

Do I Show Up When God Calls or Do I Run and Hide?

Jonah 1:1-2: *1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah... saying, 2 Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.*



We have all heard of the biblical account of Jonah and the whale. Because it is so unique and dramatic, it has been an often-repeated story with many lessons, and rightfully so. What many don't realize is the magnitude of the events and teachings that surround this amazing circumstance. First, one point of clarification: it wasn't a whale; it was a large fish. When we examine how and why Jonah came to be in the unlikely position to be swallowed by that fish and what happened afterwards, we end up with a powerful story of God's will versus our preferences. The bottom line here is that Jonah is an example of what NOT to do when tasked with godly responsibilities. However, he's also an example of what TO do. Let's unfold this account and see how both of these descriptions can be true.

To frame our lessons for the book of Jonah, we want to think about how we handle challenges when they come our way. What makes us stand, and what makes us run?

We start with a quote that is often attributed to Auschwitz survivor Viktor Frankl, but the author is actually unknown.

*Between stimulus and response there is a space.
 In that space is our power to choose our response.
 In our response lies our growth and our freedom.*

We often hear the same principle described as, *Take a deep breath, or, Count to 10 before you react.*

In our thinking, there is a process. First, there is some kind of stimulus, some kind of input. As part of this stimulus, there is always an instinctive reaction—for good or ill, we have some kind of **REACTION** that evokes the second part of the process—a **RESPONSE**. In between these two events, in between the stimulus/**REACTION** and the action/**RESPONSE**, there is space. Perhaps it is a small space, but it's space, nevertheless. In this space lies our destiny, as it is in this space we make the choices that shape our lives.

For Christians, this space is where the mind of Christ should be invited to take up a permanent residence.

A quick example is road rage. When we are driving, let's say something happens and we get very angry. We want to act on that anger → this is the stimulus/**REACTION**. What do we do with it? Will we let it take control, causing us to be destructive? Or, will we decide to act differently? Stimulus – (space) – Response. This is what we are considering.

Let's look at a short background and history of Jonah:

Jonah lived during the reign of King Jeroboam II of the northern, 10-tribe kingdom of Israel. Jonah lived around the time of other prophets like Hosea and Amos. This period was an interesting time for Israel. Wars with Damascus (Syria) weakened the nation. Even more troubling was the rising of the Assyrian Empire. Assyria was an enemy of Israel. Known for its violence and cruelty, Assyria eventually conquered Israel in 722 BC, about 63 years after our story.

The only other Old Testament mention of Jonah outside the book of Jonah actually verifies his status as a prophet:

2 Kings 14:25: *He (Jeroboam) restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.*

(Source: Albert Barnes' Notes on the Whole Bible) This passage tends to fix Jonah's date to some period not very late in the reign of Jeroboam II, i.e., (according to the ordinary chronology) from 823 BC to 782 BC.

The strongest evidence we have that Jonah existed and his experience really happened is that Jesus refers to it as an illustration pointing to the experiences he himself would face in providing the ransom sacrifice for mankind in **Matthew 12:39-41**. There is much to study in that comparison, but we will leave that for another day.

We will review the account in four parts, looking to see if it evokes a human or godly **REACTION** and a human or godly **RESPONSE**. Part one is **God's Task**: God is going to proclaim a task.

In each part, we will:

- Look to the reaction: Is there a human or godly reaction by the person(s) given that task?
- Look to the response: Is there a human or godly response to that task?

- Finally, we ask ourselves:

- *Are my reactions human or godly?
- *Are my responses human or godly?"

**PART 1: GOD'S TASK — HUMAN OR GODLY REACTIONS
— HUMAN OR GODLY RESPONSES**

God's Task:
Go to the massive city of Nineveh and warn them of their sins and My displeasure.

Jonah 1:1-2: *1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah... saying, 2 Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.*

Watch for this word *arise* and “rising up” to show up throughout this account.

Nineveh is located in modern-day Mosul in Iraq, and the archaeological site has been looted and severely vandalized by the violent extremist group ISIS. Back at the time of Jonah, Nineveh was the capital of the hated Assyrian empire, a nation that laid siege to Jerusalem and exacted tribute (demanded a tax) from the southern kingdom of Judah for many years.

Nineveh was a city of violence. These were bad people. **Nahum 3:1** calls it *the bloody city, full of lies and robbery* (KJV), *never without victims* (NLT) and known for its brutality toward enemies. **Nahum 3:19** refers to its *endless cruelty* (NIV).

(Source: Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary): God had called him (Jonah) to visit the very heartland of enemy territory and to give the hated Assyrians a chance to repent! It was a radical order that would have taxed the obedience of any prophet. Jonah's grudging attitude should not blind us to the fact that he did carry out God's command.

This was a place Jews would avoid at all costs. They hated and feared the Ninevites. God told Jonah his task was to go there to pronounce the people as wicked, and that God was going to destroy them.

HERE'S JONAH'S REACTION: *Nope! No thank you!* We could use words like disdain, disgust and rebellion to describe his reaction. He was without compassion and would have been afraid of this city with the horrible reputation. Jonah hated the Assyrians. He wanted vengeance and revenge, not mercy.

Jonah 1:3: *But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.*

God said *arise* and *Jonah rose up*. Unfortunately, he *rose up* to go in the wrong direction.

But how would the average person respond if told they are to walk right into enemy territory and say, *You need to change your ways according to how my religion says you should act!*

Jonah was heading the wrong way – disobeying God. But let's pause, not to justify what he did, but to think about our own reactions.

Human reactions or **godly reactions:** What would our potential reactions be if God had delivered such a responsibility to us?



- Our enemy has finally kindled God's wrath. It's about time He destroyed them! I can't wait to see that! They'll finally get what they deserve!

OR: What an amazing opportunity God is giving them to turn their lives around!



- If I go *cry against* them, telling them all they are doing wrong, they could turn on ME! They'll probably kill me!

OR: They might just listen. (Eh, not likely.)

- But if they DO repent and here I prophesied their destruction, then I could be seen as a false prophet. I have a reputation to uphold!



OR: I could be seen as a hero who saved hundreds of thousands of people!

