

Jonah

Jonah 1:1-4:11

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2020-01-12

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I. Misrepresentations of Jonah

This is the second book in a row that has bitterness and its ugly fruits as one of the central themes. Obviously there are other very important themes - such as Christ's redemption (which is the only answer to bitterness) and God's missions program to Jews and Gentiles, abusers and abused alike. And we will delve into those themes. But because Jonah has been slandered so frequently, I want to begin by countering two very common misrepresentations of Jonah.

A. Jonah should not be represented as a racist who hates God and fellow man

The first misrepresentation is that he was a racist who hated God and fellow man. They look at his sin (and it was sin) and they overstate it. Let me read some sample quotes from evangelical publications: "Jonah was a racist, a hyper-nationalist," "a rebel." "Jonah was a hateful, selfish, racist man bent on disobeying God." "Jonah was a Jewish supremacist." The Bible Project says, that Jonah is "the subversive story of a rebellious prophet who hates God for loving His enemies." And similar misrepresentations could be multiplied many times over.

I see it differently. I see him as a godly man who had allowed the sin of bitterness to creep into his heart. It was bitterness at the Assyrian empire - an empire that had caused so much death and destruction and that had no doubt brought him and his relatives great pain and anguish. He is a prime example of what happens to a godly person when bitterness is allowed to take root in our hearts - no matter how reasonable that bitterness may seem on the surface. It poisoned him, as Hebrews guarantees that bitterness will always do. And as I have pointed out in another sermon, that bitterness brought him into deep depression.

Bitterness. It is an ugly sin that needs to be cleansed away by the grace of God. It is a sin that needs to be replaced with compassion. Where the previous book, Obadiah, showed the impact of bitterness on unbelievers like Esau and his descendants, the book of Jonah shows the devastating impact of bitterness upon even a godly man. And ancient tradition says that he really was a godly and compassionate man. He did not hate God as the Bible

Project claims. He was not a racist, as so many books insist. And his kind treatment of the Phoenicians is a case in point. They were a different race, and yet he preached the Gospel to them and gave up his life so that they would not die. He could have let them go down in that storm with him. Instead, Jonah was a man who had suffered abuse at the hands of the Assyrians, and they made him so bitter that he was unable to extend any grace towards them.

In many ways, what Jonah experienced at the cruel hands of the Assyrians was experienced by Mez McConnell, the author of this book, *The Creaking on the Stairs: Finding Faith in God Through Childhood Abuse*.¹ And actually, this is a book that Biblical Blueprints has purchased for each of the families here to thank you for letting me minister part time through Biblical Blueprints to the hurting world out there. So I have 60 copies - enough for each family and each 20 year old or older to get a copy from me after the service. Anyway, Rosaria Butterfield said of this book, “The most disturbing book that I have ever read. I cannot recommend it highly enough.” It is a book that takes the Jonahs of this world and gently ministers God’s healing grace to them.

Now, he doesn’t reference Jonah, but I see the similarity. Mez is a Reformed minister in the Acts 29 movement in Scotland. Yet even as a pastor he initially struggled to put off the turmoil of his feelings toward his step-mother - a woman who had tortured, starved, and humiliated both him and his sister. She allowed him to be sexually abused. She forced him to eat his feces. She daily brought exquisite psychological pain into his life. If you have gone through that, you can sympathize with Jonah, while disagreeing with Jonah and wanting healing and change for a Jonah.

In any case, Jonah illustrates how bitterness can make even believers somewhat irrational. It’s irrational to run from God’s presence, as Jonah tries to do in the first verses of this book. It’s irrational to sleep in a ship that is about to sink. It is irrational to be suicidal. It is irrational to be angry when Nineveh repents. It is irrational to still want God to judge them after they have repented. It is irrational to be angry over a plant withering when you have no right to the shade of that plant. When God says in chapter 4:9, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” it was irrational for Jonah to say, “It is right for me to be angry, even to death!” He was an emotional basket case, and God’s ways of bringing him out of depression and out of his bitterness are very instructive.

¹ Mez McConnell, *The Creaking on the Stairs: Finding Faith in God Through Childhood Abuse* (Geanies House Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2019)

Those who have dealt with the victims of abuse know that getting past the negative feelings takes time and takes God's powerful grace. Many of them struggle more than Jonah did. Let me read the obituary of one sibling group that sadly had failed to appropriate God's grace and responded as Jonah did to their mom's death. This obituary was published in the September 10, 2013 edition of the Reno Gazette-Journal. It reads,

Marianne Theresa Johnson-Reddick born Jan 4, 1935 and died alone on Sept. 30, 2013. She is survived by 6 of her 8 children whom she spent her lifetime torturing in every way possible. While she neglected and abused her small children, she refused to allow anyone else to care or show compassion towards them. When they became adults, she stalked and tortured anyone they dared to love. Everyone she met, adult or child, was tortured by her cruelty and exposure to violence, criminal activity, vulgarity, and hatred of the gentle or kind human spirit.

