



Latter-Day Jonahs

In March 1863, a Cape Cod whaler named Peleg Nye fired his bomb lance into a sperm whale, and everyone on board assumed that the whale had been killed. Nye prodded the huge animal with his hand lance, and suddenly the whale slapped its tail and flapped its lower jaw into Nye's boat. Nye fell directly into the whale's mouth.

Scrambling to escape, Nye found himself trapped as the whale closed its great jaws. A sperm whale has teeth only in its lower-jaw, teeth that fit into upper-jaw sockets. Nye was caught by the whale's jaws just below his knees, but the space between the whale's teeth and sockets was large enough to prevent his legs from being crushed.

The whale soon sounded. Nye believed the huge whale reached the bottom of the ocean with him before he breathed in some seawater and lost consciousness.

Luckily, at about the same time, the whale gave up the struggle and floated to the surface, dead. Just before the mammal appeared, Nye's body came to the surface and was taken aboard the whaler. It was a long time before he could be revived, but he finally recovered completely before reaching home. He became known as *the Jonah of Cape Cod*.

An even more remarkable story appeared in a Paris newspaper on March 14, 1896.

On August 25, 1891, the whaling vessel *Star of the East* had come upon a great school of sperm whales. One of the whales, which had been wounded by a bomb lance, seized the boat in its jaws and crushed it in two.

The sailors leaped in all directions to escape. Steersman James Bartley jumped with the others, but just as he leaped the whale made a quick turn in the water, opened its mouth, and caught the falling seaman. The other sailors saw the jaws close over Bartley. Giving him up for lost, they made their way back to the *Star of the East*.

Later in the day a dead whale came to the surface of the ocean. For two days the men worked at removing its blubber. When they finished, it occurred to one of the sailors that the whale they had been working on might possibly be the one that had swallowed Bartley.

After much discussion, the other whalers finally agreed to open the stomach and intestines of the immense animal. As they cut open the stomach, to their amazement and horror they saw the outline of a man through the membranes. Carefully slicing away the muscles, they uncovered the missing sailor, unconscious but still alive.

Moving Bartley with care, the sailors placed him on the deck, rubbed his hands and forced brandy down his throat. His entire body had turned purple, and was smeared with the whale's blood. Working on him in relays, the men soon had Bartley washed and his circulation restored. Then he regained partial consciousness.

At the time of this incident Bartley was a strongly built man of thirty-five years of age. The entire crew swore in writing as to the truth of the story. Bartley later wrote the following in his own words:

I remember very well from the first moment that I jumped from the boat and felt my feet strike some soft substance. I looked up and saw a big-ribbed canopy of light pink and white descending over me, and the next moment I felt myself drawn downward, feet first, and I realized that I had been swallowed by a whale. I was drawn lower and lower: a wall of flesh surrounding me and hemmed me in on every side, yet the pressure was not painful, and the flesh gave way like soft India-rubber before my slightest movement.

Suddenly I found myself in a sack much larger than my body, but completely dark. I felt about me; and my hand came in contact with several fishes, some of which seemed to be still alive, for they squirmed in my fingers. Soon I felt a

great pain in my head, and my breathing became more and more difficult. At the same time I felt a terrible heat; it seemed to consume me, growing hotter and hotter. My eyes became coals of fire in my head, and I believed at every moment that I was condemned to perish in the belly of a whale. It tormented me beyond endurance, while at the same time the awful silence of the terrible prison weighed me down. I tried to rise, to move my arms and legs, to cry out. All action was now impossible, but my brain seemed abnormally clear; and with a full comprehension of my awful fate, I finally lost all consciousness.

Note:

It might be well to review what the Bible says about Jonah. It is not claimed that Jonah was in full possession of his faculties for the three days he was in the whale. We know that he prayed, but it is also probable that he lost consciousness, just as James Bartley did centuries later.

But for tonight . . . what can a man named Jonah, vomited out of a whale's belly . . . preach to us from across the centuries?

Jonah, Preach to Me

Text:

Jonah 1:1-4

- 1 Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,
- 2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.
- 3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.
- 4 But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was

(KJV)

Jonah 3:10-4:3

- 10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

CHAPTER 4

- 1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.
- 2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.
- 3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

(KJV)

The Book of Jonah was recorded approximately 750 years BC.

It focuses on the prophet Jonah and his reluctant ministry to the city of Ninevah:

- Jonah was the only prophet by that name in the O.T., which adds to the fact that he was a type of Christ
- He is referred to as Jonas in the N.T.
- He was the son of Amittai who came from Gath-hepher, some 3 miles NE of Nazareth

- He was a Galilean

Ninevah was a very great city:

- Ninevah was a great city founded by Asshur in the days following the flood of Noah. Asshur came from the realm led by none other than Nimrod.
- Asshur was the second son of Shem. From his name the word Assyria is derived.
- Assyria is known by the Jews as “*the land of Nimrod*”.
- The ruins of greater Ninevah have been studied since their resurrection from the dust in 1843
- It was 30-60 miles across
- The circumference walls were 100 feet high. Three chariots could ride side by side on the walls.
- It was a complex of cities similar to modern New York, including Calah to the south, Resen to the north, and Ninevah proper, and Rehoboth-Ir west of the capital. There were other suburbs also.
- It is estimated that with men, women and children . . . it had a population of over 600, 000 when Jonah preached to them

Jonah’s intent was to get to Tarshish, which was a city on the Southern coast of Spain near Gibraltar. He wanted to get as far away from God’s call as he could. To get there he fled to Joppa, a seaport about 34 miles NW of Jerusalem. From there he would go by ship to Tarshish.

