead not guilty to the charge of being more self-centered than Christ-centered. Part of the problem is that we live in an age of information overload. There is so much information on so many subjects that we are all overwhelmed by our ignorance. We can't even keep up on all the information vital to our own well being in the world of health, insurance, investments, and a host of other issues. How in the world can we keep up with the issues missionaries face in foreign lands where we know so little of the culture and customs. The result is that our prayers for missionaries are often based on total ignorance.**

**A missionary family from Kenya home on furlough learned that people here were praying for their protection from leopards. They said they were in Kenya for 18 years and have prayed to be able to see a leopard, but with no success. They never heard of a missionary in all of East Africa who ever got attacked by a leopard. Many have been killed and injured, however, in car accidents. They face the same dangers we do here, and they need people praying for protection from the real dangers and not fictitious ones.**

**Lack of information makes prayer an exercise in futility. Prayer has to be informed to be of any value. People pray for the missionaries in Quito, Ecuador who live right on the equator, and ask that they be able to withstand the heat. Then they learn that Quito is 9 thousand feet above sea level and has a year around temperature of 70 with nighttime as**

**low as 55. Whether is the least of their problems, but in ignorance it becomes the main focus on those who do not know the facts.**

**We cannot know everything about every land, but we can focus in on some places and missionaries in order to pray for their real needs. That is being world-class. Missionaries are just like us, and they have the same needs. We often assume they are different, and so we do not minister to these normal needs. Paul Barthwick writes again and shares this testimony. "Carl, a missionary in South America for 20 years, lamented after a furlough visit home, 'in multiple visits with all my supporting churches, no one asked me about my spiritual health, and when I came home last June, my spiritual life was in a state of disrepair. I wasn't praying, my Scripture reading had lapsed, and I was thinking of quitting the ministry. People should never think that because I am a missionary, I am automatically spiritual.'"**

**Missionaries need people who show they care, not just when they are home on furlough, but when they are on the field. I pray for them, but I do not write to them and encourage them. Thank God for those who do, for they are world-class Christians on a higher level, and they keep missionaries striving to succeed. This is one way to become a world-class Christian. It is to become pen pals with a missionary family. Another way to care about the whole world is to recognize that the world is coming to us. Millions have come to live here from other lands. Tens of thousands**

**of the best students from all over the world come to America each year to study. Only a fraction of these students ever get into American homes. They spend 2 to 4 lonely years in our country, and then go back to their land with no positive impression about Christianity. Thank God for exceptions.**

**A British couple took a student from the Muslim nation Oman into their home and showed him Christian love. They did not win him to Christ but they still changed the world for many others. This man became the Sultan of Oman and was totally favorable to Christians in his country. He even contributed land for the building of Christian churches. Christians in this Muslim land now have the freedom that most such nations never allow, and it is all because a couple in England were world-class Christians and showed love to students from other lands.**

**Any of us can do this, for there are abundant opportunities to befriend foreign students. You can help change the world by what you do right here with a world-class perspective. None of can do everything, but all of us can do something to help the growing movement to reach our world with the Gospel. We all need to hear things like this story related in Hugh Steven's book To The Ends Of The Earth. A witch doctor in Northern Brazil rejected the Gospel for he said, "I work to get spirits out of people. I don't want the spirit of Jesus in me." But when he was dying he had a dream of a large book with the names of all the people in the village who were Christians written in it. His, of course, was not there. In that dream he asked God to**

**write his name in the book. When he woke up he told people he thought it was too late, but God gave him a chance to receive Jesus in his dream. He dyed joyful that he was able to trust Jesus even after years of rejecting Him.**

**It may not be true that it is never too late, but it is seldom too late for anyone, for God can even come to wicked people in their dying dreams. We ought not to ever give up on people but pray until their final breath, for they may with their final breath yet breathe a prayer of faith. God is not willing that any perish but that all come to repentance. If we have the mind of Christ, that will be our attitude toward all the people of the world.**

**Tom Sine, one of the leaders in the Christian movement to resist the consumer life style of our culture, says it is never too late for Christians to start caring and sharing more with the poor of the third world countries. He tells of 6 Christian couples who gave the money they used to eat out together once a month to a literacy project in Haiti. This enabled parents to develop vocational skills so they did not have to sell their children into slavery. He challenges us all to come up with some creative way to make a difference in the lives of the poor. Anne Frank in her diary said, "How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." May God help us all to start right now by asking God to make us world-class Christians.**

## **12. DOWN IN THE DUMPS Based on Jonah 4:1-4**

**A man said to his friend, "My wife gets another hat every time she is down in the dumps." His friend replied, "I wondered where she was getting them." Down in the dumps is a less sophisticated way of referring to depression and despondency. Down in the mouth is the more common terminology used about Jonah, but this is a reference to his experience in the great fish, and applies only to his body, since in spirit Jonah was not then depressed, but rejoicing that God had spared him, but now we find him not down in the mouth physically, but down in the dumps mentally and spiritually.**

**Jonah had just started to build up a good image of himself, and restore his reputation. We had almost forgotten about his foolishness at the beginning of the book, but now he has a relapse, and again becomes almost obnoxious. Some feel that Jonah was actually a neurotic of the manic-depressive type. He was alternating between gaiety and despondency. In a very short time he could go from being abnormally displeased to being abnormally pleased. We see this by comparing verse 1 and verse 6.**

**It is not unusual for believers to suffer from despondency. Moses and Elijah, like Jonah, had the sense of depression so bad they, like him, prayed for death. A good many men of God down through history have been victims of depression.**