On behalf of her children who she so abrasively exposed to her evil and violent life, we celebrate her passing from this earth and hope she lives in the afterlife reliving each gesture of violence, cruelty and shame that she delivered on her children. Her surviving children will now live the rest of their lives with the peace of knowing their nightmare finally has some form of closure.²

Jonah had a similar desire. He wanted the Assyrians to suffer in hell for their evil. And he was hugely conflicted when they were forgiven by God. While I will grant that Jonah did not handle his own pain and depression in a godly way, I would encourage us not to be too hard on him. There are thousands of hurting abuse victims who have responded in our day just like Jonah did, and Mez McConnell's book gently and respectfully takes them past that into having compassion. God will do the same work in Jonah's life. God will take him past his bitterness by having him come face-to-face with the power of undeserved redemption. And even though I have long held to the interpretation I am giving today (and I have come to that conclusion just by comparing Scripture with Scripture), archaeological finds in the past one and a half years have vindicated my interpretation. And maybe I will get into that archeology later.

B. Jonah is literal history, not allegory (Matt. 12:39-42; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32)

A second way that this book has been misrepresented is by treating it as an allegory. Usually they will pontificate on how wonderful this allegory is, and how much we can learn from it. But they reject the historicity of Jonah and deny the miracles in this book, which in effect calls Jesus a liar. And then they have the audacity to say that Jesus was a good man, when Jesus contradicts them and affirms the miracle of Jonah in the fish and affirms the

² This can be fact checked at <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/death-penalty/>

historical accuracy of the Assyrian capital becoming a believing city for a time (I believe it was for about 45 years). And at least one modern scholar has produced some archaeological evidence that 27 other cities may have joined Nineveh. But whether that is true or not, Jesus was inspired. Let me read one of the times that Jesus spoke about Jonah. It's Matthew 12:39-42. 39 ...“An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.

It is crystal clear in this passage and in the three others that I listed for you that Jesus treated Jonah as a literal historical person, his three days and three nights in the belly of a fish as a literal historical event, and the conversion of Nineveh as having actually happened. I think he was dead the whole three days that he was in the belly of the fish, and I will prove that in a bit. But Jesus pointed out that Jonah's death, descent into Sheol, and resurrection was a type of His own death, descent into Sheol, and resurrection. If you deny the one, you must consistently deny the other. So, contrary to some books that you might read, we must treat this as real history.

Evangelical commentaries sometimes compromise by explaining away the miraculous. One commentary claimed that this was Jonah's dream on the ship, and that he only got swallowed in a dream. They say that it is just a beautiful allegory like Pilgrim's Progress. Jesus in effect calls that commentator a liar. Another commentary says that Jonah took a ship to Tarshish, and the storm then wrecked that ship (something the text does not say) and after floating in the water for a time, another ship with a fish for its figurehead picked him up. So it is likening the second ship to a fish. Still another bizarre theory says that a dead and decomposing whale was floating around, and Jonah (who had been floating in the water) took refuge by climbing into this bloated carcass. As we will see, it is the very opposite - Jonah died and the fish was very much alive. But I give these illustrations to warn you that compromise is creeping even into even evangelical commentaries and into evangelical online studies. Watch out.

II. Who was Jonah (2 Kings 14:25-27)

So who was Jonah? I want to give a little bit of background, and I'm going to start with 2 Kings 14:25. This too is inspired background information on Jonah that is essential for properly interpreting the book. It says of Jeroboam II (king of Israel),

25 He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hepher. 26 For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter; and whether bond or free, there was no helper for Israel. 27 And the LORD did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven; but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.

There are five facts that we learn here.

1. First, Jonah was an actual person, not simply a parable.
2. Second, he was a prophet who spoke the inspired word of God. And this text says that word came to pass.
3. Third, he came from the town of Gath Hepher, which was 2.5 miles from Nazareth, and in the region of Galilee. So Jonah (who was a type of Jesus) came from the same general region of Galilee that Jesus came from. So even his hometown in the region of Galilee is a marvelous foreshadowing of Jesus. It also shows the Pharisees were absolutely wrong when they told Nicodemus, “Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.” Wrong. Jonah arose out of Galilee as a prophetic type of the despised Jesus.
4. Fourth, he prophesied near the beginning of the reign of Jeroboam II. That’s a very important clue. This book must be dated to 825 BC for the conversion of Nineveh to make sense.
5. Fifth, as a result of Jonah’s ministry, Israel had relief from great affliction. They had gone through some horribly tough times. Anyone who has read about Assyrian warfare and torture knows exactly what this text is saying - it was bitter, bitter suffering. And this suffering helps to explain why Jonah was bitter over God’s treatment of Nineveh.

