



# Jonah

Taming of a rebel

# Jonah

## Introductory notes

**Kaiapoi and Timaru Ecclesias**

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## HOW TO APPROACH THE BOOK

Because it's a relatively simple story, albeit with some extraordinary elements, some would consider the Book of Jonah as only an allegory. An allegory is a story, poem, or picture which can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning—typically a moral or political one—that had significant importance.

The picture on the left shows how an allegorical structure might look.

As a complete allegory, every feature in the book represents an element in the experience of the Israelites. Israel had long used the dove as a symbol, so you can understand how, allegorically, Israel fails before God and is swallowed up of Babylon, a divinely appointed adversary, only to be given a second chance at life when it's vomited up. What you would do is go through and identify what each element is and attach the appropriate meaning to it.

Clearly that can lead to different, even competing, interpretations of what we should interpret and how we should interpret it. And treating it **only** as an allegory, or **only** as a parable or metaphor, ignores what we actually read as the story.

We have to start from a different place, and take a particular view, because in Matthew 12v39-40 we read this. *“But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: **For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly;** so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”*

The Lord interpreted this book **literally**, as **historical fact**, no matter how fantastic it may seem.



Jonah as an allegory	
Symbol	Interpretation
Jonah the dove	Israel <i>They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria...</i> <i>Hos 11v11</i>
Jonah's role	Israel's mission, and failure, in taking the Truth to Gentiles
Flight to Tarshish	Failure before the exile
Fish	Babylon
Vomiting Jonah up	Israel's second chance once they were restored to the land

### Parallel similarities

<p>The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai <span style="float: right;">1v1</span></p> <p>“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.” <span style="float: right;">1v2</span></p> <p>Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly <span style="float: right;">2v1</span></p>	<p>Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time <span style="float: right;">3v1</span></p> <p>“Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.” <span style="float: right;">3v2</span></p> <p>And he prayed unto the LORD <span style="float: right;">4v2</span></p>
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### Parallel structure of Jonah

	First commission		Second commission
1v1-3	Jonah disobeys the call to go to Nineveh	3v1-3a	Jonah obeys the call to go to Nineveh
1v4-16	Jonah and the pagan sailors	3v3b-10	Jonah and the pagan Ninevites
1v17-2v10	Jonah's grateful prayer	4v1-3	Jonah's resentful prayer
		4v4-11	Yahweh's lesson for Jonah

Jonah was three literal days in the literal fish, and Jesus meant that he would be three literal days in his literal grave. He gave a literal explanation and comparison.

And while there absolutely *is* hidden meaning in Jonah, the book is first and foremost a **narrative**, a description of things that **actually happened**, and which we must come to understand in the first instance.

But it's a very carefully constructed narrative, deliberately organised in a particular style designed to teach, to focus our attention, and to give us key, powerful messages.

## HIGH LEVEL STRUCTURE

At a basic level the Book of Jonah really is the same story told twice, first in chapters 1 and 2, and then again in chapters 3 and 4, with a special lesson for Jonah at the end.

In chapter 1 Jonah gets a commission to preach to the Ninevites, he refuses to go to Nineveh, he interacts with the pagan sailors, and then offers a prayer in chapter 2. In chapter 3, as it was in chapter 1, the story begins again, as he gets the commission a **second** time, this time he goes to Nineveh, interacts with the pagan people, and offers another prayer. After that, is the lesson that God wants to teach Jonah.

A benefit of this structure is it lets us put these two halves of the book side by side so that we can highlight similarities between the two parts.

For example, we could colour in the repeated ideas in each half: the word comes, Jonah is instructed, and Jonah prays, which are good things for Bible marking.

We can also see **differences** between the two halves, so while the structure is repeated, we're given a clue that the meaning and intent of the two sections might be different.