**Charles Haddon Spurgeon had to fight it, and so did Alexander Macclaren. These were two of the greatest preachers in history, and their sermons are in print by the millions, but they had terrible bouts with depression. The fact of believers being depressed is not unusual, but in Jonah's case the causes of that depression are unusual, and reveal the perilous power that prejudice can have on a believer. We want to examine the reasons and the results of Jonah's despondency.**

## **I. THE REASONS FOR HIS DESPONDENCY.**

**The first reason is narrowness of mind. At the printing company where I worked for 4 years when I was a student, my boss was a paper cutter who trimmed paper to the right printing size. Sometimes he trimmed tablets that were already glued and ready to ship out. When he did, he usually saved a stack of the trimmings. They were about a quarter of an inch wide. He would set them on his desk where they were observed. People could see they were obviously worthless, and so it stimulated almost everyone to ask why he was saving them. This was just what he was waiting for, and he would reply, "Those are scratch pads for narrow minded Christians." It became a standing joke, and those of us from Bethel got a kick out of it ourselves.**

**The reputation of narrowness which we had as Christians because we did not live and talk as the others, and because we did not join them at the bar and their wild parties was one for which we were proud. In spite of the joke we were**

**respected, and I even had the opportunity to lead one young man to Christ right in the plant, and I had abundant opportunities to witness. This was true of the other Bethel students as well, and it was a thrill to have the reputation of being narrow, for it meant we had some convictions about God and Christ, and people knew that if they needed help they could count on us.**

**I say all this so that it is clear that I do not knock narrowness. I feel it is a necessity to effective witnessing, but there is a narrowness that is destructive and hinders one's witness. This is the kind of narrowness we see in Jonah at this point. Jonah did not want God to be merciful to all men. He wanted God to be exclusive in His blessings. He wanted God to be a tribal deity of Israel, and not a universal God. Jonah's narrowness was not the narrowness of truth, which by its nature must exclude error, but his was the narrowness of selfish nationalism and patriotism. Both of these are virtues when they are subordinate to the will of God. But when they are first in our system of values we become idolaters. Jonah was more concerned about his nation than he was about God's mercy toward the enemies of his nation.**

**In verse 2 he says, "I told you Lord. I knew this would happen. That is why I did not want to go in the first place." Jonah knew that God was merciful, and that he would repent if Nineveh did, and he could not tolerate the thought. Jonah is the type of person who wants God to conform to their narrow and selfish ideals. The offense of the cross**

**arises from the same type of narrowness. Neither the Jewish leaders nor the Greeks wanted a plan of salvation that included the publicans and sinners. This was a stumbling block and foolishness. A God worthy of their ideals must save only their kind of people. Since God would not conform to their narrow theology, they excluded Him, and rejected His plan. When men become so narrow they walk in darkness.**

**It is difficult but essential that we have the attitude of the minister that voted on a controversial issue and said, "I was against it personally, but I believed God was for it, and so I went along." It takes an exceedingly honest man to recognize that his likes and dislikes are not synonymous with God's. Jonah knew that God's ways were not his ways, but he did not like it one bit, and this narrowness of mind led to the second thing we will look at.**

**The second reason for his despondency was his hardness of heart. He had the audacity to go to God in prayer to complain against His mercy. As the popular saying goes, with friends like this, who needs enemies? God's mercy to Nineveh is not as amazing as is His patience in putting up with Jonah. He had to battle with him all the way. Never was such success accomplished by such an unworthy instrument. I have heard of preachers having blue Mondays because they feel like they have failed, but who ever heard of depression over success? He was planning on a fruitless sermon. He was expecting a total flop. But his planned failure failed, and instead the people responded, and it was a**



**success.**

**This is conclusive proof that the Word of God can be effective in spite of the instrument communicating it. I do not doubt that if the Gospel was rightly presented by an atheist it could lead to people responding in faith and being saved. The message can succeed even if the messenger fails, as was the case with Jonah. His hardness of heart is without excuse. He was not so much interested in the destruction of sin as he was in the destruction of an enemy. God's concern is just the opposite; to eliminate the enemy through repentance and forgiveness.**

**The danger of this narrowness of mind and hardness of heart is ever present. The early church struggled with it. There were many who did not like the idea of Gentiles coming into the church. They felt that the Jews were the only people in God's plan in spite of all that the Old Testament said to the contrary. It took the authority of men like Paul and Barnabas to broaden the vision of the church. The struggle goes on yet today, and many Christians do not like the idea of God loving all races equally. They want others to be second class citizens of the kingdom at best. Jonah's experience was abnormal, but to some degree it is still an experience that many believers have. They have a narrow perspective on who is included in the family of God, and they have no joy in the wideness of God's mercy. Now let's look at-**

## **II. THE RESULT OF HIS DESPONDENCY.**

**First we see the loss of hope. When your false gods are destroyed by God Himself, your whole system of values collapses. Hope is gone if you cannot submit to God and accept His values. Jonah is so shattered that he does not care to live. He does not fear to be angry at God because he wants to die anyway. Here is a child of God so angry with his Father. We see that even a perfect father has no guarantee that there will be no friction in the family, for the children do not share that perfection. God does not compel His children to love what He loves, so if they do not choose to do so, there is trouble.**