How would we react? Jonah was in this “either/or” position. Our human reaction would say, *No, thank you*. OR, a godly reaction might say, *This is God’s will. It might be hard, but it is His will for me*.



What would be a strong **godly reaction** when we are asked to do a difficult task? It might be in the way we frame it: *You’re asking me to do WHAAAAT?????* Or, *Wait, you’re asking me to do what again?* One is **rebelling** and one **needs more information**.

WHAT IS AN EXAMPLE OF A STRONG GODLY REACTION?

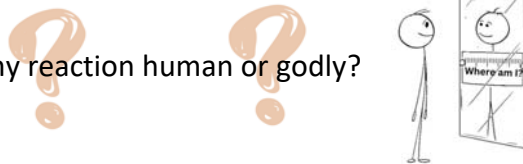
Seek clarity, just like Ananias after being told to seek out Saul of Tarsus.

Saul was persecuting and killing Christians at that time:

Acts 9:13-14: *13 But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to your saints at Jerusalem; 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.*

Like Jonah, Ananias was also given a dangerous mission. Saul could have put Ananias in prison or even taken his life. But he didn’t rise up and go the other way, the way Jonah did. He just needed to get clarity to understand his mission. Ananias’ gut reaction was to be spiritually driven.

Is my reaction human or godly?



Reactions happen. Often, our reactions are not great, but it’s okay as long as we recognize those reactions for what they are. An immediate reaction won’t create a bad destiny unless our response to that reaction is flawed.



WHAT WAS JONAH’S RESPONSE?

Run, hide and disappear:

Jonah 1:3: *...So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.*



<https://www.aarushijains.com/map-of-jonah-s-journey/>

Tarshish, which is now thought to be part of Spain, was 2,500 miles away from Joppa. He literally gets on a boat going in the exact opposite direction. It reminds us of Adam and Eve foolishly trying to hide from God in the Garden of Eden.

JONAH'S REACTION: *I'm not doing it!* His reaction was to rise up and flee—then his **RESPONSE** was to actually do that—find a ship and pay the money to sail off the other way.

What would our response have been in this kind of circumstance?

Jonathan's Experience

When I look back in my Christian walk, I see that I have reacted in both ways. There were times when I was overwhelmed and ran away from godly responsibilities. My hope is, now with maturity in Christ, I would accept godly direction in my life, with God's help.

The key to being able to accept difficult directions from God is to grow as a result of our previous experiences.

WHAT IS AN EXAMPLE OF A STRONG GODLY RESPONSE?

Act affirmatively. Back to the New Testament to see how Ananias responded:

Acts 9:15-17: *15 But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; 16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake. 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house...*

I get it. No more questions. I walk in faith, not by sight. Ananias didn't let fear or anger turn him in the opposite direction. Ananias is a good contrast to Jonah's initial reaction to receiving the Lord's direction.

Ananias was full of faith in God's providence, which was what Jonah was missing.



Our human reactions can be our worst enemies. The good news is that God knows this, and He simply challenges us to consider those reactions before acting. A potential "reaction adjustment" is to learn to change the reaction from a statement to a question. Fear! or fear? This can help us seek clarity to act affirmatively.

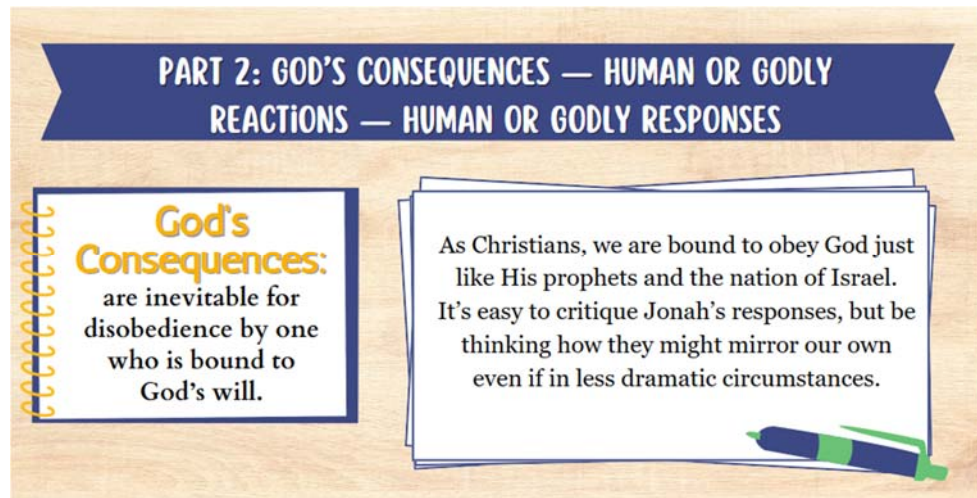
This is about either running forward to do God's will or running away and hiding from God's will.

We often can't change how we feel. If we are afraid, discouraged or even rebelling, we can say I'M REBELLING!—OR—I'm rebelling? We can either be belligerent OR question what we are feeling to try to understand those feelings. By changing how we look at our feelings, we can create an opening which can create a different response. This is one lesson from the book of Jonah.

Such a dilemma! What we are saying here is that our natural reactions likely create natural responses which is not good for our godly health.

Jonah was given a direct command from God and literally went in the other direction to hide. How can this be good?

Well, it can't be good, but it can lead to some necessary learning experiences that can change the outcome back towards a favorable direction. For Jonah, those learning experiences would end up being some of the most dramatic in all of the Bible. The good news is, there is hope after bad decisions! The reality check is, one needs to climb up into that hope and truly hang on.



So, Jonah is on a ship to Tarshish, heading as far away as he can from God.

Things are looking grim:

Jonah 1:4-5: *4 The LORD hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up. 5 Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them...*

They are fighting for their lives! This is bad! These experienced sailors are hurling cargo overboard and screaming for their gods. Where did the waves and wind suddenly come from? They are panicked, thinking they are doomed.

JONAH'S REACTION: human or godly? Human—he's *sound asleep*. He's going to ignore everything around him and hope it goes away.

...but Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down and fallen sound asleep <7290>.