### Detailed structure of Jonah

Word of Yahweh to Jonah	1v1	Word of Yahweh to Jonah	3v1
Jonah's commission	1v2	Jonah's commission	3v2
Jonah's response: flee	1v3	Jonah's response: agree	3v3-4a
Threat of disaster	1v4	Threat of disaster	3v4b
Response to disaster	1v5	Response to disaster	3v5
Captain of the ship	1v6	King of Nineveh	3v6
Sailors and Jonah	1v7-15	Ninevites and God	3v10a-c
Disaster averted	1v15c	Disaster averted	3v10d
Response of the sailors	1v16	Response of Jonah	4v1
Yahweh and Jonah	2v1-11	Yahweh and Jonah	4v2-11
Jonah is spared	2v11	Shouldn't Nineveh be spared?	4v10-11

### The chiasm of chapter 1

4-5a	Mariners afraid of Yahweh's storm
5b	Mariners cry to their gods
5c	Attempts to save the ship
6	Master asks Jonah to help him
7	Sailors look for a cause
8	Jonah asked to explain
9	<b>Jonah's confession</b>
10	Jonah is asked to explain
11	Sailors look for a solution
12	Jonah asks the master to help him
13	Attempts to save the ship
14	Mariners cry to Israel's God
15-16	Mariners afraid of Yahweh when the storm stilled

In our first example, Jonah arises to flee from his commission (1v3), while in the second he arises to fulfil his commission (3v3). In the first part he cries to be saved (2v2), while in the second he cries to die (4v3). There are hints here that may tell us about Jonah's motivation and thinking.

## MID-LEVEL STRUCTURE

At a closer, more detailed level, it's clear that the author gave considerable thought to organising the book as he did. In every regard, the second two chapters repeat the first two chapters.


This side-by-side structural view leads to questions about how Jonah responds to God, how he understands the character of God and the nature of salvation, about the plan and purpose of God, about our attitude to others, about our pride, and many more.

Then we can take the structure to a deeper level again, which reveals more of the secrets of the book.

## LOW-LEVEL STRUCTURE


If the mid-level structure required thought, the low level structure is even more impressive, because Jonah is written in the form of a chiasm. A chiasm is a literary device or technique in which a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated in reverse order.

The point of a chiasm is to help understanding and recall. Sometimes, that's all there is to it. Other times, a key idea is inserted in the middle of the chiasm to draw our attention to it, and emphasise the importance of it.




## The chiasm of chapter 2

- 17 Fish appointed to swallow Jonah
- 1-2a Jonah cries to Yahweh because of his affliction
- 2b Jonah cries to Yahweh from Sheol and is heard
- 3 Jonah cast into the sea by Yahweh
- 4 Jonah is cast from Yahweh's sight and temple
- 5a Jonah's soul surrounded by water
- 5b Jonah goes down to the deeps
- 6a **Jonah's lowest point before Yahweh**
- 6b Yahweh raises Jonah from the pit
- 7a Jonah's soul faints
- 7b Jonah's prayer reaches Yahweh in His temple
- 8 Jonah cast into the sea by idol worshippers
- 9a Jonah worships Yahweh with thanksgiving & vows
- 9b Jonah rejoices that salvation is from Yahweh
- 10 Fish instructed to vomit Jonah



## The chiasm of chapter 3

- 3-4 Yahweh's judgment announced
- 5 People repent with fasting and wearing sackcloth
- 6a Word reaches the king
- 6b **King's confession and repentance**
- 7 Word goes out from the king
- 8-9 People ordered to repent with sackcloth and ashes
- 10 Yahweh's judgment cancelled



## The chiasm of chapter 4

- 1-2b Jonah justifies his anger
- 2c-d Yahweh's compassion as seen by Jonah
- 3 Jonah responds: better for him to die than live
- 4 Yahweh asks: "Doest thou well to be angry?"
- 5 Jonah builds a booth
- 6-7 **Growth and destruction of the gourd**
- 8 Yahweh appoints a scorching east wind
- 9a Yahweh asks: "Doest thou well to be angry?"
- 9b Jonah responds: I do well... even unto death
- 10 Jonah's compassion as seen by Yahweh
- 11 Yahweh justifies his mercy

<b>A</b>	<b>Jonah commanded to preach against Nineveh</b>	<b>1v1</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>Jonah sins, not wanting Nineveh to be saved</b>	<b>1v2-10</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>Jonah repents and is saved</b>	<b>1v11-2v10</b>
<b>C'</b>	<b>Nineveh repents and is saved</b>	<b>3v1-10</b>
<b>B'</b>	<b>Jonah sins, not wanting Nineveh to be saved</b>	<b>4v1-9</b>
<b>A'</b>	<b>Jonah challenged: Should not I spare Nineveh?</b>	<b>4v10-11</b>

As an overview of the book, you can see that this structure fits the chiasmic pattern. Jonah is commanded to preach to the Ninevites, he sins, not wanting them to be saved, and then repents and is himself saved. Notice there is no single, central component when we view the book at this level. Rather it is just a series of ideas which are then repeated in reverse order.