**The anger of Jonah is not wrong just because it is anger, for there is a place for legitimate anger in a child of God. For example, we ought to be angry with one so narrow as Jonah, but when the cause for our anger is God's ways, then we are on dangerous ground. It is not wrong in itself to pray for death either. Paul had a desire to depart and be with the Lord. Many believers have suffered with a broken body and have longed for release. They have finished life's labor, and would count it all joy to leave this vale of tears for the eternal joys of heaven. But Jonah had none of these circumstances. His work was not done. He was not suffering, except from his own selfish ego, and so his despondency only added to his sin.**

**The second loss was the loss of dignity. Jonah was a peeved and pouting prophet. Many commentators feel that Jonah felt depressed and hopeless because his reputation was now shattered. The word would spread that what he**

**predicted did not come to pass, and so his authority would be lost. He would not want to go back to Israel since they would consider him a traitor for helping their enemies to escape destruction. Jonah did have some good reasons for his discouragement, and they would not be easily overcome. Our criticism of Jonah can be tempered by the realization that in the same circumstances many servants of God would react the same way, especially if they were victims of a narrow theology from the start.**

**Deep personal piety does not necessarily eliminate prejudice. A child of God can resist the truth of God, and persist in an ungodly narrowness even to the point of being willing to give up life rather than give up their prejudice. Knowing this ought to make us cautious in our judgment of many Christians. Every commentator expresses shock and disgust with the attitude of Jonah, but none can sign him to hell. To do so would be to step into Jonah's own shoes, and begin to demand God's conformity to your system of values. If God can patiently endure, and seek to teach such a servant as Jonah, we must almost also be patient with those Christians who are victims of one prejudice or another. Rebuke is always in order, but rejection is a step to be left in the hands of God. This is important to keep in mind when you confront a believer who is a bigot.**

**We need to examine our own hearts and ask ourselves, how would we react if God started a revival with a group that we feel is not biblical? Would we resent it and feel like dying, or could we rejoice that souls were being won, even**

**though God is not using us to do it? It is easy to say that we would be delighted, but I suspect that our prejudice could lead us to feel something like Jonah, and we could resent God's grace and mercy being shown to those we do not like. Are we narrow in mind and hardened in heart? Do we rejoice in the marvelous mercy of God that not only forgives sinners of all races, but who also does not forsake saints who are narrow minded, and because of their own sin are down in the dumps?**

### **13. THE PRIORITY OF PERSONS    Based on Jonah 4:6-11**

**A little boy who had shown a fit of temper was scolded by his mother and sent to his room. He was told to pray that his temper might be reformed. His mother followed him and listened at the door to see if he would. This is what she heard: "O, Lord, please take away my bad temper, and while you are about it you might as well take mother's too." A bad temper is a problem at any age. It is a dangerous weapon because it injures both others and the one who has it. A woman once said to Billy Sunday that she had a bad temper, but it was over in a minute. He replied, "So is a shotgun blast, but it blows everything to pieces." The speed at which evil is done does not lessen the evil. Someone wrote a poem that reveals the difficulty in finding any justification for a bad temper.**

**"When I have lost my temper, I have lost my reason too.  
I'm never proud of anything which angrily I do.  
When I have talked in anger, and my cheeks are flaming red  
I have always uttered something that I wish I hadn't said.  
In anger I have never done a kindly deed, or wise,  
But many things for which I know I should apologize.  
In looking back across my life, and all I've lost or made  
I can't recall a single time when fury ever paid."**

**The first line of that poem describes exactly what Jonah's bad temper did to him. Jonah's anger had blinded him to the true values of life, and he became childish. He was like a baby having a temper tantrum because he is not allowed to pull the lamp off the table, or poke your eye out with a ballpoint pen. A bad temper reduces a person to an irresponsible infant whose own selfish pleasure becomes the measure of all things. I have known otherwise mature men smash their arms through a cupboard and throw a wrench through their windshield because of their loss of temper.**

**God had to show Jonah just how low his standard of values had fallen in his awful attitude of anger. To make sure he gets the message God prepares Jonah for a question. God has a test for Jonah consisting of just one question, but before he gives it to him he makes sure that Jonah will know the answer. We want to consider the preparation for the question, and then the question.**

## **I. THE PREPARATION FOR THE QUESTION.**

**In verse 5 we see that Jonah had not given up hope. He had come a long way to see Nineveh burn, and he wanted a ringside seat. In contrast to Jesus who wept over Jerusalem because of the coming destruction, and Abraham who pleaded for Sodom, Jonah was looking for blood. His only fear was that the whole thing might be cancelled. Jonah's system of values had no place for the concept of mercy. It was justice and justice alone that he looked for. Justice is of the very essence of God's nature, but it is always combined with mercy, and God expects the same to be true to His servants. Justice without mercy gives you what you have in the elder brother of the Prodigal. If he had come home and heard his brother screaming as his father was beating him, he would have felt good. But when he heard his father was having a party for the returned sinner he threw a fit, and like an immature child he refused to have any part in the celebration. Justice without mercy always leads to anger at the practice of forgiveness. Jonah had this spirit, and he was hoping yet to see Nineveh destroyed.**

**In verse 6 we see that God takes advantage of the situation to give Jonah an object lesson to challenge his system of values. It appears that God performed another miracle here. All of the miracles of this book are due to Jonah's disobedience and God's efforts to straighten him out. The plant was a fast growing plant of which there are several in that part of the world. None grow in one night, however, and so God's direct action was needed. We see how conservative God is in His use of power. He could have made a tree that takes 20 years to grow come up over night, but He**