Floyd Nolan Jones (who is a genius chronologist) points out that placing Jonah in this historical context of 825 BC beautifully solves a huge mystery that has puzzled secular Assyriologists in the past - the mystery of a series of missing kings in the Assyrian records. (And by the way, modern establishment historians ignore those missing kings.) It’s as if later kings were embarrassed by the kings who ruled during this 45 year period and they expunged their memory from the record. Why would they do that? Jonah gives us a very good reason why they would do that. Jonah 3:7-10 says that every man, woman, and child in Nineveh repented and turned to the Lord, and Jesus in Matthew 12 says that they were genuinely converted. The entire city was converted without exception - a marvelous tribute to sovereign grace. Well, since everyone in Nineveh was converted, we would assume that the heir to the throne was also converted (both father and son).

So it is no wonder that there is a 45 year period in which Assyria is no danger to Israel. Later Assyrian kings who reverted back to Assyria's older demonic and cruel religion (and did so with a vengeance) may well have been embarrassed by this 45 year hiatus in which the kings obeyed the laws of Israel's God and served Yehowah. So their record was expunged. Another scholar claims that because there was a split in the empire, these kings may not have been recognized as legitimate emperors. The text does say, "king of Nineveh," not "king of Assyria."

Floyd Nolan Jones also shows that when you take this evidence into account, there is suddenly no contradiction whatsoever between the Biblical record and other ancient records of that period. It beautifully reconciles the Biblical record with Josephus' chronology (which is longer than the Assyrian at this point), the Egyptian chronology, and the AD 800 chronology of Georgius Syncellus. This means that far from being an embarrassment (as liberals treat it) it is the key to understanding that history. So Jonah prophesies, Nineveh (the capital of Assyria) converts to the true faith, and then what happens?

Well, it appears that Jonah stayed there to instruct this new believing city in the laws of God. This in turn explains why Jews, Christians, and even Muslims have held that the tomb of Jonah was in Assyria, not in Israel. Why didn't he return to Israel? Well, I can't absolutely prove it, but the only explanation that makes sense to me is that once the entire city converted, Jonah apparently had a change of heart, and stayed behind to instruct the city in God's laws. That is certainly what Jewish tradition says. In terms of recent archeology, what appears very likely is that when he died the Assyrian royalty honored his body with a tomb on the grounds of their palace. If that is the case, it is obvious that the royalty in Assyria loved Jonah. This is all archaeological evidence that has just come out in the last two years. You won't read about it in the older commentaries.

And Jonah's tomb remained in the region of Nineveh until just recently. Nineveh is now called Mosul. You may remember that in 2014 ISIS was videotaped blowing up the tomb of Jonah in Mosul. They also destroyed about 100 other famous ancient buildings and artifacts. Previous to the tomb being destroyed, no one dared to dig underneath, fearing that it might undermine the whole site. But the ISIS fighters had no such qualms. In order to finance their war, they dug extensive tunnels underneath it to loot artifacts and sell them. You have maybe seen some of their Assyrian artwork that they have sold all over the world. Of course, ISIS was kicked out before they could take everything. But their tunnels exposed to the world a massive

amount of new archaeological information that had previously never seen the light of day - including an untouched palace. Most of that has come to light in the last year and a half. We live in exciting times.

Enough background - let's dig into an overview of the book.

III. Overview of the book

Verses 1-2:

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me."

Everyone in the ancient world of that day feared Assyria and loathed their cruelty. The only culture that was more perverse than the Assyrian empire was the Canaanite culture that Joshua conquered. But other than the Canaanites, of all the ancient peoples that we have clear evidence on, Assyria was the most barbaric, the most cruel, and the most feared. Over the years I have tried to keep abreast of the newest archaeological finds in the Middle East, and it is astonishing how many times they discover new examples of their barbaric torture. Even children's toys pictured pretend torture. That is beyond weird - to give toys of torture to your three year old. Some of the tortures depicted in the living room frescoes of their houses are absolutely horrifying. You would think that they would be sickened to eat their food in front of a fresco of a person being skinned alive, but apparently they relished it. And next to that picture you would see another one of a man having his tongue pulled out, or his eyes gouged out. You might cross-reference Nahum chapter 3 where it talks about all the nations rejoicing when Nineveh is destroyed. Is that perverse? I don't think so. In Nahum, God understands the desire of all nations for Assyrians to suffer as they have made others suffer. It's the *lex talionis* principle embedded in human hearts. And we must come to realize that grace and justice meet together only because Jesus took the torture that the Assyrians deserved. But the point is, throughout the ancient world, Assyria was noted for its cruelty. What I have described already is bad enough. I will not describe some of the other perverted tortures on those frescoes.