Asleep: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #7290 *radam*; to stun, that is, stupefy (with sleep or death): be fast, in a deep sleep

This is a deep sleep that's hard to wake up from.

Jonah was running from God and hiding in sleep.

We know such a reaction eventually brings a reckoning. For Jonah, that reckoning for hiding from God came quickly:

Jonah 1:6: *So the captain approached him and said, How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish.*

In other words, *Nothing seems to be working on our end, and we're about to die!* Here's the irony—Jonah's being asked to call on the very God he is hiding from!

Now that he has been shaken out of sleep, the **godly response** would be:

SEE the problem. FACE the problem. FIX the problem.

However, **JONAH'S IMMEDIATE REACTION** was to hide from the world in sleep. He would now be forced to face the reality of rebelling against God's command.

SEE THE PROBLEM:

First, God would make the consequences of Jonah's choices public:

Jonah 1:7-8: *7 Each man said to his mate, Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity has struck us. So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 Then they said to him, Tell us, now! On whose account has this calamity struck us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?*

Who are you? Why are we about to die?

FACE THE PROBLEM:

Second, God would require Jonah to come clean regarding those consequences:

Jonah 1:9-10: *9 He said to them, I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land. 10 Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, How could you do this? For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.*

Jonah: *Yeah, it's me. I'm the problem. My God made this sea that's about to kill us all.*

He comes clean in a way that makes it even worse, because now they all know he was trying to hide from the all-powerful God who made this sea and its waves.

This is a big step for Jonah. He ran and hid himself, but then he was forced to see what the problem was. In his facing the problem in this moment of life and death, he is honest, but it makes the situation even worse.

FIX THE PROBLEM:

Third, knowing other lives were in danger, Jonah proposed dramatic action:

Jonah 1:11-12: *11 So they said to him, What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us? for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy. 12 He said to them, Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you.*

Jonah had the right solution, but this is a tough situation. He knows God is angry with him and he has put these lives in danger solely because of his actions, reactions and responses. He tells them to throw him overboard with the extra cargo.

THE REACTION OF THE MEN: human or godly?

Godly, in that they were trying to protect everyone's life:

Jonah 1:13: *However, the men rowed desperately to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming even stormier against them.*

Seeing a vivid demonstration of God's power, they probably weren't too keen on throwing a prophet of Jonah's God overboard. They were doomed if they didn't throw him overboard, but they might be doomed if they did. *Row harder! Row harder!*

These men knew they were going to die—they had to respond NOW. They had to SEE the problem, they had to FACE the problem, and they had to FIX the problem.

The problem was Jonah! As long as he remained on the ship, everyone would die, so they had to do what they had to do.

But listen to what they did first:

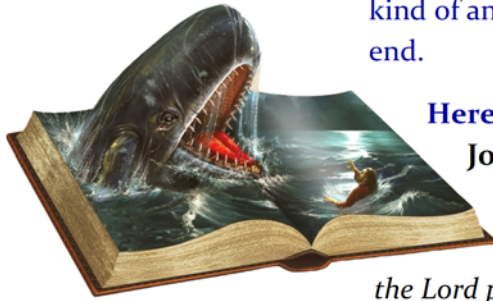
Jonah 1:14-16: *14 Then they called on the LORD and said, We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, O LORD, have done as You have pleased. 15 So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. 16 Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.*

Let's pause and just consider what that moment looked like. They actually bring themselves to throw Jonah overboard as they desperately try to save everyone else. As soon as they do, the storm began to subside.

These men looked up and gave honor and praise to Jonah's God. They made promises to God, realizing this situation was bigger than anything they have ever seen or believed in their entire lives. Whether they continued to worship the true God later, we are not told.

At this moment, these pagan men were a great example of learning how to respond in a godly way.

While disobedience brings consequences, they happen under the providence of God's will for the sake of those who need to learn. God's anger is not an out-of-control, road-rage kind of anger. God's anger is always justified and clear. It has a purpose and an ultimate end.



Here's what God's consequences brought Jonah:

Jonah 1:17: *And the LORD appointed <4487> a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.*

Appointed here means “to allot or constitute officially.” Other translations say *the Lord prepared, provided, arranged for, or designated a great fish*. This gives us the sense of how God can alter something to accomplish His will.

Appointed: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #4487 *manah*; properly, to weigh out; by implication, to allot or constitute officially; also to enumerate or enroll

Let's not let the technical part of the Hebrew words negate how disgusting, dark, slimy, gurgly and smelly the inside of that fish would be! Not to mention how claustrophobic Jonah must have felt.

God *appointed* or “altered” this fish to be able to house Jonah for three days. This same word is used again when we talk about God appointing the *plant*, the *worm* and the *wind* at the end of the account a little later.

We can't overlook that God's providence was present during this consequence to Jonah's actions. It was disgusting, but this is how God cared for Jonah and kept him safe while Jonah sat and thought about what he did by trying to run and hide.

How is Jonah going to react to God literally plucking him up and swimming him in the right direction? Jonah is now completely unable to control his own destiny, as he is being led wherever the fish goes.

All that has happened as a consequence to his response and actions has been within the providence of God. God's anger is never without justification. It always provides clarity and is used as a teaching tool for others as well as for the individual it is directed at.

**FINDING THE FORTITUDE
TO STAND STRONG:**

Serving God is serious business. For Jonah, running away from that service put him into what seemed to be a certain death circumstance.

Our lesson here is to realize that the result of our own running from God's direction can be tragic. When such a tragedy does occur, how will we respond?

Do we try to ignore it? (Maybe it will go away if we sort of try to sleep it off.) Or, do we face the problem and fix the problem, realizing it is time to change and do something different? Jonah did that, and the result was entirely unexpected.

It is sobering to realize just how high the standards are for those who are called to do God's will.

Jonah has no place to go. He is plainly suffering the consequences of his own rebellion against God. What does he do now?

The only physical option for Jonah at this point is to wait in the slime and darkness to be digested. However, there were other options available regarding his connection to God and His will. Interestingly, while Jonah is forced to face his own mortality, he can choose to do it with his heart and mind focused on either his misery or God's greatness.



