

Book of Jonah

Jonah: Introduction

The name of this prophet means —dove. He was the son of Amittai (meaning: —my truth; that is, —the truth of Yahuwah). His home was Gath-hepher, a town in Zebulun in the district of Galilee.

Jonah's service as a prophet of Yahuwah is documented in scripture as occurring during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (793-753 B.C.).

2KI 14:25 He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of Yahuwah Aluhym of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hepher.

Timeframe

According to Assyrian history, the series of events described in this book occurred shortly after the death of Adad-nirari III in 782 B.C. It was during this period that Assyria was attempting to defend its northern border from incursions by the Urartu Kingdom.

Purpose

This book is unlike any of the other prophetic books in that it lacks specific prophecies for the Time of the End. It is primarily the story about the interaction between a patient, merciful and a recalcitrant one of His prophets, and the eventual reprieve of a large, wicked city that Yahuwah had condemned.

There are several purposes for the preservation of this unusual prophetic book. The one best known is that the length of time Jonah spent in the belly of the great fish was a type of the length of time Amanuwal would spend in the tomb—from the burial of His body until He left the tomb at the ending of the Sabbath.

MAT 12:38-40 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, —Teacher, we want to see a sign from You. But He answered and said to them, —An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Other reasons for this book to be part of Kadosh Scripture will become evident as the story unfolds.

Placement

Yahuwah inspired the placement of this book immediately after Obadiah for an important reason. Because Obadiah predicts the annihilation of the adult males of the descendants of a non-Israelite people, and the utter destruction of that people's national or tribal identity, some could draw the mistaken conclusion that Yahuwah reserves compassion and mercy only for Israel. The story of Jonah sets the record straight: Yahuwah can and does show compassion and extends mercy to those who obey Him regardless of their descent.

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Interpretation

Some have attempted to interpret this book allegorically, and regard Jonah as a type of the nation of Israel. This view is based upon several parallels between the two:

1. Jonah was chosen by Yahuwah to be a witness to another nation by speaking to them; Israel was chosen by Yahuwah to be a witness to all nations by living Yahuwah's way and thereby being an example.
2. Jonah initially refused to do what Yahuwah instructed him to do and went in a different direction; Israel initially refused to obey Yahuwah, choosing to go in a different direction by copying the example of the nations cut off from Him.
3. Jonah was removed from and carried away from the life he had when swallowed by the great fish; Israel was removed from life in the Land of Promise and carried away into exile.
4. Jonah was humbled while cut off from the world he knew; Israel will be humbled while being cut off from the land of Israel.
5. Jonah was returned to his land after being humbled; the remnant of all of Israel's tribes will be returned to the land of Israel after being humbled through the tribulation brought onto the world during the Day of the Yahuwah.

Although this allegorical interpretation does contain some correct parallels, the entire book cannot be allegorical.

1:1 Now the word of Yahuwah came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

Amittai

As noted earlier, —Amittai means —the truth of Yahuwah. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that the name of his father not only portrays Jonah's dedication in delivering Yahuwah's message, but also depicts Jonah's forthrightness. *He was blunt and to the point. He was honest. When called upon to give account, he spoke whatever was on his mind.*

1:2 Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim judgment upon it; for their wickedness has come before Me [MOF: and thunder in their ears that their wickedness is known to Me]. (TNK)

Nineveh

Nineveh was situated on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, directly across the river from the modern-day city of Mosul, Iraq. Nineveh was always a chief city of the Assyrians. According to classical writers it was the largest city in the known world of that day—larger even than Babylon. At the time of the events recorded in this book, the city and the smaller towns located outside its walls had a population between 600,000 and 1,000,000.

Yahuwah required Jonah to inform the Assyrians of Nineveh that their conduct had degenerated so much that Yahuwah could not allow them to continue to exist. Their wickedness was

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comparable to that of the pre-Flood world (GEN 6:5, 13), and of Sodom and Gomorrah (GEN 18:20-21).

1:3 Jonah, however, started out to flee to Tarshish from Yahuwah's service. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid the fare and went aboard to sail with the others to Tarshish, away from the service of Yahuwah. (TNK)

Tarshish

According to the Greek historian, Herodotus, Tarshish was the city of Tartessus located in southern Spain. Jonah was attempting to sail west along the entire Mediterranean, heading in the opposite direction of Nineveh.