You would think that Jonah would consider it a privilege to give that nation "what-for" with his prophetic rebukes. Didn't he want them to be judged? Yes he did. But chapter 4 tells us that Jonah already suspected in chapter 1 that his mission was to convert them, not to consign them to hell. And he was conflicted; horribly conflicted. It did not seem fair. And we need to realize that grace is not fair - at least not fair to us. Burning in hell would be

fair. And Jonah wants the Assyrians to get fairness, not grace, so he flees in verse 3.

But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

God sent him to Nineveh and he flees in the opposite direction. On the map you can see that it is about as far away as you can get. He knows the power of God's Word, and he knows that he has no ability to withhold prophecy when God comes upon him. So he thinks his only alternative is to flee. If he's not in Nineveh, God's prophetic word can't convert them. But God's prophetic word follows Jonah wherever he goes. In chapter 1 it converts the Phoenicians, the first typology of Christ's kingdom going to the ends of the earth. The whole book is a type representing New Covenant times. Let's read verses 4-5.

Jonah 1:4 But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.

Jonah 1:5 Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.

This is one of the symptoms of depressive behavior, but since I gave an entire sermon on Jonah's depression in the past, I won't touch on it today. But in verse 6 the captain calls on him to cry out to his god. In verse 7 they cast lots, and God controls the lots so that they fall on Jonah. In verse 8 they start grilling him with questions. In verses 9-10 they find out that he is the prophet of the God who made the land and the sea and that he has been running away from his call. And it scares them.

They ask him what they should do to avert death, and in verse 12 Jonah says, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me." These too are prophetic words; he knows this is the solution.

They don't want to have his blood on their hands and try their hardest to row to land. But God makes sure they have no choice. Then comes the amazing conversion of these sailors in verses 14-16:

14 Therefore they cried out to Yehowah and said, "We pray, O Yehowah, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O Yehowah, have done as it pleased You." 15 So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared Yehowah exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to Yehowah and took vows.

In the NKJV Yehowah is all capital letters, LORD. And their use of Yehowah throughout shows that they had switched gods, had converted, and entered into covenant with the Lord. This sets up the typology of the New

Covenant Kingdom converting the Gentiles. God sovereignly allowed Jonah to flee so that Jonah would stand as a type of the New Testament church.

And you might be thinking, “Now wait a minute. I thought you said Jonah was a type of Christ.” Yes, he was. But since Christ is united to His people, what happens to Jesus happens to His people. They are His body. So Romans 6 and Colossians 2 says that when Jesus was crucified, we were crucified. When Jesus was buried, we were buried. When He was raised, we were raised. When He ascended, we ascended in victory with Him. Ephesians 2:6 says, “and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” We are on His throne as princes and queens. So Jonah is a type of the New Covenant Kingdom as a whole. His reluctance to go to the Gentiles represents the church’s reluctance to go to the Gentiles in the book of Acts. But since that church is marked indelibly by Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection power, God guarantees that the church will eventually reach its Nineveh and convert it through its preaching.

Indeed, the book of Jonah as a whole is a marvelous testimony to God’s missions heart to the Gentiles. It isn’t just Israel that God loved. God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Jonah may have tried to run from his calling to prophesy to the Gentiles, but he could not. Even his being cast into the sea was a prophetic typology of Jesus being our substitute. Verse 17 says,

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

And that he was dead in the belly of that fish can be seen by a few facts.

Take a look at the text:

1. First, verse 10 shows that this prayer was made just before Jonah was vomited out of the fish and onto dry land. You’ve got to reconcile that with the rest of the prayer.
2. Second, the second sentence of verse 2 says, “Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice.” His soul was in Sheol, the subterranean place of the dead that is in the heart of the earth. Sheol is not in the ocean; Sheol is under the earth. And he is rescued from Sheol before he is rescued from the fish.
3. In verse 5 he remembers his body sinking and his life ebbing away as his body settled on the bottom of the ocean: “The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; the deep closed around me; weeds were wrapped around my head.” So he was not swallowed immediately by the fish. He sank all the way to the

bottom and apparently drowned before the fish ate him. He was dead.