**uses a plant that naturally grows very rapidly. God is not extravagant and showy in His use of miracles. He stays as close to the natural possess as possible. He feels no need to be spectacular like the stories of magic genies. Jesus would not gain popularity by jumping off the temple, or turning stones into bread. God is conservative omnipotence. He does only what is necessary to accomplish His goal. In this case it was to give Jonah shade to protect him from the scorching sun.**

**His goal is simply accomplished and Jonah is delighted. He is so engrossed in self-pity that this pleasure is just what he needed to bolster his ego. He is thinking that maybe everything isn't so bad after all. God still favors me, and so maybe destruction might still come. Every cloud has a silver lining was the way he was thinking, but it didn't' last long. The next day Jonah was back down in the dumps. In verse 7 God has a worm attack the plant and it withers. By the natural means of hot wind and the sun God makes Jonah miserable. His hopes collapse for everything seemed to be against him. Even the worm and the wind are against him, and so he was ready to die. God now had Jonah almost in readiness for the test, but first He gave Jonah a practice question.**

**In verse 9 God asked Jonah if he thought his anger was justified. Jonah responded without hesitation that he had a perfect right to be angry enough to die. When nothing goes right and everything is against you, what is the sense of living? The thing he could not see, of course, was that the**

**reason all looked dark was because of the blinders he was wearing. His false values were being crushed, but he refused to admit they were false, and so he was crushed.**

**Kierkegaard said, "Man clutches his torment because it gives him a right to be resentful." This was the picture of Jonah, and now he is ready for the question.**

## **II. THE QUESTION.**

**Note that the book of Jonah ends with a question mark. God teaches His greatest lesson to Jonah with a question. Jesus used the question often in His teaching, and He answered difficult questions by asking another question. This was a pedagogical method of the Jews. A frustrated Gentile once said to a Jew in debate, "Why do you always answer a question with another question?" The Jew said, "Why shouldn't I." And there was silence. There is silence after God's question also, for Jonah has no answer. With all of his arrogance and readiness to argue with God, this question stops him. Many assume that Jonah learned his lesson and submitted to God's will.**

**God simply pointed out how he pitted the plant which gave him personal comfort, but for which he did not labor, and then he asks if it is wrong for God to pity a whole city of eternal souls, many of whom are innocent children? Jonah must have seen immediately how low his system of values had fallen. He was giving priority to a plant over persons, and this is the basic cause for all the inhumanity to man in the world. While a prisoner in Russia after the second**



**World War, Helmut Gollwitzer, a famous German chaplain, saw a bumper crop of sugar beets destroyed while he and fellow prisoners were near starvation. It was all due to a minor official who misjudged the projected yield, and a higher official who, like Jonah, had a perverted system of values. He felt that accurate predictions were more important than people, and so to keep the prediction accurate he ordered the crops destroyed.**

**The evils of every form of government arise because the priority of persons is not practiced. The evils in religious institutions are also due to putting other values above persons. Jesus said the Pharisees would allow a man to pull an animal out of the pit on the Sabbath, but they were angry because they healed persons on the Sabbath. Jesus put people first, and because of it he clashed with value systems of His day. God gives priority to persons above all else. In Mark 2:27 we read, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." The Sabbath was a God ordained institution, and it was so important that it was a matter of life and death to obey it. But Jesus made it clear that it was for man's blessing, and not to be a burden. Persons had priority even over this sacred day.**

**E. Stanley Jones said that all religious institutions are made for man, and not man for them. When persons are sacrificed to the machinery of an institution, that institution no longer represents the values of God. Like Jonah it must learn God's value system or it will be opposed to God's will. We can apply this to anything, for any person or**

**organization that puts anything above persons is guilty of folly. All forms of government, which say that man exists for the state, and not the state for man, have fallen from grace, and are opposed to God's system of values.**

**The lesson that Jonah needed to learn to bring him to his senses, and the lesson all of us must be conscious of is that persons are ends in them selves and not means. The state and the church exist for the welfare of persons. Whenever the state or the church uses persons for its welfare, and to the harm of the persons, true values are perverted, and people are being exploited for an end that is less valuable. The whole ministry of Jesus was person centered. And even here in the Old Testament we see that in God's system of values the priority goes to persons. The Pharisees put precepts over persons, and Satan tempted Jesus to do the same, and this is the temptation all of us must overcome.**

**Ted Hatlen gave a speech in high school many years ago at a Lincoln's birthday celebration. Afterward an old man came up to him and said, "I like the way you gave that speech, but you made a common mistake. I heard Lincoln at Gettysburg so I know what I talking about. Everyone says of the people, by the people, and for the people. But Lincoln said of the people, by the people, and for the people." He gave the priority to persons. This is what Jonah failed to do.**

**Jonah is famous for having been fish food that survived, or more grossly put, he is histories most famous fish vomit. He is not famous for being a man of God-like compassion.**

**He illustrates that one can be a child of God for eternity, but still have choices to make that determine what they will be remembered for. Alice Freeman Palmer, the second President of Wellesley College for girls, was urged to write books to become more famous. She had no interest in becoming famous through books. She decided to put her life into the girls she served. She said, "It is people that count. You want to put yourself into people; they touch other people; these, others still, and so you go on working forever."**

**She saw what Jonah was blind to, and she chose the wiser way. Jesus did not want us to remember Him as one who built a great empire; who lead armies to great victories, or who built a monument to his own glory. He wanted us to remember him as the one who gave his life for people that they might be forgiven, redeemed, and restored through fellowship with God. He made it clear that a God-like value system always gives the priority to persons.**