But when we start to dig a bit, we see the wonder of the Word. The book as a whole is a chiasm, from chapter 1 through to chapter 4. Chapters 1 and 2 are a chiasm. So are chapters 3 and 4. And so is each, individual chapter. We'll look at chapter 1 as an example.

Verses 1-3 of chapter 1 constitute an introduction, but the remainder of the chapter demonstrates a clear and detailed chiasm. And a note about how this is written. You see in the first line we have vv4-5a, the 'a' simply means the first part of the verse. In this section, we've broken v5 into three parts, a, b and c, which appear over the first three lines. So in vv4-5a the mariners are afraid of Yahweh's storm, and in v5b they cry to their gods.


They make efforts in v5c to save the ship, and in v6 the Master asks Jonah to help him. The sailors are looking for a cause of this disaster in v7, they ask Jonah to explain what's going on in v8, and then we get to the central part of chapter 1, which is the confession of Jonah in chapter 1 and verse 9.

He acknowledges the power of God over the sea and dry and his place before Him. Then the sequence repeats, in reverse, through to the end of the chapter.



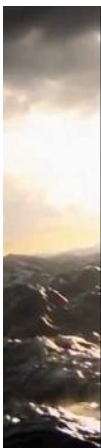
## 'Gadol' - Great

- A great city 1v2
- A great wind 1v4
- A great tempest 1v4
- A great fear 1v10
- A great storm 1v12
- A great fear 1v16
- A great fish 1v17
- A great city 3v2
- A great city 3v3
- A great person 3v5
- A great person 3v7
- A great displeasure 4v1
- A great gladness 4v6
- A great city 4v11



## Ruler of all

- Sent out a great wind 1v4
- Prepared a fish 1v17
- Prepared a gourd 4v6
- Prepared a worm 4v7
- Prepared a vehement east wind 4v8



## 'Qara' - Call, cry

- Cry against it 1v2
- Call upon thy God 1v6
- They cried 1v14
- I cried 2v2
- Preach unto it 3v2
- He cried, and said 3v4
- Proclaimed a fast 3v5
- Cry mightily 3v8

Note that verse 17 of chapter 1 is included in chapter 2 as the chapter break more accurately sits after 1v16.

Each chapter has its own chiasmic structure and the central component in each section is the key idea of that section. Together, they tell a remarkable story that highlights the key message of the entire book. We'll get to this in our last study.

## BIBLE MARKING

There are a number of ideas repeated in the book of Jonah, three of which are in the pictures on the left. You may want to colour them in. In many ways, it is a book of extremes, which you can see in the use of the word 'great'. It's not just a city, but a great city, not a wind but a great wind, a great tempest and so forth, more than a dozen times in the book. None, of course, is greater than God, and the lesson Jonan will learn is that His mercy is great also.

His greatness is evident in the control He exerts over the natural elements of the world. God would challenge Job to demonstrate the power He Himself wields and, although He doesn't challenge Jonah in that way, we see God's greatness manifested in His control. All of the things He prepared were that He might prepare the prophet Jonah.

Lastly is the verb 'Qara', which means to call or cry out. It's an extremely common word in the Old Testament, usually translated call (such as 'And God *called* the light day...') or name (as in he named his son...) while here it particularly means to cry out.



## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the British museum is a black, four-sided, limestone obelisk, the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III. It's about 2 metres tall, and depicts, in its 20 panels, the conquests and tributes of the Assyrian empire. One in particular stands out.

The 'Jehu Relief' is the most significant panel because it reveals a bearded Semite, a Jew, in royal garb, bowing with his face to the ground before King Shalmaneser III. Hebrew servants standing behind him bearing gifts for the king.