4. Then (after he died) verse 6 shows that he went down below the ocean floor. So we are definitely not talking about his body. He says, “I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me forever...” That language parallels many other verses of the subterranean compartment called Sheol.

5. Fifth, one of the synonyms for Sheol is used in the next phrase of verse 6 - “Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God.” If he was in the pit, he was clearly dead. But where is he when he prays this? Not on the dry land. He was in the fish, and God resurrected him or brought up his life from the pit when he was still within the fish.

So Jonah’s dead body was in the fish for three days and three nights (just like Christ’s body was dead for three days and three nights).

Not to get gross (but I know some of you are curious), why was he not digested in that stomach? Whales and sharks digest food rather quickly. Well, it appears that the fish was sick. He did vomit, after all, right? So the fish was sick, and perhaps not producing the gastric juices needed to digest him. Or (as some commentators assume) he may indeed have been partly digested as yet another prophetic sign to the Ninevites. In any case, verse 10 says, “So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.”

How could all of this happen? Historian Edward Davis debunked the James Bartley story, which has circulated in various newspapers and magazines for over a hundred years. The story claims that a sailor had been swallowed whole by a sperm whale and had survived to tell the story. I used to actually think that story was legit. But there are several inconsistencies in the story, and it is contradicted by the wife of the sea captain, and many question whether a person could breathe in the stomach of such a sea creature. Davis says that he would have suffocated or drowned in that stomach. But if Jonah had already drowned and if the fish had scooped up his dead body, he wouldn’t need to be alive until just before God had the fish spit him out. In any case, it was a miracle all the way around, and you don’t explain away miracles by what can happen non-miraculously. We just believe it because it is Scripture and Jesus treats it as an actual historical fact.

Then in chapter 3 we start the second half of the book, where God begins all over again with almost the same words. And you can see in the outline that there is a parallelism if the two halves of the book.

Jonah 3:1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.” 3 So Jonah

arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD...

His attitudes may not be completely right yet, but at least he obeys.

Prophecy always has a powerful effect. It either hardens or converts. Jonah perhaps hoped that there would be no repentance, but he preaches. And repentance happens on the first day just one third of the way through the city. Verse 4:

4 ...Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. 4 And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

Jonah 3:5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. 6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

Jonah 3:10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

In Matthew 12 Jesus said that this was a genuine conversion and that Nineveh would rise in judgment against Israel in that generation - something that happened in AD 70 - within the span of that generation. So the 40 days appears to not only prophecy the literal time from the Festival of Firstfruits to the Day of Pentecost, when people from every nation under heaven get converted, but it appears to foreshadow the judgment on Israel 40 years later. And tongues were given at Pentecost as a sign of judging Israel and going to the nations. And what a marvelous sign it was. Paul appeals to the Assyrian foreign language that Israel was about to experience when talking about tongues in 1 Corinthians 14. 1 Corinthians 14:21 says,

21 In the law it is written [and then he quotes a Isaiah 28]: "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me," says the Lord. 22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.

In any case, when Jesus put Nineveh's salvation and Israel's judgment together, He was making exactly the same theological argument that Paul was. Jesus was alluding to Deuteronomy 32 - a passage that no doubt also factored into Jonah's reluctance. Deuteronomy 32 warned that if Israel forsook the Lord to serve other gods (something that had already happened) that God would turn away from Israel and turn to the Gentiles to make them jealous and He would scatter Israel among the nations. It happened to the prophetic type, as Israel was swallowed up by Assyria and later Babylon.

But it happened to the antitype as God called the Jewish church to reach the Gentiles. This only reluctantly happened on the part of the Jews, but the Gentiles enthusiastically embraced the Gospel. And of course, the final casting of Israel among the nations happened in AD 70.

But none of this seemed fair to Jonah. It just didn't seem right that a murdering, fornicating, raping, torturing, and abusive nation like Assyria should be saved. Chapter 4 begins,

Jonah 4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. 3 Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"

It's amazing that Jonah would complain about God's mercy and forgiveness being given to the abuser. It's God's mercy and forgiveness that is his only means of salvation. He too deserved hell. But the abused frequently feel that way. Anyway, God doesn't let this go, but gently pushes him. Verse 4:

Jonah 4:4 Then the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

This was Mez McConnell's attitude toward sex offenders who became Christians. He chased them out of the church. When his pastor told him that we are all sinners and God saves sex offenders too, he became enraged. It was almost like a personal assault upon him that God would save his abuser and forgive those horrendous sins. The thought seemed scandalous to him even though he had been a Christian for two years. By that time he had discovered the doctrine of hell in the Gospels and was regularly praying that his abusers would spend eternity in hell. But God's forgiveness of all of our sins is scandalous - that is, unless Christ took the justice we deserved. Mez began to understand it academically, but it took years before he felt true compassion (supernatural compassion) for people like the Assyrians. It's a question we need to ask ourselves when we are judgmental of others - "Is it right for you to be angry?" And the right answer is, "No. We have no rights." But Jonah doesn't answer. He theologically knows he can't. But he is still wrestling with his emotions as he contemplates this scandalous grace.