#### **14. ARE ALL WHO DIE IN INFANCY SAVED? Based on Jonah 4:11**

**While visiting in the hospital I met a woman who was anxious to talk about the salvation of infants who die without baptism. She had good reason to be searching for information to give her hope. 18 years ago she lost a baby girl who had not been baptized. Her pastor came to call on**

**her, and she asked him about the state of her child. He told her the child was lost because she had failed to have it baptized. This pastor no doubt really believed it, but he was a victim of a perverted interpretation of Calvinism which Calvin himself repudiated. He was a Presbyterian but apparently was uninformed, for Presbyterians have a system that offers the greatest hope. His neglect of his theology led to this woman, and who knows how many others, to live in agony of soul and guilt for years. For 15 years this woman grieved because she failed to get water put on her babies head.**

**Friends finally persuaded her to go hear a Baptist evangelist who spoke on this issue. He assured her that her baby was saved. She was happy when I was able to give her some Biblical illustrations of salvation without baptism such as David's baby by Bathsheba who died on the 7th day. David accepted it and said in II Sam. 12:23, "I will go to him, but he will not return to me." The attitude of David indicates his hope of seeing that child again. Another illustration is the thief on the cross who was saved without baptism.**

**But what has this got to do with Jonah? This last verse in Jonah has played an important role in the history of the doctrine of infant salvation. It is the only passage we have where God reveals His attitude of love toward heathen children. These who could not tell their right from their left hand were innocent helpless children, but who would grow up to be bloody warriors. Yet God had compassion on them.**

**Many have taken this to prove that God loves all who will die in infancy, and will save all such, even of the heathen. The big question has been how He will do it.**

**Calvin and Servetus agreed that all infants would be saved just like those of Nineveh. Servetus said it was because God was just and would not damn an innocent baby. Calvin said this was heresy for it denied original sin. He said they can only be saved by God's grace. Servetus was prosecuted before the assembly where he was condemned as a heretic and burned at the stake. In theology it is not enough to be right, you must be right in the way you arrive at your conclusion, or you are still wrong. It cost Servetus his life because he arrived by the wrong road. I agree with Calvin that grace alone is the basis for infant salvation, but it is a poor exhibition of grace on the part of men to kill their opponents who disagree on how to get to the same conclusion.**

**On no issue has man proven his folly more than on this issue of infant salvation. On numerous occasions men have implied that it is up to them and not God to decide the matter. Some have decided to damn them, and others have decided to save them. At one council, after long debate, they voted that all who die in infancy will be saved. One man on the council, who saw the folly of voting on this as business, brought his point home by standing and moving that this be made retroactive to take in all those who died before the vote was cast.**

**The intricate arguments of theologians on this matter are not without great value, however, for they can lay a solid foundation for our belief. In the hour of crisis one cannot quote Calvin or anyone else's theology, but can only assure the grieving of God's love and mercy. But unless that consolation has a sure foundation in Scripture and theology, it is nothing more than deception, and so it is worth the time to go deeper into this matter to prepare ourselves as messengers of comfort. We want to look at this matter from three points of view.**

**The historical; the Biblical, and the practical. The historical is first, not because it is more important, but because we want to see the problem before we look at the answer.**

## **I. HISTORICAL.**

**The earliest reference to infant salvation goes back to the second century where the attitude is optimistic. Aristides speaking of death and the Christian reaction says of the child, "If it chance to die in infancy they praise God mightily, as for one who has passed through the world without sins." This began to be doubted, however, as the church took on more and more the concept of good works and merit. How can a baby merit anything was the question, and so Gregory Nazianzen said they could, "Neither be glorified nor punished." A middle state began to develop early between heaven and hell. Some spoke of annihilation, and others said infants were not yet human. By the fourth century Augustine was defending the Catholic position that all infants not baptized were lost, but would suffer only mild**

**punishment.**

**All who are baptized would certainly be saved, for baptism cleansed from original sin. We see then how baptism came to be such an important doctrine in the Catholic church. Not to have a child baptized was a sin and a crime since a child would go to hell if it died unbaptized. If we believed that, we would baptize infants as well. Catholic theologians did not like the conclusions their theology led to, but what could they do? All are sinful they said, and none can be saved except by Christ, and the grace of Christ must be applied to infants as well as others. Therefore, baptism is a means of grace whereby an infant is saved. This is where we disagree. All we need to see is how the grace of Christ applies to infants without baptism.**

**Theologians back then tried to modify the results of their conclusions. They said martyrdom of a child was equal to baptism of blood, so if a child was not baptized but was martyred it would be saved. They said if parents wanted the child to be baptized, but could not do it for some good reason, it would be called the baptism of desire, and the child would be saved. For those who couldn't get in by these means but must be lost, the middle age scholars softened infant damnation by saying they would just lose the beatific vision of God, but suffer no positive pain. This gained Papal authority in 1200 A. D. Catholics have developed the idea since then that heathen infants, since they have no chance to be baptized, are saved anyway. It is only Christian parents who refuse to have a child baptized who will cause that child**

to be lost.