The cuneiform text around it reveals both the gift bearer and his gifts. It says: "The tribute of Jehu, son of Omri: I received from him silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden vase with pointed bottom, golden tumblers, golden buckets, tin, a staff for a king [and] spears."

This was early in the reign of Jehu, when the Assyrian was powerful and menacing, but there would be days coming when the Assyrians were weaker, distracted by internal rivalries and fighting, preoccupied with the growing pains of an empire.

Following the death of King Adad-nirari III in 783 B.C., the nation was not strong again until Tiglath-pileser III seized the throne in 745 B.C. During this 37-year period, Assyria had difficulty resisting its neighbours to the north, the Urartu mountain tribes, who allied with their neighbours, the people of Mannai and Madai. These invaders pushed the northern border of Assyria south, within 100 miles of Nineveh. With disputes, politics, and invasions of the marauding northern tribes consuming their attention, the Assyrians would leave the Israelites alone.

Under King Solomon Israel had been at the peak of her wealth and size, in the glory days of the Kingdom of Israel. In 1Kgs 8v65 we're told: And at that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation, **from the entering in of Hamath**





**unto the river of Egypt**, before the LORD our God, seven days and seven days, even fourteen days.

Hamath was in the north, beside the sea of Galilee, while the river of Egypt is obviously in the south, meaning the Judah-Egypt border. The scale of the Kingdom was, for the time, remarkable.

Over time however, the kingdom had eroded as Israel fought various battles and ended up under tribute to other nations. But without the oversight or interference of the Assyrians, and with a series of reasonably able kings on the throne, her fortunes took a decided turn for the better. 'Able' kings doesn't mean godly kings, it means *administratively* capable.

So although Jehu had once bowed down to the Assyrian King, they were now untouched by the dominant Assyrians, out of sight and out of mind. Jehu was succeeded by Jehoahaz and then Jehoash. By the time Jehu's great grandson, Jeroboam II, was on the throne, in a reign that would last for 41 years and stretch Jehu's dynasty to a century, the nation of Israel began to grow once more.

At the expense of Syria, Israel was expanding as far northeast as Damascus and as far north as Hamath. Judah was also expanding their territory and profiting from their relationship with Phoenicia, which controlled trade in the Mediterranean world. Its strategic location near the international trade routes, as well as conquests and commerce, accounted for its great affluence. Because of the exorbitant tolls Jeroboam II charged for merchants to travel on Israelite-controlled trade routes, the nation's wealth and power began to rival that of Solomon's kingdom two centuries earlier, which we read of in 1Kgs 8 on the previous page.

Samaria was fertile, and perfectly suited to agriculture, with the valleys delivering wheat and barley, and the hills producing grapes and olives. A fortress sat atop the

capital of Samaria, building programmes flourished, and another golden age beckoned.

Then we read this in 2Kings 14v23-25. In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, and reigned forty and one years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. Here's the important bit, verse 25, ***He restored the coast of Israel... from the entering of Hamath... unto the sea of the plain...***

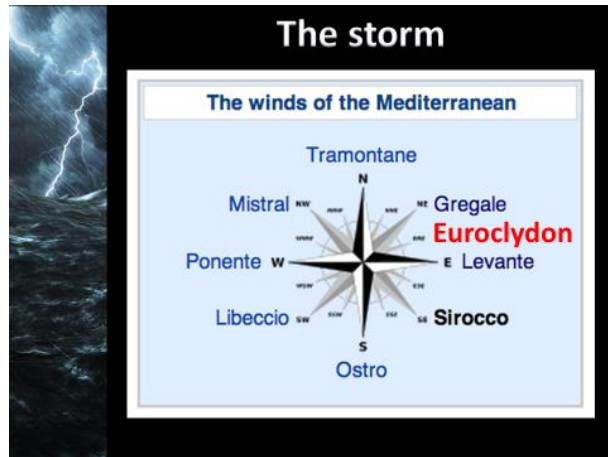
It would have interested Jonah, particularly, because 2Kgs 14v25 continues, He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, *according to the word of the LORD God of Israel... which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher.*

It was Jonah's prophecy.