We can be in a slimy, dark situation and still be godly. We always have a choice in our attitude towards our circumstances. How will we then stand by the choices we make?

Consider the Apostle Paul and Silas in prison (Acts 16). They were whipped, shackled and in pain. They had a choice. They could either be miserable in their circumstance or they could sing praises to God. They chose to honor God.

Jonah is in an extraordinary situation, inside the belly of a fish!

JONAH'S REACTION: human or godly? Godly – his reaction was to pray, acknowledge and confess. He is no longer hiding.

Instead, he is being hidden and kept safe:

Jonah 2:1-3: *1 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, 2 and he said, I called out of my distress to the LORD, and He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of sheol (the grave); You heard my voice. 3 For You had cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the current engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me.*

His prayer begins with the recognition of his distress and his utter helplessness. He *cried for help from the depth of the grave*. There is no getting out of this situation. But there are some positive things happening within this desperate situation.



Do we acknowledge the depth of our weakness and the seriousness of our self-inflicted consequences when we want to hide like Jonah?

Jonah is stuck and what is he doing? He is now honoring God.

It gives us comfort to know God uses consequences to educate us and help us grow. "Our trials are worth millions. Don't waste even one." No matter how it turns out, we can still learn and praise God.

Whatever circumstance we find ourselves in, if we are working at being a godly person but have made mistakes, we can look up and see what God wants us to learn.

Let's see how Jonah's prayer develops:

Jonah 2:4-6: *4 So I said, I have been expelled from Your sight...*

This is just what Jonah had been trying to do! He was running from God. Remember, he wanted to hide where God couldn't find him. Well, he was now out of sight!

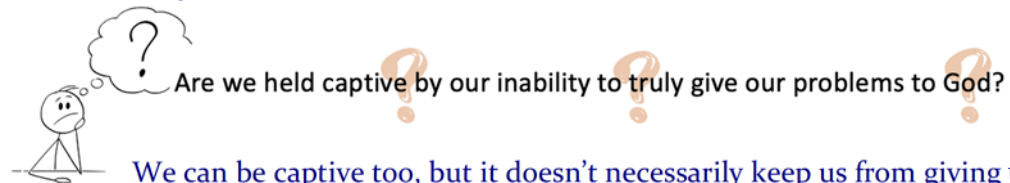
...Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.

We see despair but also hope. Was he looking towards the literal temple in Jerusalem? It is unlikely, as the fish swam around it would not be possible for him to know what direction he was facing while inside the fish. It might mean he was looking forward to being in Jerusalem again, but verse 7 supports that it means he was once again approaching God in the heavenly temple, through prayer.

Jonah's faith is alive, even though the situation is grim:

5 Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, weeds were wrapped around my head. 6 I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, but You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.

What a powerful prayer! What powerful devotion! He is looking heavenly, toward God's temple. He does not know what direction he is looking, but he is seeing it in his mind. He is reaching out towards holiness but is captive because of his own actions.



We can be captive too, but it doesn't necessarily keep us from giving the problem over to our heavenly Father the way Jonah gave his issues over to his God and said, *Here I am. I am looking toward you. I am looking to get back to where I need to be.*

JONAH'S REACTION was godly. He is praying, acknowledging and confessing.

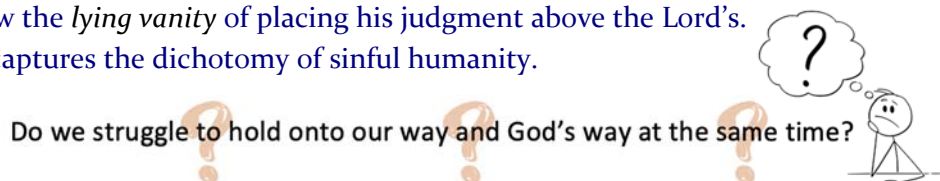
Was **JONAH'S RESPONSE** human or godly?

The godly response was to embrace the experience and claim personal responsibility. This is the turning point where everything can change:

Jonah 2:7-9: *7 While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple. 8 Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness, 9 But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD.*

The King James Version: *They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.*

Jonah saw the *lying vanity* of placing his judgment above the Lord's. Verse 8 captures the dichotomy of sinful humanity.





Let's give a very practical example: texting and driving. We know we should never text and drive. Driving is the main objective. When we are behind the wheel we have our own and other's lives in our hands. When we start texting, we are paying attention to something other than the main objective. It can be damaging and deadly.

Jonah was "texting and driving" and ended up in the belly of a fish because he wasn't paying attention to God. He wanted what HE wanted. These *lying vanities* put aside our ability to be faithful to God because we are trying to hold onto two things at once. It just does not work.

Rather than listening to God, Jonah thought it wiser to not give the people of Nineveh any chance to avoid destruction.

Now he makes two decisions as to how to change his life, **if and when** he is delivered from the great fish:

1. He peels the seaweed off his eyes (*seaweed was wrapped around my head*) and offers thankfulness for his own personal deliverance, and also for being given another opportunity to mend his ways and accept the will of God in place of his own judgments.
2. He would be more careful to speak the word of the Lord whenever and wherever he was directed.

He has come to a point of resolution in his own mind. He is now clearly responding as a prophet of God.

God hears and respects the hearts and prayers of those who seek to serve Him:

Jonah 2:10: *Then the LORD commanded the fish...*

(Source: Bible Commentary by David Guzik) If God can speak to a fish, He can speak to us. Then again, fish probably don't resist the will of God like we do.