**The Lutheran doctrine was set down too soon to gain the full benefit of Protestant thought. They held on to the necessity of baptism for salvation. Luther had comfort to offer to Christian parents, however. He said, "The holy and merciful God will think kindly of them. What he will do with them He has revealed to no one, that baptism may not be despised." Luther argued that there was a basis for hope. Like all men who give thought to the matter, he could not tolerate the thought that infants would go to hell.**

**If Jewish babies who died before circumcision on the 8th day were saved, why could not Christian babies be saved if they died before baptism? Lutheran's did not extend hope to heathen infants, however. Luther only said he expected only mild punishment. The Lutheran position was cautious and just left all to the mercy of God. They did not want to state that heathen infants would be saved, for this would destroy their doctrine of the necessity of their baptism for infants. If a heathen baby would be saved without it, certainly a baby from Christian parents would be saved. They wanted to believe that all infants would be saved, but their theology made them hesitate to declare it.**

**The church of England said baptism was a necessity or the child would be lost. They offered no hope for the unbaptized. It was the only Protestant church that offered no hope at all. But some of the major individuals in the church, such as John Newton and Augustus Toplady wrote**



**that they believed all infants would be saved, even heathen infants.**

**Presbyterians like Zwingli and Calvin finally got around to challenging the idea of baptism as a means of regeneration. They said salvation was not by any external rights, but was by the internal work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit made John the Baptist leap in his mother's womb before he was born, and so we know the Holy Spirit can work in an infant. They escaped the problem all others had before them. They were able to say that an infant could be saved by grace alone, and not by any external needs. As in Adam all die so in Christ are all made alive. A child born with original sin from Adam is lost, but Christ died for the penalty of original sin, and so now by his grace none perish because of Adam's sin, but only those are lost due to their own sin.**

**Zwingli was most outspoken and clear on this. Calvin was somewhat contradictory, and this led to Calvinists following two different lines. Some took his hard doctrine of predestination and read into it that some infants are predestined to hell. Calvin did not believe that himself, but some took his doctrine to that conclusion. So we have Calvinists who say some infants are lost, and others who say they are definitely saved.**

**All Methodists believe that infants will be saved by virtue of their Arminian theology. The Methodist Episcopal Church Discipline says, "We hold that all children, by virtue**

**of the unconditional benefits of the atonement, are members of the kingdom of God, and therefore are entitled to baptism." There are two kinds of Arminians just as there are two kinds of Calvinists. Some say a child is innocent and is saved because God is just. John Wesley said they are guilty and lost because of original sin, but they are saved by God's grace, which is identical to the Calvinist position. We see then that Calvin was an Arminian in the sense that he believed the atonement of Christ was universal in that it covered all infants who die. Wesley was a Calvinist in the sense that he saw the Sovereign grace of God alone as the cause of their salvation.**

**Where does that put Baptists? They have always been divided between Calvinism and Arminianism, but since both agree that all who die in infancy are saved, Baptists have always agreed on this point. Baptism is not necessary for salvation for Baptists. It is by grace alone, and so Baptists see no need or value in the baptism of infants. Our theology does compel us to say, however, there can be no inherent wrong in the baptism of a dying infant, since we agree it is saved. Calvin said to the ana-baptists of his day, "On what ground do you object to the baptism of an admittedly saved person? He has a point, but not of much weight since he agrees it is not necessary for salvation. Why add confusion by needless ceremony that gives people a misimpression?"**

## **II. BIBLICAL**

**The Biblical basis for the belief that all infants who die are**

**saved is the atonement of Christ which releases all from the penalty of original sin so that none perish for Adam's sin, but only for their own personal transgressions. This foundation is insufficient in itself, but some specific references to Christ's attitude add to the assurance.**

**In Matt. 18:1-14 we see Jesus calling a little child and saying that child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and that we must be converted and be as the child to enter the kingdom of heaven. In verse 14 he says, "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." The reference is not to infants but small children who are old enough to believe in Jesus, but by inference we can say God is not willing that infant perish either. In Matt. 19:13-14 the disciples rebuked those who brought little children to Jesus, and He said, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus always put a high value on the child, and these references make it inconceivable to imagine Him condemning a child to hell, or even to some neutral limbo. There are other similar references, but these are sufficient for us to see the attitude of Christ.**

**We must admit that there is no direct statement anywhere as to the fate of infants. That which is stated, however, so clearly reveals God's attitude that there is no reason to doubt His mercy, and there is no way to give meaning to Christ's dying for all if His atonement does not cover the original sin of all infants. If the evidence seems small for our belief, it ought to be noted that the evidence for any alternative does**

**not exist at all. There is no reason to doubt, for how can we know that Christ prayed on the cross, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do," and still think He would condemn infants who know nothing of good or evil?**

### **III. PRACTICAL**

**This doctrine makes for real optimism about the final number of the saved. It will be far greater than those who are lost, for the number of infants who have died may even exceed all who have ever lived. John Newton who wrote Amazing Grace said, "I cannot be sorry for the death of infants. How many storms do they escape! Nor can I doubt, in my private judgment, that they are included in the election of grace. Perhaps those who die in infancy are the exceeding great multitude of all people, nations, and languages mentioned in Rev. 7:9." This makes sense, for babies die in all nations and languages. This would also mean that the babies that Herod killed in trying to kill Jesus will one day be able to see the Savior who died for them, and for whom they died.**

**This doctrine turns what is apparent tragedy into blessing since none are so assured of seeing their children in heaven as those who have lost a child in infancy. This modifies the whole picture of the mass slaughter of children in the Old Testament. The judgment and tragedy were for adults, but no injustice was done to the infants, for they will be saved. Adults would have corrupted them and they would have been lost, but they died in infancy and thereby escape the**