It promised prosperity, power, strength, expansion and influence and showed God's direct favour on His prophet and His people.

Jonah had been given it directly by Yahweh Elohim of Israel, and he had delivered it, and it had come to pass. It firmly established Jonah as a prophet for the people, a prophet of good tidings.

And it's in this time, in the reign of Jeroboam II, with Israel blossoming as Jonah had promised, and Assyria buckling, when their vulnerable condition would make the king and residents of Nineveh receptive to Jonah's prophetic message, that the word of Yahweh came to Jonah again, to send him, to Nineveh.



## THE STORM

The natural environment is prominent in the story. Hebrews were not seafarers and, generally speaking, they'd not managed to colonise the coast. Consequently, that length of land, even though only 10 to 20 miles wide, became something of a physical barrier, essentially landlocking them.

Jonah could have fled south and gone down into Egypt. He could have fled north and then west around to Greece, but his flight tells where his mind was. So desperate was he to get away from where he thought God might come after him, that he opted for passage on a ship heading across the Mediterranean. This was an option mostly unfamiliar to a Hebrew.

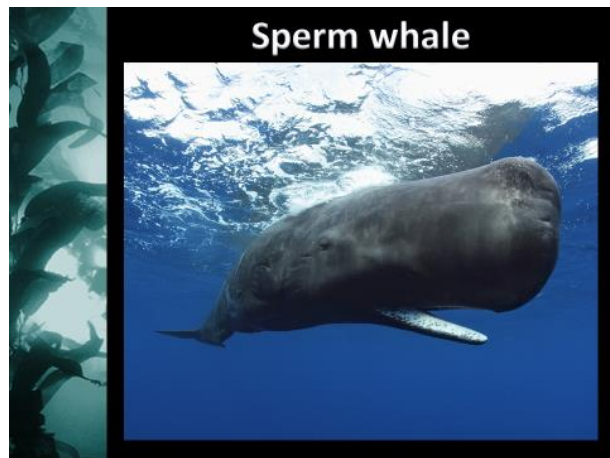
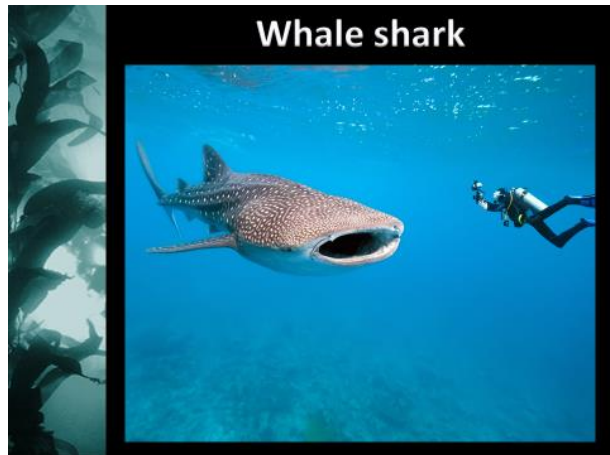
And it was a dangerous option, because Israel, and in fact the peoples of the Near East, believed that the sea was directly controlled by a divine hand. It was a place of chaos and power, and it represented chaotic forces that were beyond the control of man. It was a power that could not be tamed.

Soon after he launched, and with blinding speed, a great wind, a mighty tempest, arose. It's the language of an extreme storm in a book full of extremes. It's a great wind, a fierce Mediterranean storm.

The margin says that God 'cast it forth'. It's the same word used in 1Sam 18v33 and 1Sam 20v11, where in both records we read 'and Saul cast a javelin'. So we imagine the Heavenly Father, dwelling in the temple, hurling an east wind across the blue of the Mediterranean; a shrieking east wind of judgement.

To the sailor, knowing the wind was crucial, and the prevailing wind would change depending on where in the Mediterranean you were. The east wind today is known as the Levante, and from the Northeast, the Gregale, or Gregalia. They're aggressive, with rapid effect.





We know them by another name, for they used to be called Euroclydon, which was the storm that caught Paul in the Book of Acts.