What God is going to do in chapter 4 is to show Jonah that just as his being cast into the sea saved the Phoenicians (and Calvin actually calls it a picture of Christ's substitutionary death), Jonah's death and resurrection and prophetic preaching would save the unworthy Assyrians. And that all of us are worthy of hell and all of us are guilty of Christ's torture and abuse is also the message of this book. But verse 5 shows that Jonah is still struggling.

Jonah 4:5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he

made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.

He was still hoping for judgment to fall. Of course, he knew that this is not how prophecy works. Turn with me to Jeremiah 18 where God gives the conditional element in all prophecies of judgment like Jonah's. Liberals say that Jonah's prophecy failed. No. It did not fail in its purpose; it succeeded in its purpose. Jeremiah 18, beginning to read at verse 1.

Jer. 18:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying: 2 "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words." 3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. 4 And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. 5 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: 6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!

This speaks to God's sovereignty in our salvation. He can make whatever He wants from the clay, and the clay cannot complain. But notice the gracious conditional nature of these prophecies of judgment, beginning to read at verse 7.

7 The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, 8 if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. 9 And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, 10 if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it. 11 "Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.' "

No one deserves salvation. But when we repent and turn to the Lord, He washes us clean and begins the process of developing a new life in us. And this is true whether we are the bitter abused person being cleansed of our bitterness or the evil abuser being cleansed of his evil. And God did that to Assyria - producing a nation that appears to have remained true to God for 45 years, after which a king hostile to God changed it back.³

3 For an alternative theory to Floyd Nolan Jones, see Gerard Gertoux, "Jonah vs King of Nineveh: Chronological, Historical, and Archaeological Evidence," (2015 PhD candidate paper). He says, "824 BCE. Shalmaneser III was dying, his son Shamshi-Adad V was mandated as new crown prince to quell the revolt headed by his brother Aššur-danin-pal who led 27 cities including the famous Nineveh. Jonah came to Nineveh at that moment in order to announce a terrible judgment of God if the Ninevites continued their crimes. Aššur-danin-pal (827-820), the king of Nineveh, repented. It is noteworthy that military campaigns westwards immediately ceased (until 765 BCE)." (p. 99). On p. 9 he says, "The last years of Shalmaneser III can be pieced together¹⁵ as follows: due to old age, Shalmaneser passed command of his armies to the General in chief Dayyan-Assur from 831. In his 32nd year of rule (in 827), Shalmaneser III's own son, Assur-danin-pal ("Aššur has strengthened the son") rebelled against his father. Shamshi-Adad V recalled: Where [my brother] Aššur-danin-apli, in the time of Šulmānu-ašarēdu, his father, acted wickedly, bringing about sedition, rebellion, and wicked plotting, caused the

In any case, in Jonah 4:6-9 God uses an illustration to try to break through to Jonah's heart.

6 And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. 7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. 8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." 9 Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!"

And here comes the punchline that breaks through to Jonah's heart much like Nathan's story of the sheep broke through to King David's heart. God gets him to empathize with the plant, and then shows him his inconsistency. Jonah 4:10 But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?"

There were 120,000 infants and toddlers, which means that the general population was much bigger. That punchline that the Lord gives must have broken through to Jonah because God is the perfect counselor. And archeology shows not only that Jonah stayed in Nineveh and was honored by the king of Nineveh with a tomb at the place of the palace,⁴ but he must have stayed long enough to teach them how to obey God's laws.

And the very fact that he wrote this embarrassing biography may indicate that Jonah later came to love his enemies and in doing so has conquered the hurts that brought on his severe depression. Step by step God brought Jonah out of his depressed state by making him leave his bitterness behind. And we can't look at all the steps that God took. But the book of Jonah has great instruction for counselors. Let me give you eight hints of how this book

land to rise in revolt, prepared for war, brought the people of Assyria, north and south, to his side, and made bold speeches, brought the cities into the rebellion and set his face to begin strife and battle [...] 27 cities, along with their fortifications [...] revolted against Šulmānu- ašarēdu, king of the four regions of the world, my father, and [...] had gone to the side of Aššur-danin- apli 16. Thus, the rebellious brother, according to Shamshi-Adad's own inscriptions, succeeded in bringing to his side 27 important cities, including Nineveh (the rebellion lasted until 820, preventing Assyria expanding its empire further until it was quelled). Because of his influence and power, Assur-danin-pal was a former crown prince (from 846). When Shalmaneser chose again his general Dayyan-Assur as eponym in 826, as he did in 854, that meant a new preparation for war to conquer the Levant."