Jonah's Reaction

Jonah's reaction to Yahuwah's direction was entirely different from that of Amos. Amos said he had been caring for sheep and tending trees when Yahuwah called him and sent him to prophesy to Israel, at which time he did exactly as he was instructed (AMO 7:14-16).

Jonah knew the Assyrians were a warmongering people who used inhumane violence against the people they conquered. From Israel's past encounters with Assyria, he knew they were the type of people Yahuwah could use to punish the Northern Kingdom of Israel for its sins. In fact, being a prophet of Yahuwah, he was probably very much aware of the prophecy contained in the curse Yahuwah pronounced through the prophet Ahijah during the reign of Jeroboam I:

IKI 14:15-16 —For Yahuwah will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the [Euphrates] River, because they have made their wooden images [Asherah], provoking Yahuwah to anger. And He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and who made Israel sin.

The Assyrians were the dominant power beyond the Euphrates River, and Jonah, believing that they would fulfill this curse, desired to see them destroyed. As he reveals later in the story (4:2), Jonah knew Yahuwah would be merciful and remove the judgment announced against them. Therefore, he wanted no part of warning the Assyrians of Yahuwah's displeasure with them.

1:4 Then Yahuwah sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. (NIV)

Violent Storm

This was no ordinary storm; it was much more severe than any that the sailors had previously experienced and arose suddenly. By this action, Yahuwah reveals that no one can escape from doing His service.

1:5 All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. (NIV)

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Sailors' gods

Most of the sailors were probably Phoenicians from different areas, so they worshipped various idols.

Sleeping

If Jonah had traveled from Gath-hepher to Joppa as quickly as possible, he must have been worn out from making his escape, which might explain how he could sleep through the turbulence encountered by the ship.

1:6 The captain went to him and said, —How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe He will take notice of us, and we will not perish. (NIV)

—Call on Yahuwah

Since the pagan sailors were not certain which one of the many gods they believed to exist was upset with them and responsible for their current plight, the captain ordered Jonah to appeal to the one he worshipped.

1:7 Then the sailors said to each other, —Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity. They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. (NIV)

Who was Responsible?

In this region, serious storms occurred only during the winter season. No ship captain would attempt to sail to the western Mediterranean from Joppa during that time of year, but would —winter in harbor until the stormy season passed (ACT 27:9-12). Therefore this violent, unseasonal storm caused the sailors to deduce that someone on the ship was responsible for their dilemma, and they intended to find the guilty party. Yahuwah made certain that their method of discovery pointed to Jonah.

1:8 They said to him, —Tell us, you who have brought this misfortune upon us, what is your business? Where have you come from? What is your country, and of what people are you? (TNK)

Their questions were an attempt to understand whether Jonah had displeased Yahuwah, and if so, how. They wanted to know if the storm was the result of the justified anger of Yahuwah, or if the storm had been sent by one of their gods who perhaps was bored and desired entertainment by watching them struggle.

1:9 —I am a Hebrew, he replied. —I worship Yahuwah, the Aluhym of Heaven, who made both sea and land. (TNK)

Jonah informed them that he was a servant of Yahuwah who made the sea, which at that moment was about to destroy their ship.

1:10 Then he told them that he was running away from Yahuwah. The sailors were terrified when they heard this. —Oh, why did you do it? they groaned. (NLT)

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They were horrified that he would knowingly disobey such a powerful god.

1:11 The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, —What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us? (NIV)

Rather than do anything to Jonah that might further upset Yahuwah and, aware that only Jonah would know what would appease Yahuwah, they appealed to him to offer a solution that would save their lives.

1:12 He answered, —Heave me overboard, and the sea will calm down for you; for I know that this terrible storm came upon you on my account. (TNK)

Jonah was willing to be sacrificed in order to save those who were about to die.

1:13 Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. (NIV)

Sailors' Reaction

Rather than immediately throwing the Hebrew foreigner overboard, the pagan sailors did their best to try and save him. In so doing, they showed far more concern for his solitary life than Jonah showed for the lives of hundreds of thousands of Assyrians. But the harder they worked to try to save themselves, the more vicious the storm became.