Those who sailed knew it only too well, and we read of it in Ps 107v23-27. *They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end.*

## THE FISH

What kind of fish was it? Typically, it becomes the story of Jonah and the whale, but the word fish is the Hebrew 'dag', which can mean a variety of creatures. There are however, three strong contenders.

First, the whale shark, the largest of all sharks. It's a filter feeder, swimming with its huge mouth open to feed on plankton and the like, churning through 600 tonnes of water an hour. The problem with the whale shark though, is that despite its large mouth and body, it has a small oesophagus, not large enough for a man to fit through from the mouth. Nor are they found in the Mediterranean.

Second, the sperm whale. It's the second largest whale, but the largest toothed whale, and known to swallow food whole, including giant squid and, on occasion, people. Additionally, you can find them in the Mediterranean.

Third, and probably the best choice, is the basking shark (see next page). Also found in the Mediterranean, the basking shark is the second largest shark and a filter feeder like the whale shark.



Swimming at about two knots, mouth wide open, it takes in about 2000 tonnes of water per hour, like a giant aquatic vacuum cleaner. Placid, docile, and not at all afraid of people, he is our best bet. The record is silent because, although interesting, it doesn't matter. It was prepared, timed by God to the second and controlled thereafter. It had to be. In the belly of a whale is gas to breathe, but more methane than anything else. In the belly of a fish there's no oxygen. For Jonah to live, it must be divine.

## **DROWNING**

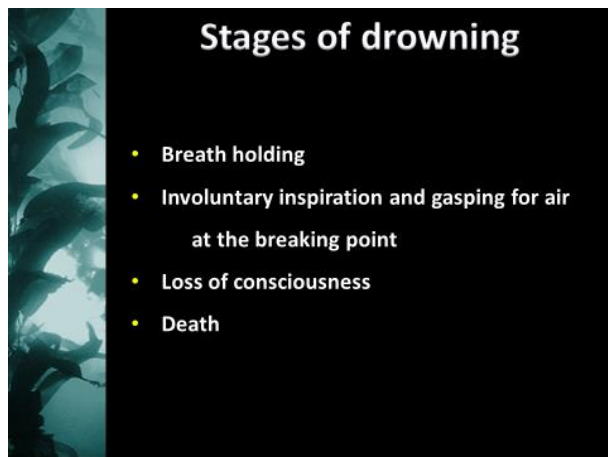
What the text of Jonah chapters one and two does not do is convey *time*.

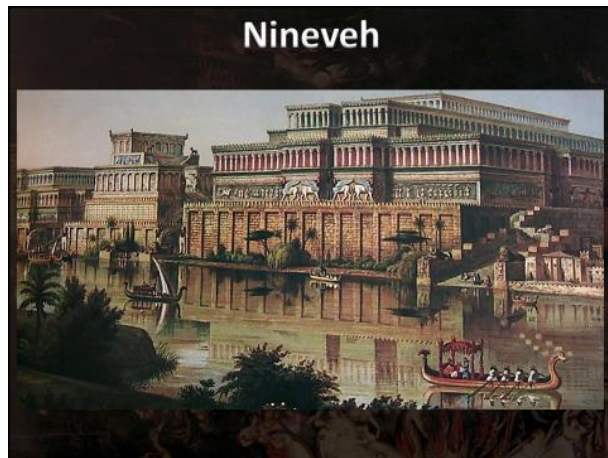
How long did he float on the surface, tossed about, swamped by the waves until he was pulled under? We assume he couldn't swim and, fully clothed, would struggle to stay afloat. It would seem that he went under quite soon. The water was calm, suggesting that he would have been visible to the sailors were he above the water. Key to the water being calmed was that he was 'dead', consumed by the waves.

And how long did it take the fish to arrive? Here we have a reasonably good idea. Remember that Jonah chapter two is Jonah's recollection of what happened as he sank under the water through to when he came to his senses in the fish. In order for that to happen, Jonah must have been conscious as he sank.

A conscious person will reflexively hold their breath the moment they go under the water. Just as Jonah did, we sink, and we go to the bottom, and especially if we're unconscious. Jonah tells us he was caught in weed and current. Weighted by clothing, he sank, holding his breath.