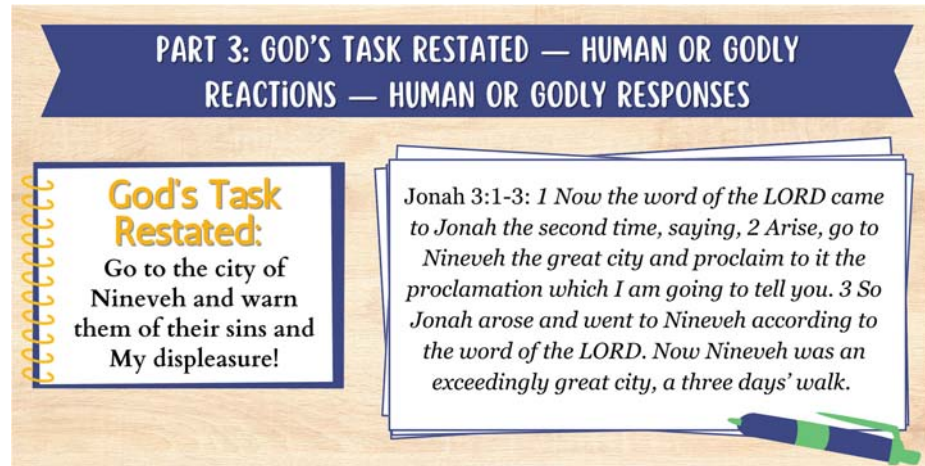
...and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.

Despite the slime, Jonah is now on dry land. He has been redeemed, brought back from the depths of his own sinful choices! God is saying to Jonah, *I heard you, and I trust you!*



As those who seek to serve God, we realize that when left unchecked, our human reactions and responses will inevitably lead us into self-inflicted traps and challenges.

God's providence will inform us of our faulty approach. Sometimes His providence is painfully obvious and other times it is more subtle. Either way, the message is to listen, acknowledge, claim responsibility, adjust and move forward.



God said *Arise!* And this time, *Jonah arose and went to Nineveh!*

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers tells us that Herodotus (a Greek historian and geographer from the fifth century) reckoned a day's journey to be about 18 to 23 miles. Nineveh was an irregular quadrangle composed of four mounds: Koujunjik, Nimrud, Karamless and Khorsabad. It is estimated to be about 60 miles through the streets of the city.

(Source: Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary): At the time of the greatest prosperity of Nineveh as described by Jonah, the city...would have had an area sufficient to contain a population of 120,000.

It was a three-day's journey to walk through the city. The task Jonah was given was enormous and dangerous. Now Jonah is given the task a second time. He rose and he went.

Was **JONAH'S REACTION** human or godly? Technically, we have no indication of how he felt, so we cannot say what his reaction was.

Was **JONAH'S RESPONSE** human or godly? Godly—he walked through the city proclaiming God's judgment.

He did what he was commanded to do with godly zeal:

Jonah 3:4: *Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.*

This is the shortest prophecy in the Bible—eight words in English and only five in Hebrew!



The number 40 in Scripture generally symbolizes a period of testing. He walks for one day—remember, it took three days to get through the entire city, and it appears change began to happen after only one.

We've had some internal discussion as to whether or not Jonah is really putting in maximum effort or still in his heart hoping Nineveh won't be converted.

- View one: It seems with a five-word Hebrew prophecy, he is just going through the motions and doing what he is instructed to do, the bare minimum.
- View two: He put the absolute maximum into this. He cried out and said, *Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown*. But we don't know that was all he said. He likely gave a massive explanation. When he was in the belly of the fish, his response to God was clear and specific about doing what he said he would do. His heart was in the right place, and God saw that heart and released him.

This big city was filled with natural enemies. His natural self did not like these people, but his spiritual self preached to them because God told him to.

Jonah acted contrary to his own will. He threw his heart into his work. He was as good as the words of his prayer from inside the fish's belly. He pronounces God's warning, and it proves to be incredibly powerful and effective.

The NINEVITES' REACTIONS and responses were clear:

Jonah 3:5: *Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.*

The king and his nobles led by example. The king removed his royal robes and *put on sackcloth and sat on the ashes*. These actions symbolized the king was truly sorry for being so sinful. He issued a decree that everyone should fast for three days and be dressed in sackcloth, even the animals. All were to pray earnestly to the one true God and turn from their evil ways.

The king speaks:

Jonah 3:9: *Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.*

It is interesting the king didn't bargain with God. He didn't know if the sackcloth and ashes would work, but said in a heartfelt, overwhelming response, *Whether we all live or die, we will do the right thing*. God must have been pleased.

Never in all of the recorded history of God's prophets had there been such a total and immediate conversion of sinful people to God's ways! This repentance was without a guarantee of forgiveness!

Why would the king listen to a prophet that wasn't even from his own country? It's possible those in Nineveh heard about the miraculous survival of Jonah through the trade routes—people brought messages and news, and could have heard about the God of Israel and victory over its enemies. Now Jonah was in person giving this message of destruction.



(Source: Wikipedia) Nineveh was an important junction for commercial routes crossing the Tigris on the great roadway between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, thus uniting the East and the West, it received wealth from many sources, so that it became one of the greatest of all the region's ancient cities.

In addition, there is some thought that the Ninevites worshipped Dagon, a fish god. Jonah was inside a fish for three days and deposited on dry land by that fish, so perhaps they reasoned that their own god had helped save Jonah from the belly of the fish. Maybe they were in awe of Jonah, and that's why they listened to what he had to say. Or maybe they interpreted the God of Israel to be even more powerful than Dagon. Whatever the reason, the warning worked!

The entire city was serious about worshipping God. The old, evil Nineveh was indeed “destroyed” within 40 days! This was a huge, national turnaround for them.

**FINDING THE FORTITUDE
TO STAND STRONG:**

The power of God's chosen ones doing what God requires of them is immeasurable.

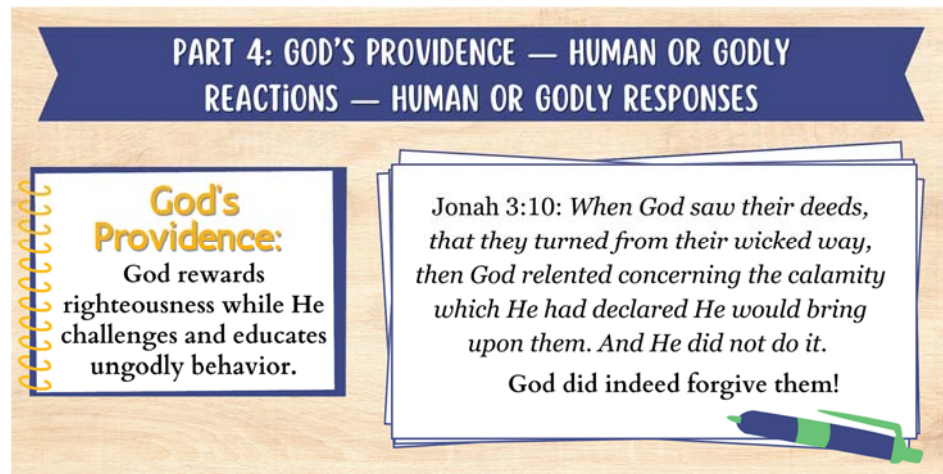
Let us never underestimate what godly zeal expressed in a godly way for a godly cause can produce.