1:14 Then they cried out to Yahuwah: —Oh, please, Yahuwah, do not let us perish on account of this man's life. Do not hold us guilty of killing an innocent person! For You, O Yahuwah, by Your will, have brought this about. (TNK)

Before hurling Jonah into the sea, to what they expected would be his certain death, the sailors all appealed to Yahuwah not to hold them responsible for what they understood to be the fulfillment of Yahuwah's will.

1:15 Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm [TNK: stopped raging]. (NIV)

Yahuwah's Answer

The Hebrew literally says the sea —stood—the water immediately ceased its turbulence. Can you imagine a wave so large? Such a dramatic event astonished the sailors.

1:16 The men feared Yahuwah greatly; they offered a sacrifice to Yahuwah and they made vows. (TNK)

The response of the sailors indicated they believed Yahuwah had indeed power over the sea and wind, but there is no indication that they planned to cease worshipping their supposed gods and idols.

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1:17 Now Yahuwah had prepared [TNK: provided; NAS: appointed] a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

A Great Fish

The proximity of this fish was as much a miracle as the starting and stopping of the savage storm. Yahuwah guided events so that this special fish was in readiness once Jonah was thrown into the sea. It is possible that this fish was created just for this purpose, but is also possible it was a specimen of an existing species that Yahuwah caused to grow to an abnormally large size so that it could swallow a man. (Whales are known to be in this area, ever.) Yahuwah either miraculously supplied fresh air within Jonah's lungs, or He designed the fish with a cavity, free of liquid, large enough for Jonah to have air to breathe while in its belly. Yahuwah also protected Jonah from being digested, either by suppressing the natural release of digestive enzymes in the fish's belly, or by encasing Jonah in a protective coating, or perhaps by a process akin to His miraculous protection of Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace (DAN 3:23-27).

Being enclosed in darkness within the fish, under the surface of the water, was a type of being buried in a tomb. This was the analogy Amanuwal used when He connected the length of time Jonah was inside the fish to the length of time His body would remain in the tomb: three days and three nights (MAT 12:40).

Jonah Chapter 2

2:1 Then Jonah prayed to Yahuwah his Aluhym from the fish's belly.

Praying

Jonah had plenty of time—three days and three nights—to reconsider the choices he had made which had brought him to his present circumstances. He no doubt spent many hours meditating and praying, yet the only prayer preserved is the one he uttered in thanksgiving at the end of the 72 hours.

2:2 He said: —In my distress I called to Yahuwah, and He answered me. From the depths of the grave [NKJ: Out of the belly of Sheol] I called for help, and You listened to my cry. (NIV)

This summarizes Jonah's contact with Yahuwah throughout the unfolding of the events over the three-day period, beginning with his being thrown into the raging sea. The prayer catalogues all that Yahuwah had done for Jonah and would yet perform for him. Jonah considered his deliverance from death to have been already accomplished while he remained inside the great fish. This mindset reveals the level of faith that Jonah possessed; being a recipient of Yahuwah's favor, Jonah had been given the faith of Yahuwah.

ROM 4:17 ... Yahuwah, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did;

Jonah's prayer of thanksgiving is full of allusions to many psalms, showing that he was very knowledgeable of the Kadosh Scriptures that were then in existence.

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2:3 You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all Your waves and breakers swept over me. (NIV)

Jonah saw Yahuwah's hand in everything that had occurred: Yahuwah had caused the storm to rise, had guided the casting of lots so that Jonah was chosen, had prevented the sailors from rowing back to shore, had calmed the raging sea, had provided the fish that swallowed him to save him from drowning, and was, at the time of this prayer, preserving him alive inside the belly of the fish.

2:4 Then I said, I have been cast out of Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your Kadosh temple.'

From the moment he went under the water he was confident that, should he die, Yahuwah would grant him life again.

2:5 The engulfing waters threatened [TNK: closed in over] me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. (NIV)

The longer he was in the water, the more dire his circumstances became; currents were pulling him down, entangling him in seaweed. He was only seconds from death when the fish swallowed him.

2:6 I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O Yahuwah, my Aluhym.

Within the belly of the fish, Jonah went to depths so great that human rescue would have been impossible. He was so far removed from the atmosphere that he felt himself locked in the prison of the realm of death with no hope of escape. However, in the face of certain death and the destruction of his body, Jonah was saved from the grave of the sea.