- 4 Though the palace is from much later - Esarhadon's time, it has artifacts from Shalmaneser II. https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/C39961A5169B023A5402BB767AB51FDD/S0021088917000079a.pdf/recently_discovered_neoassyrian_royal_inscriptions_from_the_review_palace_and_nergal_gate_of_nineveh_1.pdf Also, artifacts that ISIS sold are beginning to surface pointing to a continuity of this site from previous times.

parallels modern Biblical nouthetic counseling of people who have true nervous exhaustion or depression.

- This book illustrates the principle that depressed people frequently need intervention. They often refuse to come for help, preferring instead to retreat from their jobs, their responsibilities, and to just hang out in their room. Jonah wanted to crawl into a hole, but God wouldn't let him. You are doing a depressed person no favors when you leave them alone.
- Second, Jonah wanted to avoid his pain, God helped to deal with his pain.
- Next, Jonah felt overwhelmed with the task; God took him through it step at a time.
- Fourth, Jonah tried to avoid action, God forced him to take action.
- Fifth, Jonah sought to excuse his irresponsibility, but God kept reminding him of his responsibility and wouldn't let him off the hook. That can be frustrating to a depressed person, but it is absolutely essential for their restoration.
- Sixth, God asked, "Is it right for you to be angry?" And of course, Jonah responds irrationally and emotionally, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!" Exclamation mark!!! And you see that emotions seem to trump reason for a lot of depressed people.
- Just as Jonah was a challenging case, depressed people are often challenging cases.
- Jonah saw only the negative. God has to remind him of the positive sides of life, especially in chapter 4. God helps Jonah refocus the positive pity he had for a plant to having pity for those whom he hates.

So in many different ways God showed his love to Jonah by bringing him out of his depression and out of the bitterness that led to his depression, and doing so a little bit at a time. It is a great book for training those who counsel the depressed and those who are guilty of bitterness.

And it ends brilliantly - leaving you wondering what happened. It gives hints of where it could go, but doesn't take you there. And that implies that there is still a tough road ahead of him. We know from ancient history that Jonah did learn to minister lovingly to his former enemies. But we don't know if there was still residual pain. The book just leaves it dangling, no doubt because even this was not instant fix. There are no instant fixes in life.

I'll end by reading from the introduction to this book by Mez McConnell. He illustrates the new life and thinking that grace can bring. But like Jonah, it doesn't mean that all conflict of soul is gone for those who were abused.

We will be ministering more and more to such people as Jonah and Mez McConnell, and it is imperative that we have the tools to do so successfully.

Mez said,

I just heard several hours ago that my stepmother of almost 13 years is dead. Of what and how I do not know. She was young. I know that. So painful is it to even think of her name I refer to her as "she" throughout my autobiography.>

It's 1:30 a.m. and I can't sleep. I don't know what to think or feel. The above [and that was the obituary that I read earlier] is pretty much what I would like to express to the world. I would like to go to her funeral, stand, and let everyone know what this person was truly like and how much damage she did while alive. I want her to get her just deserts even though I know, thanks to Christ, I will never get my own.>

I am a pastor. I should know better. I do know better.>

I know, deep in my soul, that Jesus experienced every form of suffering when he was in the world. "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). Jesus was betrayed and tortured. He is well acquainted with your grief, and he will never leave you (John 14:18). I know, therefore, that perceived wisdom (my own included) demands I forgive this woman who caused me such pain. I know it's the Christian thing to do. I know he who has been forgiven much ought to forgive much in return (Luke 7:47).>

I know.>

Yet I want to make public my frustration toward crimes she never paid for. At the same time I want to be magnanimous in my forgiveness as Christ has been in his for my sin.>

I feel conflicted.>

I thought I might dance a little jig or even feel a sense of release and elation at news I long dreamed about and ached for as a kid. This is a woman who drove me to such despair that I attempted to set her on fire in her (drunken) sleep when I was no more than 10 years old. But there is no jig. There is just a heaviness of heart and the nagging itch of my suffering and her evil never admitted in this life. The problem is I want to feel joy at her passing. I want to rejoice in the belief that she will face the Judge of all the earth for her crimes against me. I want to revel in the thought that she is having her own spiritual Nuremburg moment right now. That Father Time has caught up with her and her sins are about to be found out and brought into that terrible, perfect light. That the angels in glory will see just what a monster she truly was.>