All of us have a natural breathing reflex that will push us to take a breath. While we're holding our breath, the body uses up oxygen in our cells, excreting carbon dioxide.





Increasing carbon dioxide levels lead to a stronger and stronger breathing reflex, up to the *breath-hold breakpoint*, at which the person can no longer voluntarily hold his or her breath. Thence follows a predictable process.

Upon reaching the breath-hold breaking point, we involuntarily inhale, taking in large volumes of water. Some water is swallowed and will be found in the stomach. The involuntary gasping for air under water may continue for several minutes, until respiration ceases. A lack of oxygen, or chemical changes in the lungs, may cause the heart to stop beating. This cardiac arrest stops the flow of blood and thus stops the transport of oxygen to the brain. Reduced oxygen to the brain (called hypoxaemia) either through cardiac arrest or not breathing, leads to cell death and damage. Hypoxaemia becomes anoxia when there is *no* oxygen to the brain. Damage becomes irreversible and death occurs. Except in special circumstances, the brain can only survive without oxygen for six minutes. In most cases, we are unconscious underwater in fewer than three minutes. Maximum time to death is 10 minutes.

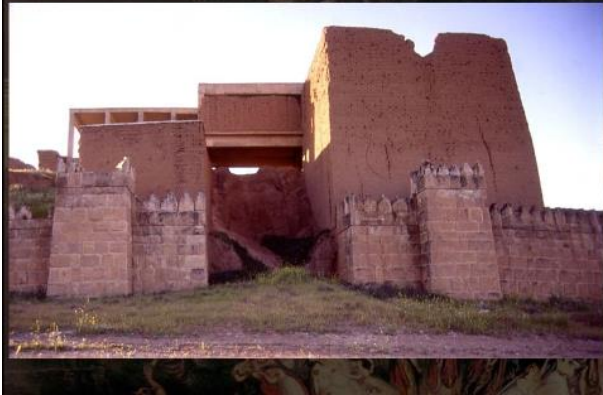
God timed the fish perfectly.

As the fingers of unconsciousness crept over him, he felt the doors of Sheol the prison house closing behind him, the key about to turn in the lock. And like the prison house, once that key was turned, there was no escape.

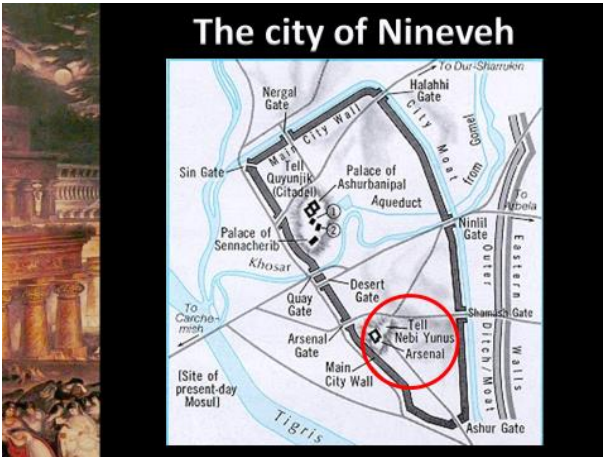
## NINEVEH

Historians tell us Nineveh was a spectacular city, heavily defenced, affluent and sophisticated. She stood on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, with walls 100 feet high, 50 feet thick and more than seven miles long. The total population was probably about 600,000. Two large mounds now represent the ancient city. They are known as

## The restored Adad gate



## The city of Nineveh



Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus, the latter being so named because it is the site of the reputed tomb of the prophet Jonah.

Today it sits in the middle of the Iraqi town of Mosul, surrounded by suburbs. Parts of the city have been restored, such as the Adad gate, which gives us an idea of the scale and grandeur of the city. We're told it's a city of three day's journey.

As it was in those days, the city of Nineveh alone wasn't large enough to qualify for the estimation of three day's journey. That can mean from one side to the other, or around, but, in any event, Nineveh wasn't that big.

The circumference of the city here in this diagram is about seven and a half miles. You can see down the bottom the mound Nebi Yunus where Jonah is allegedly buried. We're given a clue as to its size, and the clue is the phrase 'great city' in Jonah 3v2, which is a link all the way back to Genesis 10v9-12.