2:7 When my life was ebbing away, I remembered You [NKJ: the], Yahuwah, and my prayer rose to You, to Your kadosh temple. (NIV)

As he was about to lose consciousness in the moments before drowning, he called out to Yahuwah in heaven; pleading for forgiveness and deliverance.

2:8 Those who cling to false gods may abandon their loyalty [NAS: forsake their faithfulness], (REB)

2:8 Those who heed vain idols leave their real refuge, (MOF)

The emphasis of the REB and NAS translations of this verse is that those who pledge loyalty to and worship false gods can be compelled to desert them when they feel their idols have failed to help them. The emphasis of the MOF translation is that all who look to idols for help have deserted the only One who actually is, and has the power to come to their aid.

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2:9 But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation [TNK: Deliverance] is of the Yahuwah.

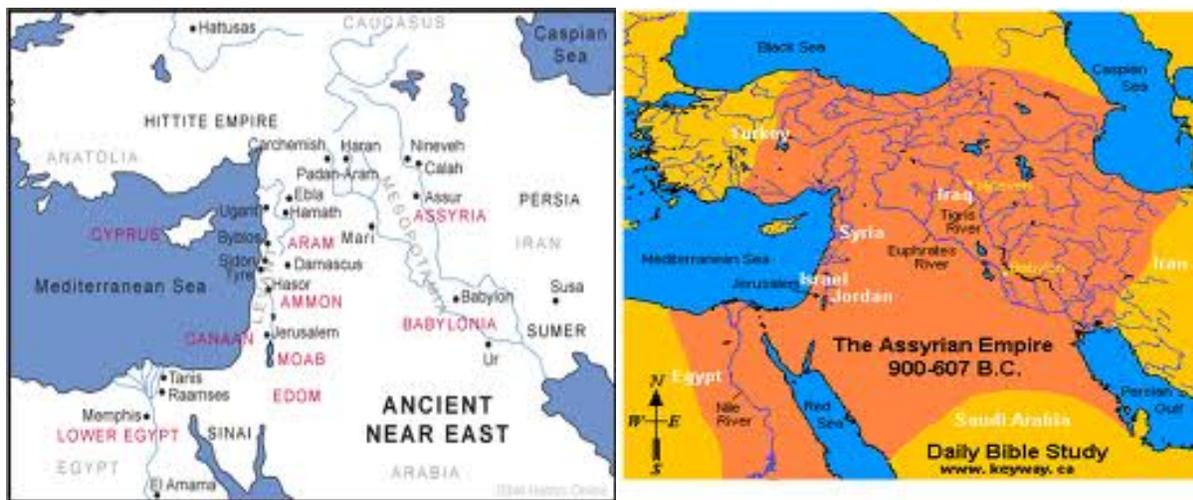
Pay My Vows

Unlike the worshippers of false gods, Jonah continued to cling to Yahuwah without hesitation—never looking elsewhere for help. Jonah knew he deserved no mercy for attempting to run away from the responsibility that Yahuwah had given him. But, because he worshipped the true Aluhym and knew how merciful Yahuwah is, he knew he could receive Yahuwah’s mercy if he admitted and repented of his error. What he vowed during the time of his confinement would have included a commitment to carry out what Yahuwah had commissioned him to do.

Jonah knew that it was Yahuwah who is our deliverer – our salvation.

2:10 So Yahuwah spoke to [TNK: commanded] the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

The actual location where Jonah was discharged is unknown. However, since the territory of the Assyrian Empire extended to the coastal region of the northeastern Mediterranean, it is a reasonable assumption that he was ejected from his submarine transport somewhere in that area.



It is also possible that there were witnesses to this event. Since the people of Mesopotamia worshipped the fish god Oannes (known as Dagon in Philistia), if any of them were witnesses, they would have supposed that Jonah was sent by Oannes, and word may well have reached Nineveh before Jonah himself did.

Jonah Chapter 3

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

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Arise, Go!

We are not told whether Jonah was allotted any time for recuperation, or if this command was issued immediately after his release. If he was vomited out of the fish onto Assyrian territory, he was three days closer to Nineveh than when he left Joppa.

Note: *The Word of Yahuwah* came to Jonah.

3:3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the *Word of Yahuwah*. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent [NAS: a three days' walk].

Jonah responded to Yahuwah's command without hesitation this time, in accordance with the vow he had made while still inside the great fish.