**judgment of God.**

**Baptists have been traducianists which means they believe the soul, like the body, is passed on to each infant from the parents. That is why all are depraved and born sinful. This means that even a miscarriage represents an eternal soul, and so all such will also be a part of the eternal kingdom. This means even the folly and evil of abortion does not destroy a soul, even though it takes a life. If all infants are saved, then all aborted fetuses will be a part of the multitude in heaven. This doctrine is a great comfort to all who have lost a child. It is our obligation to give this hope to all who have suffered such a loss.**

## **15. WHO CARES ABOUT CATTLE? Based on Johan 4:11**

**Henry Bergh was the founder of the American Humane Movement, which about one hundred and thirty years ago brought about the first child protective laws in this country. He drew attention to the case of Mary Ellen who was beaten, and the chained by her parents. This led to laws being passed. Very interesting is the fact that Mr. Bergh was also the lawyer who brought about the first laws for the protection of animals. He linked children and animals together in his compassion, for both have the same problem. They are innocent and helpless victims of the cruelty of the adult world.**

**This attitude which brought about the humane societies of the world did not have its origin in man, however, for the Bible makes it clear that God is the author of all the principles upon which humane societies are founded. Here in the book of Jonah we see that God also links children and animals in His compassion. Like children, cattle are innocent of any rebellion against their Creator, and God has no delight in the slaughter of the innocent. God has pity even upon the cattle. What a precious word of assurance, for the Old Testament times were often so violent and bloody, and so great was the destruction that it is easy to doubt if God really cares for the innocent. But here is His own testimony to the fact that He does care for children, and even cattle.**

**We have here a valuable insight into God's tenderness. Some may feel that preaching on cattle and God's concern for animals is irrelevant, and unworthy of pulpit time. If that be so, you only reveal how little you know of what God has revealed about Himself. If we believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, then we must agree that all of its words are important. There are 143 references to cattle in the Bible, and literally thousands of references to other creatures of God's creation. To say that all of this is irrelevant, and mere fill, is to accuse God of doing a third rate job in revealing Himself.**

**I think you will be amazed at just how relevant animals are in Scripture as we take God's concern for them seriously, and see how they are linked with man in all of God's dealings. The first thing we want to observe is how children**

**and animals are linked together in Scripture.**

## **I. CHILDREN AND ANIMALS.**

**We need not look at every reference, but only at example of the types of reference. In Deut. 3:19, after God commanded the men of valor to pass over and conquer, he says, "But your wives, your little ones, and your cattle (I know you have many cattle) shall remain in the cities..." Cattle were, like the women and children, to be kept a safe distance from battle. There are other references to this as well.**

**In the Ten Commandments we see that God is not just concerned that men get rest on the Sabbath, but He cares for the health of animals as well, and so He includes them in His Sabbath law. Duet. 5:14 says, "But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your man servants, or your maid servants, or your ox, or your ass, or any of your cattle...." Who cares for cattle? God does, and so much so that He is the author of the first laws for animal protection. There are many more, but for now we are only looking at how animals and children are linked together.**

**One of the most vivid passages is Isa. 11:6 where we see the ideal of universal peace where God will reign supreme, and children and animals are friends." The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little**

**child shall lead them." Usually this text is quoted in reference to children leading adults, but we see that it is really about them leading animals. No society is pleasing to God where children and animals are not protected from cruelty. God cares about what man does to His creation. Man was given dominion over all animals, but they are not to be mistreated. William Cowper put it this way,**

**The sum is this: If man's convenience, health,  
Or safety interfere, his rights and claims  
Are paramount, and must extinguish theirs;  
Else they are all, the meanest things that are,  
As free to live, and to enjoy that life,  
As God was free to form them at the first,  
Who in His sovereign wisdom made them all.**

**Cruelty and useless killing of animals is contrary to a biblical faith. The greatest example of a child linked with the animal kingdom is, of course, the Christmas story. "The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, But little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes." God intended to link the Christmas story with animals or His Son never would have been born in a manger. Who can imagine the Christmas story without animals? There are no shepherds without sheep, nor could the wise men have come without their camels. You can no more remove animals from the story of the incarnation than you can from the story of Noah and the Ark.**

**Animals had been substituting for men for centuries as sacrifices for sin, but now the Lamb of God has come to offer**



**Himself once for all, and thus deliver man from sin, and animals from being sacrificed for sin. But we are jumping ahead to the cross, and we need to get back to the crib. Frederic Marvin wrote a book in 1912 called Christ Among The Cattle. He felt that it was no mere accident that God should descend to this level of humility so as to be born in a barn. God not only cares for cattle, he is not ashamed to have His Son be born where they are born. This fact leads us to a consideration of our second point.**

## **II. SALVATION AND ANIMALS.**

**The Bible links man and animals together from beginning to end. When man is blest of God, animals share in that blessing. On the other hand, if man is judged, animals also suffer judgment. Adam named all of the animals of Eden, and there was a good relationship between man and the animal kingdom. When man fell, animals were immediately affected in that they needed to be killed to provide clothing. We read that they soon were used for sacrifice, and that would not have been necessary if man had not sinned.**

**Then there is the flood. God saved animals as well as man from destruction. After it was all over God made a covenant, not just with Noah, but with the animals as well. This is emphasized 5 times over in Gen. 9:8-17. Let me read verse 9 which reveals clearly that God included all animals in His covenant. "Behold, I established my covenant with you and your descendents after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the**

**earth with you...." Who cares for cattle? God does, and He even makes promises to them, and includes them in His covenant.**