We need to realize the power of godliness in our actions, even after we have made mistakes.

What an amazing example of not only God's providence, but the results of putting oneself in a position to contribute to that providence.

All should now be in order. Jonah powerfully followed God's will and was overwhelmingly successful! It's all good, right?

It would be nice to have that storybook “happily ever after” ending to this truly remarkable series of events. However, let's remember that we are not only dealing with the power, will and providence of God, but also with the stubbornness, emotions and desires of sinful humanity as well. As we shall see, Jonah is not done rebelling.



Just to be clear, by “God rewards righteousness,” we are not saying the better Christian we are, the more wealth and fame we will receive. Jonah’s reward for faithfulness was to be spit out of the belly of the fish in order to do God’s will. He didn’t get any fortune, though he did get a strange bit of fame. He got his life back. He was given the ability to do what God had tasked him to do.

The reward is not about fame and fortune or riches and glory. It is about the privilege of doing that which God asks us and directs us to do.

God did indeed forgive Nineveh. Was **JONAH’S REACTION** human or godly?

His godly reaction after being spit up by the fish sure was short-lived because Jonah was not prepared for the Ninevites’ response of repentance. His human **REACTION** of displeasure and anger returned. *They didn’t get what they deserve!* Isn’t this why Jesus’ command to love our enemies is so difficult? We want mercy for ourselves, of course, but resent it when others, particularly those we don’t like, receive that same mercy.

Although Jonah was successful doing God’s will, he is displeased and angry at the result:

Jonah 4:1-2: *1 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the LORD and said, Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.*

See, God, I TOLD YOU SO! This is why I did not want to preach and warn them! Jonah was not happy! Unquestionably, he did not like the result. But he loved the result when God spared him after HIS sinfulness. The concept of loving our enemies IS difficult, and Jonah was just a human being who definitely did not love the Ninevites.

What happened? How could such a great prophet with such a great success after such a great rescue from certain death have such great anger about God not killing thousands of men, women, children and animals? It does not seem to make sense.

It does make sense from the standpoint of a broken human being. One of the reasons we have the account of Jonah is because he was a broken human being who had issues just like we do. God was working with him through those issues.

HIS REACTION was displeasure and anger. As bad as the reaction is, the response is even worse!

Was **JONAH'S RESPONSE** human or godly? Human, and appalling, because he takes God's compassion on Nineveh and hurls it back at God. He is bewildered and he has a hopeless, dejected surrender to God's will. His reputation is also on the line—he predicted Nineveh would be physically overthrown in 40 days and it did not happen.

We have to add that he is just plain irritated:

Jonah 4:3: *Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.*

Wow, this went downhill quickly! It breaks our heart to hear Jonah's depression and dejection as he has this conversation with God Almighty. *Take my life from me because I just did the greatest work of my life for You and did exactly what You said, and You saved these awful people.* It is a pretty dramatic contrast from his expressed desire while in the belly of the fish to unequivocally live and serve!

What happened to *casting off lying vanities*? He had not "cast them off" or put them away, he had merely put them aside. And those *lying vanities* came right back.

God knew it. Watch how God handles this:

Jonah 4:4-5: *4 The LORD said, Do you have good reason to be angry? 5 Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city.*

God GENTLY questioned Jonah, *Do you have good reason to be angry?* but received no answer. This is a good "mirror question" to ask ourselves to inch out some of that space between our reaction and our response.



Do I have good reason to be angry?

Asking ourselves to critically look at what is causing us so much emotion might help us buy precious seconds of cooler thinking.

Sometimes in those precious seconds we can change the destiny of our responses. This is what God is looking for, to help Jonah. He is giving Jonah something else to respond to.

What follows is God's power and love towards Jonah, presented as some hard reality checks. These next three things (*plant, worm, wind* – mentioned in chapter 4) fit in with the great fish as well. As we shall see, all four were *appointed* for Jonah in his own life and death struggles within himself as a prophet of God.

The fish forced him to see his own deep and troubling faults. He admitted his faults when he was faced with life and death.

David gave us good advice:

Psalms 19:12-14: (KJV) *12 Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. 13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. 14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.*

While David sinned over and over, he came back from it again and again. This is an important part of examining our own actions. The life and death fish experience forced Jonah to look at his own faults.

The next of God’s “appointments” for Jonah was a plant:

Jonah 4:6: *So the LORD God appointed <4487> a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant.*

Do you remember how the Lord appointed/provided/arranged a great fish? This is the same Hebrew word—God appointed or provided this plant.

Jonah was overjoyed! He can observe Nineveh in cool shade and comfort.

He is very happy for the plant. He has been looking for the next best, greatest thing to make him smile because he is very upset at God for saving Nineveh.

The plant gave him great physical and emotional comfort, but it doesn’t stop him from relapsing back into his old reactions.



We have this beautiful promise from God if we walk with Him in His ways:

Psalms 84:11-12: *11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly. 12 O LORD of hosts, how blessed is the man who trusts in You!*

God has given Jonah a plant to comfort and protect him. God does not withhold from those who walk uprightly. Jonah had walked uprightly, then faltered. God gave him a blessing anyway in spite of his faltering, and Jonah was happy, but he still did not turn around.

God has another “appointment” for Jonah:

Jonah 4:7: *But God appointed <4487> a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered.*

Why would God torture him like this? He gave Jonah this nice plant, but the next day it gets eaten by a worm. Why?



God is not torturing him; He is teaching him. There is a world of difference between the two things. He gave Jonah the plant so he could sit and think over his response to the saving of Nineveh in relative comfort. Jonah is not responding to that. God is testing Jonah to see if he is with God in this moment. God is working with him to help him see his wrong thinking.