Nineveh

According to the historian, Diodorus Siculus, who used records and accounts that had been preserved from the time of Jonah, Nineveh was described as a city that was sixty miles in circumference. The walls were one hundred feet tall and wide enough for three chariots to be pulled side by side.

The city was large enough that it would take *three days to walk completely around it*. The emphasis of —a three-day journey in extent is on the size of the city—not on the amount of time Jonah would need to deliver Yahuwah's message - A city that size would be much too large to cover thoroughly in three days.

3:4 And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, —Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!

Warning

The primary message was: the total destruction of Nineveh was already determined and the time of its demise already appointed. There may have been more to what Jonah preached, if what Josephus wrote is accurate; he records that Jonah —went to the city of Nineveh, where he stood so as to be heard; and preached, that in a very little time they should lose the dominion of Asia... (Antiquities of the Jews, IX.X.2).

3:5 So the people of Nineveh believed Yahuwah, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them [MOF: highest to the lowest].

Ninevites' Reaction

The scripture does not imply they turned to Yahuwah and became Yahuwah-fearing people; only that they believed what His prophet declared He had said, and were willing to do whatever they could to abate the anger of Jonah's god. The people of Nineveh listened to, believed and acted on the message of Yahuwah that was brought to them by Jonah. It was their manner of responding that Amanuwal later commended when chiding the Jews who refused to respond to the message He brought to them.

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MAT 12:41 —The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.

One reason they were so quick to heed the message delivered by Jonah was the impending threat of the army of the Urartu Kingdom in the north. It had advanced southward to less than one hundred miles from Nineveh. When the Ninevites considered the distance, they believed the city could easily be reached in forty days. Also, if there were witnesses to Jonah's expulsion from the great fish, his credibility would be very high among the pagan Assyrians who worshipped the fish god.

3:6-7 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, —Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water.

It is stated here that the king decreed that all people and animals fast, yet verse 5 suggests that the people were already fasting. There is no oversight or contradiction in these verses; many times in Hebrew narrations the effect or outcome is mentioned first, and then the cause for the outcome is mentioned later.

The reason animals were required to go without food was that they were considered to be full members of the community. When the people of the city did something, the animals were required to do it too. This inclusion of the animals was to prove to Yahuwah of Jonah how serious they were. Every member of the community would be required to participate because every member of the community stood to lose his, her or its life if Yahuwah did not change His mind.

3:8 But both man and beast [NRS: animals] must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on Yahuwah earnestly [NIV: urgently] that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence [TNK: injustice] which is in his hands. (NAS)

All were required to humble themselves and change the way they viewed themselves and others. Because of the extension of their power and dominance over other peoples, the Assyrians perceived themselves as superior to all others and therefore treated all non-Assyrians with disdain, as subhuman. This command of the king for every man and beast to fast was so out-of-character for an Assyrian leader that we can suppose such a recommendation must have been included in the message Jonah delivered.

3:9 Who knows? Yahuwah may relent and change His mind [NLT: have pity on us]; He may turn from His fierce anger, so that we do not perish. (NRS)

These carnal people were sincere; they hoped to receive Yahuwah's mercy.

3:10 Yahuwah saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways. And Yahuwah renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon them, and did not carry it out. (TNK)

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Jonah Chapter 4

Yahuwah's Mercy

Yahuwah showed compassion to these Gentiles because they were willing to do what He had asked: to turn from their cruel ways, to stop plundering and brutalizing other peoples for no other reason than that they enjoyed hurting and murdering them.

4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.

Jonah's Reaction

Why was Jonah so upset? Because he realized that his homeland was doomed now that the Assyrians had received the compassion of Yahuwah.

Isa 10:5 O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation.

4:2 So he prayed to Yahuwah, and said, —Ah, Yahuwah, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful Aluhym, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, One who relents from doing harm [TNK: renouncing punishment].

Jonah was upset with Yahuwah's decision because it was contrary to what Jonah thought should be done. He was convinced that Yahuwah was wrong to show mercy to the bloodthirsty, cold-hearted Assyrians. Jonah had been very thankful for the mercy Yahuwah had showed him when he was saved from drowning and delivered from certain death after he repented of his original disobedience. Yet, he felt the Ninevites should be denied that same mercy even though they had humbled themselves and repented of the error of their ways.