**We have already seen that God included animals in His Sabbath law, and we see that cattle are saved in the book of Jonah along with the Ninevites. We see Him saving them in the ark, and later we see the animals being saved from Egypt along with the Israelites as they are delivered. The big question then is this: If God included animals in His saving plans in the Old Testament, does He also include them in His plan of salvation in the New Testament? In other words, will there be animals in eternity? There is no reason to doubt that they will be. A new heaven and a new earth would be lacking something without the handiwork of God in the animal world.**

**In Rom. 8:19-21 Paul indicates that the whole creation of God will enter into eternity, and be set free from all the effects of sin. He writes, "The creation waits with eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." Paul is clearly saying that God's plan for eternity includes His whole creation. There shall be total victory for all, and this includes the animal kingdom which has suffered the effects of sin also.**

**God would only be following a pattern that He followed all through history. In Ex. 12:29 we read that at the Passover, not only was the first born of Egyptians killed, but also the first born of all the cattle. Man and his animals stand together in blessing, or in judgment. Ex. 9:3-7 tells us that none of Israel's cattle died. They were included in God's salvation of His people.**

**Here in Jonah in 3:7-9 we see the animals were made to fast along with the people, and they were also covered with sackcloth. Men and animals stand together, or fall together. Many times when God's wrath fell in the Old Testament the command was that the cattle were to die along with the people. Many times also God's blessing on the people included a promise of much grass for the cattle. In Ps. 104:14 God is praised, "Thou dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle.." In Ps. 50:10 God says, "For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills." God is the biggest cattle rancher in the universe.**

**When Jeremiah the weeping prophet wants to picture a sad setting due to his people's sin, he pictures the absence of animals. In Jer. 9:10 we read, "Take up weeping and wailing for the mountains, and a lamentation for the pastures of the wilderness, because they are laid waste so that no one passes through, and the lowing of cattle is not heard; both the birds of the air and the beasts have fled and are gone." When man is cursed, animals suffer. When man is delivered, animals are delivered too. Very definitely animals are involved in all that happens to man, and they always benefit by his**

salvation. In Ps. 36:6 we read, "O Lord, you preserve both man and beast." God is a very real animal lover, and He includes them in His plan. The third point we want to look at is-

### **III. SOCIETY AND ANIMALS.**

God's love and care for animals has social implications. Prov. 12:10 states clearly, "A righteous man has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel." In plain English, no man can be pleasing to God who is cruel to animals. A righteous man is righteous in part because he, like God, is kind rather than cruel. Cruelty is a defect in man's character, and if a Christian is cruel to animals, he may dismiss it as no big deal, but God will not.

There is, of course, the danger of having compassion for animals, and then lacking it for people. This is what happened to the Pharisees. They were all for helping some poor animal out of the ditch on the Sabbath, and they were all for leading it to water, but they did not delight in seeing a person being healed on the Sabbath. Their problem was not that they loved animals too much, but that they loved people too little. They majored on minors, and this is not wise. But neither is it wise to dismiss minors. Just because we are not to major on them does not mean we should not take them seriously.

Persons are to be our major value and emphasis as Christians, but concern for animals is also our responsibility.

**The fact that they are secondary does not make them unimportant. We often speak of dumb animals, but though they cannot speak, they can develop a loving relationship with man that is superior, at times, to what man has with God. God begins His complaint to His people through Isaiah in Isa. 1:3 with these words: "The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people does not understand." We are know that a dog can be more loving, grateful, and joyful toward its master than a believer is toward God. Man can fall to a level lower than the animal, and he usually does so when he loses his compassion for animals and becomes cruel.**

**Nero, when he was a youth, took great pleasure in tormenting animals. He would cut off their feet, or clip the wings of birds, and smear tar on them, and then set them on fire. That was the beginning which led him to delight in the torture of men. Let a child learn to despise God's lower creation, and when he is older, he will despise God's best and highest. On the other hand, the best way to teach a child to love is to teach kindness to animals. We can't give all the proof there is for this, but I am convinced that Frederick Martin knew what he was saying when he said, "The man who kicks dumb brutes kicks brutality into his own heart."**

**Some animal lovers go the opposite extreme and make animals almost equal to people. I do not doubt it is legitimate to pray for a pet that it might be healed, just as we would pray for a loved one. John Chrysostom, the golden mouth preacher, said, "Assuredly we ought to show a great**

**humanity and mercy towards beasts for various reasons, and especially because we may thus learn to have compassion and mercy, since they have the same origin as ourselves." The Jews pride themselves on being humane. Jacob Raisin in his book Humanitarianism Of The Laws Of Israel says, "Judaism was the first to become a mouth for the dumb. Judaism from the start insisted upon fair play not only between man and man, but also between man and beast."**

**Abraham's servant in looking for a wife for Isaac made it a testing point that she must be kind to his camels. A good wife will be tender toward animals. We could look at how the laws of Israel gave animals rights and protection, and even demanded that they be slaughtered in the most painless way. In the New Testament the Gospels have 40 different Greek words denoting animals, and Jesus used camels, sheep, and birds in His teachings. He called Herod a fox indicating He knew the character of animals. He proclaimed the kind of Messiah He was by riding into Jerusalem on a colt rather than a horse. 24 times in Revelation He is called the Lamb. Jesus always put people above animals, but He also made it clear that He cares for animals. We have only scratched the surface of this subject, but the answer to our question is clear. Who cares for cattle? God does, and Jesus does, and if we are filled with His Spirit, we will too.**