*And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, And Resen between Nineveh and Calah: **the same is a great city.***

This is the land of Nimrod, with *four* cities. Nineveh, Rehoboth, Calah and Resen. That group, those four *collectively*, is **the great city** of which Jonah 3v2 speaks. The circumference here is about 60 miles which, at 20 miles a day, is three days.

Jonah knew that the Assyrians were a threat to Israel's national security. You can imagine the range of emotions that he ran through. Nineveh? Shock. Disbelief. Anger. It was the capital of the enemy, the empire founded by Nimrod who directly and defiantly stood against the God of Israel. He knew their threat, and their cruelty. He

knew that if they repented then God would spare them, which is the key reason for his rebellion. But we also know that Jonah was a prophet among other prophets. He was contemporary with Hosea and Amos, and he knew that the word that came to him, came in context.

For the Word had come to Hosea too, and he said this in Hosea 11v5, **He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return.** And the word had come to Amos, and he said this in Amos 5v27, **Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts.**

Oh they were a threat all right, and the word was to Cry against them, to convert and not to condemn. Forgiveness was in the offing for this nation, for the Assyrian, the tool of Yahweh's judgment against Israel, and for whom Jonah now had to intercede. And among all of the things that Jonah could feel, perhaps the one thing he felt most keenly was anger at God.

Amos 6v14 tells us: **But, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith the LORD the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hemath unto the river of the wilderness.** If you remember back to 2Kings 14v25, you'll recall this was the area that Jeroboam II had restored according to the prophecy of none other than the prophet Jonah.

Jonah prophesied they would gain, and Amos prophesied they would lose. And so you wonder if Jonah saw Yahweh as inconsistent. He would offer the Ninevites mercy only to then use them to deliver judgment on Israel. Jonah wants God to be consistent in His messages, and he wants time to turn the hearts of the people. Is God capricious, or duplicitous?



Put yourself in Jonah's shoes and try to imagine what this divine interruption was like. You are enjoying a successful ministry among God's people. You are well known and well appreciated for your celebrated prophecy about restoring the borders of Israel. You feel settled, fulfilled and contented, but now the Word of God disturbs your comfortable 'Christadelphian' life. God is calling you to leave the people you love, move to a new location and venture into an uncertain future. Your assignment is to serve people of another race, who regard you as an enemy, and you are to do this by speaking 'against' the great city of Nineveh. Instead of prophesying blessing on God's people, your new calling is to pronounce judgment on God's enemies. Nothing in this new calling is attractive to you; it all seems like an overwhelming loss.

In addition, there's the famous bigotry of the Jews. There's no escaping it for they were the chosen people, and they thought therefore that nobody else was. And so when he's asked to go, he's confused, and conflicted.

Of all places... Nineveh?

**Gourd: Castor Bean plant**



**Worm: False codling moth**



## THE GOURD

What exactly is the plant, and what is the worm? Opinion differs, but by far the best guess seems to be the *Ricinus Communis*, a common, broad-leafed, fast-growing Mediterranean vine.

In the margin of the AV, you'll note that we're given the words *qiqayon*, and *palmchrist*. The word gourd, *qiqayon* appears only in Jonah 4, while *palmchrist* is better known as the castor bean plant. And that's all we're told about the plant. But we think it *is* the right plant, for we're given a clue in verse 7, and it's the worm.

Now if you're a closet lepidopterist, you'll know what this is. It's the young caterpillar stage of a moth *Thaumatotibia leuco*. And we need to know that because it is the common pest of the castor bean plant, known by its more common name, the false codling moth, which grows to look like the picture on the left.

The reason we're showing you this is we think it shows this is the right worm, and therefore the right plant. Because the word used in Jonah for worm, *tola*, is not usually translated worm, except for about eight times. Another 25 times or so it's used in the book of Exodus in connection, strangely enough, with the tabernacle. In Leviticus and Numbers it's used in relation to cleansing sin. It's more commonly translated as scarlet. And when the false codling moth caterpillar grows, they are crimson, and the chrysalis a scarlet brown.