The worm quickly removed the comfort of the plant when Jonah did not properly respond to God's prompting him to introspection of his sulking, leaving him rightfully exposed to the harsh elements. We say "rightly exposed" because with Jonah's attitude, he did not deserve God's comfort washing over him as long as he hoped for the destruction of all these people.

Jonah wanted mercy for himself, but not for the others. When he received mercy for himself, he responded to it. Interestingly, when Nineveh received mercy for themselves, they responded also! God takes mercy away from Jonah to bring him to awareness.

Here is David's response to the effects of sin kept hidden inside:

Psalms 32:3-4: *3 When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.*

David wrote this after his sin with Bathsheba. He felt like his life was wasting away because he was hiding his sin. What is happening to Jonah? The same thing. David says, *My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.* What happened when that plant was taken away? The fever heat of summer came upon Jonah again. He is being reminded of whom he serves and where his flaws are. That is God's mercy upon Jonah. It goes even further because God is not stopping.



Here is the next "appointment":

Jonah 4:8: *When the sun came up God appointed <4487> a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, Death is better to me than life.*

I've had enough. You're not listening to me, so death is better for me than life. Jonah was more concerned about the vine and his own comfort than he was about the Ninevites. This is just going from bad to worse.

1 John 4:20-21: (The Message) *If anyone boasts, I love God, and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both.*

Jonah needed to come to the realization that he had to overcome himself. God allowed serious physical testing, looking to get Jonah's full attention.

The wind not only accentuated his exposure to the elements, it pressed him to proclaim his human grief and anxiety. God was literally drawing and pulling Jonah's sin out of him.

Contrast Job's attitude after he gets word of the catastrophes which happened to his family:

Job 1:20-21: *20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. 21 He said, Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.*

Job felt he had nothing left, and yet he still says, *Blessed be the name of the Lord.*

God is working with Jonah to show him that very attitude. *Jonah, you are in the wrong place. You have done wonderful work for Me, but you are in the wrong place in your own heart and mind and need to grow out of it.*

Here is the end of the account of Jonah. Interestingly, it ends with a question:

Jonah 4:9-11: *9 Then God said to Jonah, Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant? And he said, I have good reason to be angry, even to death. 10 Then the LORD said, You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. 11 Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?*

Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant? Jonah was first angry about the sparing of Nineveh, and now he's angry about the death of a plant! God is using Jonah's own broken thinking, reactions and responses to bring him to where he can see his responses are wrong.

He needs to have that prayer moment back in the belly of the fish that says, I will look to Your temple. We aren't told what happened after this.

Think about if we had the story of the Apostle Peter when he denied the Lord three times and then we ended the story and you didn't know what happened, what would you say? That was a pretty bad situation.

Jonah is in the same kind of circumstance. He had been used of God; he was a godly man. We firmly believe that Jonah would eventually find his way back because God was gently drawing him back and showing him what needed to happen.



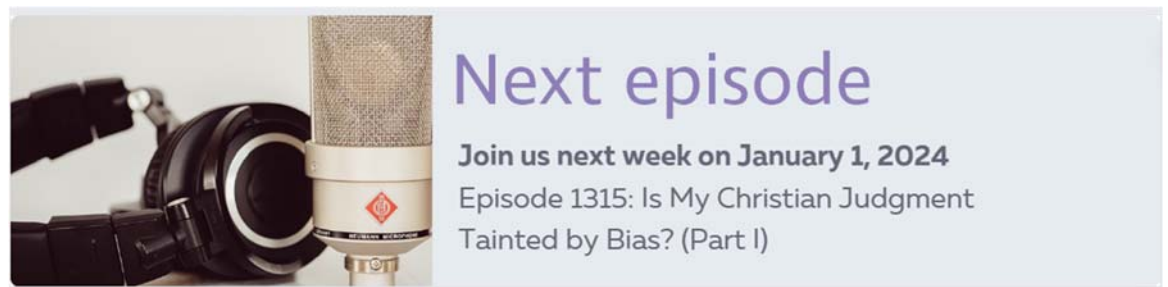
We have all fallen down or run away from God's direction at different times and under different circumstances in our lives. What have we done, what are we doing as a result?

When God's providence drives our lives, do we have human or godly reactions? Do we have human or godly responses?

Let's think about the major lessons from the book of Jonah. When we are given a message from God to deliver, we have to do what God tells us to do. His will is mighty, wise, just, loving and merciful. If things do not work out the way we want them to, we have to frame our response to be a godly response saying the result is in God's providence, instead of looking at things through the human framework of our eyes. When we are broken and we need fixing, we need to look through God's eyes, not ours, asking what would He have us to do? That is the lesson from the Book of Jonah.

**So, do I show up when God calls or do I run and hide?
From Rick, Jonathan, Julie and Christian Questions...
...Think about it!**

All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.



@christianquestionsministries



cqbiblepodcast

Text CQREWIND to 22828
to receive our Weekly Newsletter, Show Notes and Study Questions

Bonus Material and Study Questions

Recommended additional study:

[Ep. 1204: Am I Fighting For or Against God?](#)

Facing the things we do and think that put us in opposition to God



Parents and Bible class teachers, continue your studies on this topic with this short, animated video for kids at [ChristianQuestions.com/YouTube](https://www.christianquestions.com/YouTube):

- [What is obedience?](#)

All scriptures below are from the King James Version.

