



## The Prophets, the Prophet Jonah, & God's Heart for the World

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Two well-known prophets from 1 and 2 Kings, Elijah and Elisha, didn't provide any written contributions to Scripture, but many after them did.

- Prophets to the northern kingdom before the Assyrian invasion: Hosea and Amos
- Prophets to the southern Kingdom before the Babylonian captivity: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah
- Prophets to other nations: Jonah and Nahum (Nineveh of Assyria), Obadiah (Edom)

Much of the Old Testament is the writings of those prophets calling God's people back to God and their mission of telling the nations of the One True God.

Sometimes, God would take one of His prophets and send them directly to the nations that needed to hear the truth.

One such prophet was Jonah, and one such nation was the nation of Assyria, and the city of Nineveh.

(In the book of Jonah, we see a lot about the heart of God for the world, and we also see a glimpse of the heart of one of his prophets that doesn't feel the same way.)

*Jonah 1:1-3 The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me." But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. 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."*

Nineveh was the capital city of the evil empire of Assyria.

By the time Jonah became a prophet, the Assyrians had about a hundred years' worth of atrocities under their belts. They were not only barbarians, they were a sick nation who reveled in the mutilation and live dismemberment of their enemies.

Nineveh had no shame, no conscience, no moral compass, no compassion. Every nation around them, including Israel, feared them, hated them, and knew it was only a matter of time until the Assyrians broke down their gates.

The fact that Jonah wanted to stay clear of Nineveh seemed a wise decision to anyone who lived in the region. But God was determined to get Jonah to Nineveh.

*Jonah 1:4-7 – "And 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. 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. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down, and fallen sound asleep. 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." And 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."*

Now the sailors knew who the problem was, but they didn't know why. So, Jonah explained why.

*Jonah 1:10-12 – "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. 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. And 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."*

The storm was a matter of Jonah's disobedience to the call and mission of God. God sent the storm to get Jonah back on track.

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

Jonah discovered that a fish's belly provides a good place to reconsider the call of God, so he asked for another chance to obey. That's all God was waiting to hear, so the fish vomited Jonah onto dry land.

God gives Jonah a second chance.

*Jonah 3:1-2 – "Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD."*

With shaky nerves, Jonah marched into the city and preached the shortest sermon in history.

*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.””*

The message of Nineveh’s coming demise was all he had to say. He gave the message at every block for a day, then left to make camp on a hill that overlooked the city.

Word of Jonah’s message and word of the strange Hebrew prophet got around, and the people repented of their sins.

*Jonah 3:5–9 — “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. When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on the ashes. And he issued a proclamation and it said, “In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. “But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. “Who knows, God may turn and relent, and withdraw His burning anger so that we shall not perish?””*

The king got up off of his throne, tore off his royal robes, slipped into some sackcloth, and sat in a pile of ashes. The king decreed that all of Nineveh should repent, and do as he did, and that even the livestock should fast and wear sackcloth.

“Who knows,” said the king who was used to controlling things but knew he couldn’t control this, “maybe God will turn from his anger and spare us after all.”

*Jonah 3:10 — “When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.”*

God, who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but would rather them turn to Him and live, saw the repentance in Nineveh, heaved a sigh of relief, and cancelled their impending doom.

*Jonah 4:1 — “But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry.”*

Jonah believed the only good Ninevite was a dead Ninevite, so he sulked and felt sorry for himself.

But God loved Jonah and wanted to help him understand. God caused a plant to grow up and shade Jonah from the harsh sun and the scorching desert wind. Jonah liked the plant. He smiled for the first time in days.

*Jonah 4:5–6 — “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. So the LORD God appointed 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. “*

*Jonah 4:7 — “But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day, and it attacked the plant and it withered.”*

*Jonah 4:9–11 — “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.” 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. 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?””*

The Ninevites aren’t the enemy, they are *victims* of the enemy.

Jonah’s story ends with a question. God is asking, “Should I not have compassion on all people, even evil people?”

God relents at Nineveh’s repentance and saves them instead of destroying them. This is God seeking and saving the lost.

No sinner is too vile, no sinner too far gone for God’s long arm of salvation to reach them.

The story ends without us knowing whether or not Jonah ever changed.

**Are you at all like Jonah?**

**Are there certain people that you would rather see judged than saved?**