Up to this point in the story, it has been clear that Jonah had faith; he had trusted that Yahuwah always knows best and acts accordingly. However, it is now clear that Jonah wanted Yahuwah to do things the way he thought best. He wanted Yahuwah to be in his image rather than he being in Yahuwah's.

4:3 Please, Yahuwah, take my life, for I would rather die than live. (TNK)

Jonah was now sulking because things had not gone the way he had wanted.

4:4 Then Yahuwah said, —Is it right for you to be angry?

Yahuwah's Reaction

Yahuwah now continues the extension of His mercy in dealing with Jonah. He did not chastise him for his attitude. Instead, He patiently worked with Jonah in a merciful manner. He began by asking Jonah to consider whether the way he felt about how Yahuwah should act was justifiable.

4:5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.

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Hopeful Jonah

This was Jonah's response to Yahuwah's question. Possibly, he hoped the Ninevites would quickly revert to their old ways and Yahuwah would yet destroy them. Or, perhaps he stubbornly thought that when Yahuwah saw how determined he was to have Yahuwah do things his way, maybe Yahuwah would change His mind and destroy the city for the sake of His prophet.

4:6 And Yahuwah Aluhym prepared a plant [NIV: provided a vine] and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery [TNK: discomfort]. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant.

The Plant

It is believed that this was a ricinus plant, which has large leaves, grows quickly and reaches a height of around nine feet. Yahuwah provided this plant as an act of compassion for Jonah's physical well-being, and Jonah appreciated the compassion he was shown.

4:7 But as morning dawned the next day Yahuwah prepared [TNK: provided; NAS: appointed] a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered.

The next stage of Yahuwah's act of mercy was done for Jonah's spiritual well-being; it required physical discomfort.

4:8 When the sun rose, Yahuwah provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, —It would be better for me to die than to live. (NIV)

From the details given, the time this story took place was in the hot season in Mesopotamia, when the average daily temperature is around 110 degrees F. An east wind can raise the temperature by up to 20 degrees. Jonah was experiencing a blast furnace.

4:9 But Yahuwah said to Jonah, —Do you have a right to be angry about the vine [NKJ: plant; NLT: because the plant died]? —I do, he said. —I am angry enough to die. (NIV)

Jonah had feelings of sorrow over the loss of the plant because of the benefit he had received from it while it was alive.

4:10 But Yahuwah said, —You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night.

Yahuwah's Explanation

Yahuwah had mercifully led Jonah to the point of admitting that he felt the plant should have been spared. Now, Jonah's mind was prepared for Yahuwah to show him how his desire to have the plant survive was comparable to Yahuwah's desire to allow the people of Nineveh to live.

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4:11 And should I not pity [NAS: have compassion on] Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons [MOF: infants] who cannot discern between their right hand and their left, and also much livestock?

Unlike Jonah (who did nothing to bring about the existence of the plant for which he felt pity when it died, preferring that it could have remained alive for his own sake, rather than the plant's), Yahuwah had overseen the creation of the Assyrian people, had nurtured them and had great plans for them in the future (ISA 19:24).

Those not able to —discern between their right hand and their left were possibly infants. From this number of young children defined in this way, the total population of Nineveh at that time has been estimated to be at least 600,000.

The Outcome for Assyria

The outcome of the message delivered by Jonah was a period of over thirty years during which the Assyrian Empire ceased aggressive actions against other nations. Not until after the beginning of the rule of Tiglath-pileser III in 745 B.C. did the Assyrians again use their armies for invading and plundering other peoples.

However, from that time on the Assyrians did not exterminate the people they conquered, which seems to have been their practice prior to Jonah's delivery of Yahuwah's message. Instead, they removed the conquered people from their land and scattered them in other parts of the Assyrian Empire.

In essence, the events recorded in this book prepared the Assyrians for the role Yahuwah had in store for them: to carry out the exile of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, in fulfillment of the curse they brought upon themselves by disobeying the terms of the Sinai Covenant (DEU 28:63; 1KI 14:15-16).

One Last Message for Us

Another important lesson contained within this book of Jonah is that the prophets of Yahuwah were men of compassion and emotion—subject to the same passions as we are (JAM 5:17). They were not perfect any more than any of us. We see that Yahuwah exhibited great patience in the case of Jonah, as with His other prophets, and just as He now mercifully does with all of us.