The following verse from Jonah's prayer captures some major character lessons from this prophet:

Jonah 2:8: *They that **observe** <8104> lying vanities forsake their own mercy.*

The following is a more in-depth look at this verse and its meaning:

Observe: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #8104 *shamar*; properly to hedge about (as with thorns), i.e. guard; generally, to protect, attend to, etc., beware, be circumspect, take heed (to self), keep (-erself), mark, look narrowly, observe, preserve, regard, reserve, save (self), sure, (that lay) wait (for), watch (-man)

Some uses:

Genesis 4:9: *And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's **keeper** <8104>?*

Leviticus 19:30: *Ye shall **keep** <8104> my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.*

Job 29:2: *Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God **preserved** <8104> me.*

Lying: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #7723 *shav'*; from the same as #7722 in the sense of desolating; evil (as destructive), literally (ruin) or morally (especially guile); figuratively idolatry (as false, subjective), uselessness (as deceptive, objectively; also adverbially, in vain)

Some uses:

Exodus 20:7: *Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in **vain** <7723>; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in **vain** <7723>.*

Psalms 31:6: *I have hated them that regard **lying** <7723> vanities: but I trust in the LORD.*

Vanities: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1892 *hebel*; emptiness or vanity; figuratively, something transitory and unsatisfactory; often used as an adverb

Some uses:

Jeremiah 16:19: *O LORD, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto Thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, **vanity** <1892>, and things wherein there is no profit.*

Ecclesiastes 11:10: *Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are **vanity** <1892>.*

Forsake: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5800 *'azab*; to loosen, i.e. relinquish, permit, etc., commit self, fail, forsake, fortify, help, leave (destitute, off), refuse, surely

Some uses:

Genesis 2:24: *Therefore shall a man **leave** <5800> his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*

2 Kings 2:4: *And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not **leave <5800>** thee. So they came to Jericho.*

Their own mercy: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #2617 *chesed*; kindness; by implication (towards God) piety; rarely (by opprobrium) reproof, or (subject.) beauty, favour, good deed (-liness, -ness), kindly, (loving-) kindness, merciful (kindness), mercy, pity, reproach, wicked thing

Some uses:

Proverbs 3:3: *Let not **mercy <2617>** and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart.*

Psalms 119:149: *Hear my voice according unto Thy **lovingkindness <2617>**: O LORD, quicken me according to Thy judgment.*

A "Rick Translation": *They that guard and protect their own evil and empty ideas lose their grip on their own piety towards God.*



- Jonah of Gath-hepher and Nahum of Capernaum both come from the province of Galilee, disproving the claim of the officers of the Sanhedrin that *out of Galilee ariseth no prophet (John 7:52)*.
- Jonah and Nahum were the only two prophets whose prophecies concerned Nineveh. Nahum prophesied about Nineveh and Jonah to Nineveh.
- The name Jonah means “dove,” a frequent symbol of the holy spirit.
- Jesus’ words in **Matthew 12:40** say the time Jonah spent in the belly of the fish pictures the duration of Jesus’ final experiences on this earth, his death and his entombment.
- Jonah’s prayer shows a deep familiarity with the psalms. Many of the expressions in the chapter bear a close resemblance to those found in the writings of David.
http://www.heraldmag.org/2007/07ma_10.htm
- Nineveh was eventually destroyed around 612 BCE by a coalition led by Babylonians and Medes which topped the Assyrian empire. It laid in ruins until it was rediscovered in the middle of the 19th century. The city wall ruins still stand.

Jonah 2:2	Psalms 120:1
Jonah 2:3	Psalms 42:7
Jonah 2:4	Psalms 31:22
Jonah 2:5	Psalms 69:1,2
Jonah 2:6	Psalms 30:3
Jonah 2:7	Psalms 142:3; 18:6
Jonah 2:8	Psalms 31:6
Jonah 2:9	Psalms 116:17,18; 3:8

Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1314: Do I Show Up When God Calls or Do I Run and Hide?

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1314-jonah>

See:



1. What is the process involved in our reacting and responding to a stimulus? Why is it important to put a space between our reaction to the stimulus and our response to that stimulus? How does that space aid in our spiritual choices?
2. Who was Jonah – give a short history of his time. What was God’s task for Jonah? Why was this something Jonah did not want to do? What was Jonah’s reaction? What was his response? How was Ananias’ reaction and then response to his task from God different? (2 Kings 14:25, Matthew 12:39-41, Jonah 1:1-3, Nahum 3:1,19, Acts 9:13-17)
3. How might you have reacted if you had been Jonah? What should you do if your reaction is not great when asked to do a difficult task for the Lord? Why was Ananias such a good example for us? (Acts 9:15-17)
4. Jonah is sound asleep in the hold of the ship – have you ever ignored something you know you should be doing for God, hoping it will go away? As a consequence to his hiding, how did God engineer Jonah’s responses to be more godly? (Jonah 1:4-12)
 - a. How did he make him **See the Problem?** (vs 7-8)
 - b. What did God require to make Jonah **Face the Problem?** (vs 9-10)
 - c. What was Jonah’s solution to **Fix the Problem?** (vs 11-12)
 - d. How did the sailors react and respond to the circumstances? How are they an example to us? (vs 13-16)
5. How does Jonah react to being in the belly of a large fish? Where does he look for help and relief? How does God use the consequences He gives for our actions? What was Jonah’s response to his circumstance within the fish’s belly? What two decisions does Jonah decide on to change his life? (Jonah 2:1-10)
 - a. Do you acknowledge your weaknesses and serious failings before God in prayer?
 - b. Are you able to truly give your problems to God without reservation?
 - c. Do you struggle to hold onto your way and God’s way at the same time?
6. How is Jonah’s reaction and response to God’s task restated? What evidence do we have that Jonah’s response is now godly? How did the people of Nineveh respond to Jonah’s prophecy? Why might the Ninevites have particularly listened to Jonah? If the city took three days to walk through, what does Nineveh’s repentance after only one day indicate? How did God respond to their repentance? (Jonah 3:1-10)
7. What was Jonah’s reaction to God’s forgiveness of Nineveh? What was God’s response? (Jonah 4:1-6)
 - a. What did the appointed **fish** force Jonah to face? (Psalms 19:12-14)
 - b. Why was Jonah so pleased with his appointed **plant**? (Jonah 4:6)
 - c. How did Jonah feel about his appointed **worm**? (Jonah 4:7)
 - d. What did the final appointed **east wind** do? (Jonah 4:8)
8. How was Jonah’s attitude and response very wrong? How can we avoid falling into the negative responses of Jonah instead following the will of the Lord in our lives? What could you have done better during times you may have run away from God’s direction in your life? (Psalms 32:3-4, 84:11-12, 1 John 4:20-21, Jonah 4:9-11)