Joppa was a 600 mile journey from Ninevah . . . as the crow flies.

It was the nearest port to Jerusalem.

The Phoenicians carried on quite a trade with the people of Tarshish, and it was probably in one of their ships that Jonah bought passage.

So why would Jonah flee from God’s call?

Why did he place his life, his calling, his ministry in peril?

Why would he flagrantly disobey the Lord?

Oh we’ve preached all about him. We’ve called him:

- A rebel
- A selfish, narrow-minded prophet
- A coward
- A bigot
- Unfaithful
- Unworthy
- Inconsiderate

We’ve spent a lot of sermons telling people, “Don’t be like Jonah!”

We have made him out to be the scoundrel of all scoundrels.

But really . . . WHY DID JONAH DO WHAT HE DID?

- Why did he flee from the presence of God? A place where any prophet of God would desire to be, and yet he fled from it?

That low-life!

That imbecile!

That, not-worthy-to-be-a-prophet, selfish man!

Why was he so WRONG?

I've got a better question for you . . . why have we always been so wrong about Jonah?

Yes, I said WRONG!

Could it be that we have been wrong in condemning him!

Could our Bible school teachers, ministers, pastors, evangelists . . . have been wrong about the motives of the man of God!

Would a man so despicable as we have made him out to be really be allowed to be a sign of the Messiah?

Have we wronged his character, just as the Jews wrongfully accused Jesus?

What really happened there?

What message does Jonah really have to preach to the church today?

Are you ready for the answer?

- **Jonah was a true prophet of God**
- **And prophetically he knew that these very people would soon oppress, defeat and enslave Israel.**
- **And if he went and preached to them, and if they would hear his message and repent, that God would spare them from his wrath.**
- **And if God spared them, eventually they would destroy Israel.**

(And of course they did repent, and God spared them, and in 721 BC King Shalmanesar of Assyria beseiged and starved Samaria for 3 years . . . in a siege so terrible that starving mothers ate their own children . . . and Assyria led the 10 Northern tribes of Israel into a brutal captivity.)

And the two Southern tribes of Judah were led into captivity by Babylon in 586 BC.

Ninevah . . . the Temple of Ishtar was there.

King Sennacherib made it the capital of Assyria.

Jonah loved God!

And he loved Israel with all of his heart!

He was a patriot . . . true and devoted to God's people,

And when God (who is no respecter of persons, and who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance . . .

When God called Jonah to go and preach to the very people that God would use to devastate His own chosen Israel . . .

because Jonah knew what would happen,

Like Jesus to come, he was willing to lay down his life for his friends!

He was willing to lose his calling,

His anointing,

**Forsake his office as a prophet,
And perhaps even lose his own soul . . .
Because he loved God's people so much,
And because he wanted Israel to inherit the promises made to his forefathers . . .
and because he wanted Israel to be saved . . .
he was willing to pay the utmost price and lay down his life!**

Do you love God's people that much? PREACH TO US TONIGHT JONAH!

Do you believe in God's promises that much? PREACH TO US TONIGHT JONAH!

To make a comparison . . . how many of you tonight would give up heaven for somebody or something that you love?
Would you lose your eternal soul if you thought it would save the people in this building?
Jonah was so totally committed, that he was willing to flee from the presence of God:

- Not out of cowardice, but out of boldness
- Not as a rebel, but as a patriot
- Not as someone who did not care, but as someone who cared completely
- Not as an unbeliever, but as a believer

Oh how he must have hurt!

How miserable he must have been?

To walk away from the God you love!

To never again minister to the people you love!

At the total sacrifice of your own self!

It was no surprise to Jonah,

When the people on the ship tried to discover the reason for the great storm.

In chapter 1 verse 9 he said, "I fear the Lord".

In verse 12 he said, "Throw me into the sea and it will be calm. It is because of me that this has happened to you."

Doesn't sound like a coward to me.

Oh how we have preached him wrongly,

And accused him falsely,

BUT MAY JONAH PREACH TO US TONIGHT!

I propose to you tonight,

that perhaps one of our biggest hindrances to evangelism, is the fact that we don't always like the people out there in the world!

Some have been cruel to us.

They will be willing to persecute us, and will in the end times.

We don't fellowship them.

We don't visit them.

We're more comfortable around God's people . . . because we love them.

We believe in the promises of God to them.

So rather than "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature",

- We call our church friends
- We pray for each other
- We entertain each other in our homes
- We eat dinners together
- We meet each other at church
- Because we hate the sins of the world!
- We don't go where they go . . .
- And do what they do . . .

And a whale of a trial comes along and we cry out to God saying, "But God I don't understand. I haven't done anything wrong!"