But I don't feel the joy that I want to. I just feel sad. Sad for a woman who wasted her life in bitter anger and expressed it through the mental and physical torture of children. Sad for the trail of devastation she left behind. Sad for the family members she hurt and betrayed. Sad that, despite these things, people will mourn her passing. There will be tears at her funeral. There will be stories of her good side or of things well done and said. Things I never experienced. Things I can scarcely believe are true...>

...Even now, at 2:30 a.m. as I trawl through online press cuttings and see familiar faces all over the courts pages and obituaries, I feel a deep gratitude for Jesus. Old family and friends imprisoned and/or dead at criminally young ages. And I find her photo. She looks like an old woman even though she wasn't. A lifetime of self-abuse has ravaged her features.>

That could have been me. That was my own road to self-destruction until Jesus intervened. I live today only because Jesus found me and turned my life around. He gave

me hope. He gave me a spiritual family. Brothers and sisters who have loved and cared for me. He's used godly people to teach me personal responsibility for my own sins. He's used godly people to teach me how to be a real man, a faithful husband, a loving father, and a (average) pastor.>

He is teaching me still.>

Still I feel conflicted. I am angry with myself. I feel like my toing and froing over forgiveness and the rationalization of my suffering is somehow betraying my childhood self. A spiritual battle rages on. The old man berates the new while the latter fights for peace. The old man wants to take me on a trip down (painful) memory lane, trawling up old wounds and savage rage long since soothed with the balm of the gospel. Of course, he's popped by from time to time in my Christian life, but it seems like he's pulled up an armchair tonight and is here for an extended visit.>

The new man is winning.>

Just.>

Two decades of living for Jesus has evened the odds against two decades of self-loathing, shame, anger, and destruction. It seems that even the sovereign control over "her" death means I'm able to be conflicted without complete self-implosion. The same Holy Spirit who raised Christ from the dead is helping me draw on my decades of biblical knowledge and personal experience with which to vanquish the devil's poisonous darts (Eph. 6:16).>

It's 4 a.m. and I am suddenly reminded that I am not the person I was 30 years ago.

Maybe she did change at the end? An awful thought crosses my mind. What if she, like me, found the true forgiveness and peace of Christ? No. There was no evidence to suggest it. How would I know? I haven't seen her for 30 years. No! Surely not? God wouldn't do that to me? He's on my side, right? He wouldn't let me down by saving my chief tormentor, would he?>

Imagine that.>

That would be the ultimate cheat, wouldn't it? Pardoned, at the death, for her heinous crimes against me and who knows how many others? I don't like that thought.>

I suddenly realize that if it were true, I'd be like the angry brother in the parable of the prodigal.>

I want God to overlook my sins. I like it when he does that. But hers? That's a stretch. I tell myself I'm a better person than she was. Is that true? Maybe now. But any good in me belongs to the Holy Spirit. I hurt people. I abused people. I stole. I lied. I murdered in my heart. I too have done awful things.>

I think about Romans 12:17-21:>

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.>

I don't like that very much. I want to be her judge and jury.>

Do I trust God to be hard enough on her? Will he let her off on a technicality? Will he forgive her? Maybe he doesn't know the full story and I need to fill him in on the details.>

Pathetic, I know.>

Sinful.>

Arrogant.>

I want to comfort myself by comparing my innocent suffering to his. Jesus understands me because we have suffered together. But, tragic though it is, my pain doesn't really compare to his cosmic distress. My anguish, though real, isn't even a pinprick on the little finger of his nail-pierced hand. My suffering is infinitesimal in light of the cross of Calvary as he took the wrath of God on himself to rescue the poor, the lowly, the proud, the greedy, the arrogant.>

The child abusers.>

He died for awful human beings like my stepmother.>

Like me.>

I roll over and try to sleep chewing on that awful truth.>

She doesn't need my forgiveness any more than I need her repentance. We both need the former from him, and he requires the latter from us.>

Thankfully, in Jesus he grants both to all who come.>

This doesn't tie it all up in a neat little bow, but at least sleep comes knowing that, ultimately, the Judge of all the earth will do right and act justly.

I believe that the story of Jonah is a story of conquering grace. It conquers uncaring potty mouthed Phoenician sailors. It conquered Assyrian abusers. It conquered a prophet's bitterness. And it continues to conquer our fleshly outbursts bit by bit and promises that what He has begun in us He will complete until the day of Jesus Christ. Brothers and sisters. Submit your hearts to God's prophetic Word and to the healing grace of Jesus Christ. Amen.