Perhaps the only thing we have done wrong is flee from preaching to the Ninevah of our day!

Oh PREACH TO ME TONIGHT JONAH!

How many people are saved today because of me?

OH, PREACH TO ME TONIGHT JONAH!

In order to get on a ship to Tarshish, Jonah had to first go to Joppa.

JOPPA was only a few miles from the Philistine city of Ashdod.

Ashdod means RAVAGER.

You may recall that it was there that the Philistines took the Ark of the Covenant when they captured it in battle.

They placed it in the temple before their god, Dagon.

Dagon was the national god of Philistia.

But his origin was from Ninevah!

Dagon was a fish God . . . half man, half fish.

He had the head, hands and upper torso of a man . . . and the body and tail of a fish.

The Babylonians also had versions of the fish god . . . half man, half fish.

And when that whale vomited a bleached purple prophet out on the shore in the land of the fish god,

Word got out!

Here's a man that came up out of the ocean!

He walks and looks like a man!

But he smells like a fish!

And when this man finally got to Ninevah,

Perhaps his reputation preceded him there.

They were willing to hear whatever it was that he had to say.

And if any false god could come alive and preach to its followers, what would it say?

The same thing that the prophet Jonah said . . .

“Hear Oh Ninevah the Word of the Lord . . . repent or perish!”

When he said repent, even the king ordered everyone to repent.

And God spared the entire city.

And that made Jonah mad.

And as he sat there waiting to see what God would do, and getting madder by the minute, he said:

Jonah 3:10-4:3

10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

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3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

(KJV)

There is coming a persecution on the church,

And like it or not there is not going to be an early exit of the church that will automatically exempt you from the wrath of the enemy.

The church has never been appointed unto God's wrath . . . but we have always endured the wrath of the enemy, who in turn is appointed unto God's wrath . . . which makes them lash out at the church more vehemently . . . which brings out the best in God's glorious church.

Persecution is already happening to many Christians in many places in the world.

It happens here in the U.S. in many subversive forms.

Examples:

I was just at the church of a pastor . . .

The only available land to expand in the area is the 10 acres right next door to his church.

His church wanted it . . . and offered the owner (a wealthy doctor) \$50,000 an acre for it as a starting offer.

He put them off for a few years. They were willing to pay much more.

He recently sold it to a new bidder, the leading denominational church in town . . . for \$15K and acre, rather than let the Pentecostals have it!

Perhaps people have hurt you:

- Offended you
- Cheated you

- Lied to you
- Betrayed you
- Cursed you
- Made fun of you

But have you reached out to them in the love of God?

Have we just determined in our own heart to: simply let them get what they deserve?

Have we said in our hearts:

Their day is coming!

Let them burn!

Let them find out the hard way?

I am so glad that I did not get what I deserved!

God was merciful to me.

I was just a sinner before God reached me.

HOW CAN THEY HEAR WITHOUT A PREACHER?

HOW CAN WE PREACH EXCEPT WE BE SENT?

In the Words of Jesus . . .

Mark 2:17

17 When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

(KJV)

Matt 10:6-8

6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

7 And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

(KJV)

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A FEW VISITORS . . . and thank God for them . . . THIS DOES NOT HAPPEN AT CHURCH . . . BECAUSE THE WORLD DOES NOT COME TO CHURCH!

The church is commissioned to go to them!

Jesus stood in the house of a sinner named Zacheus, and said to all who heard:

Luke 19:10

10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

(KJV)

Luke 14:23

23 And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

(KJV)

OH, PREACH TO ME TONIGHT JONAH!

Matt 5:44-48

44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

(KJV)

(SPIT)

OH, PREACH TO ME TONIGHT JONAH!

Matt 5:38-42

38 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.

41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

42 Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

(KJV)

(SPIT)

OH, PREACH TO ME TONIGHT JONAH!

Let us not be so quick to cast accusation at the misunderstood prophet named Jonah.

If we loved God as much as Jonah did,

And if we loved what God loves as much as Jonah did,

Our evangelistic results would be incredibly different.

After all:

How many of us have reached up to 600, 000 men, women and babies in one evangelistic effort?

CLOSING:

Can we ever learn to be like Paul, and be happy with whatever situation of life and circumstances that we are in?

Can we see the things that happen to us as doors of opportunity?

Whether we abound or are abased . . . God can work in our situation!

1. I once knew a man who had cancer. He did not want to be in that hospital, nor did he want to be sick. But he won a young man to the Lord shortly before the young man died.

2. A man in the church I used to pastor was impressed by the Lord to pick up a hitch-hiker, and the man did not want to . . . but because he did the hitch-hiker today is full of the Holy Ghost and working in a bus ministry.
3. I have a loved one living for God today that I used to stop by and visit her in a beer joint, always only minutes after preaching somewhere, and I'd just drink a coke and tell her that I and God loved her . . . and today she is living for God. I didn't care to be in that beer joint, but I did what I knew God wanted me to do!

If we come up out of the water,

And we are markedly different than the way we were before.

Our testimony will go before us.

We might be surprised just who would listen to us if we would just give them an opportunity.

OH, PREACH TO ME TONIGHT JONAH!