

THE BOOK OF JONAH

Lesson 1, Introduction

Within its mere 4 chapters Jonah presents one of the more complex, controversial, and difficult books among all the Prophets to interpret. This might seem counter-intuitive since the story is one of the first that Jewish and Christian children are taught, and the story of Jonah is portrayed as a simple if not fun sea adventure of a man falling overboard from a ship and getting swallowed by a whale, but miraculously surviving in the innards of that giant creature for 3 days and 3 nights. So, while the title of the Bible book we're about to study is Jonah; and while on the surface the primary subject of this little but powerful book might seem to most naturally center on the question of what exactly happened to the Prophet Jonah and what was he *really* like (by means of seeing how he reacted to God's command to go and preach to gentiles in Nineveh and all the misadventures that followed), the much more important and serious question that is actually being asked, and revealed to us, is: what is **God** *really* like? What makes God tick? Why does He do as He does? What, when we boil it all down, best epitomizes God in a way we can comprehend Him, characterize Him, and then explain Him to others? I'm speaking neither of His substance nor His shape, but rather of His truest nature that is best exposed in how He operates...not theoretically, but in reality... throughout time and history, and therefore (presumably) throughout the future and into eternity.

I opened with this thought because quite often in commentaries and academic monologues about the Book of Jonah (of which there are hundreds and hundreds), the premise is regularly made that the central theme of Jonah is a little hazy and difficult to identify. The confusion, I believe, comes by focusing attention too much on trying to dissect the person and actions of Jonah, instead of noticing the character and purpose of the God he is reacting to. Like any good story, there are multiple literary elements involved in the telling that revolve around the main characters. However, the elements themselves surrounding Jonah are not the point; rather they are but vehicles for transporting us to the author's point. The reality is that most narrative in the Bible is given to us in the form of expression that is usually less direct as to its precise meaning and application than we wish it might be. We would of course prefer to encounter a series of bold and unmistakably explicit statements about morals and ethics or

ideology or even human psychology that would make discerning a passages' meaning far easier for us. Many Bible scholars say that Jonah is the most extreme example of this problem among all the Bible books of the Old Testament. As one might suspect, then, the ancient as well as the modern Hebrew scholars have different views of what this book is teaching us, with each viewpoint based upon which element of the story they see as the most important one that conveys to us the ultimate point of this story of Jonah. My job, then, will be to help untangle all this, and to distill all these viewpoints down into the single most likely one. And then, staying within the context of the time and culture it was created and who the intended audience was to be, see if we can learn from it the lesson that Yehoveh wants us, His worshippers, to know and to practice it in our own lives.

So...who is Jonah? The first verse of the book clearly identifies the person of Jonah as being the "son of Amittai". One of the things to understand about biblical Hebrew names is that when a name like Jonah son of Amittai (in Hebrew, Yonah Ben Amittai), or later even like Paul of Tarsus, these are not complete names with both a first name and a surname or family name or what we in the West tend to call "last name". The use of last names didn't come into use among Hebrews until centuries later and was really more about their eventual assimilation into Roman culture. Rather, at the time when the Bible was written, when the number of Israelites had grown exponentially and there were so many men and women with the same given names, adding "son or daughter of so and so" was a way of narrowing down WHICH local family someone belonged to. But even then, as one can imagine, there were duplicates and so it still wasn't precise.

Even so, there is no real doubt that the Jonah son of Amittai in the Book of Jonah is the same person that is mentioned in the Book of Kings.

CJB 2 Kings 14:23-27 ***²³ It was in the fifteenth year of Amatzyah the son of Yo'ash, king of Y'hudah, that Yarov'am the son of Yo'ash, king of Isra'el, began to reign in Shomron; and he ruled for forty-one years. ²⁴ He did what was evil from ADONAI's perspective; he did not turn from all the sins of Yarov'am the son of N'vat, who made Isra'el sin. ²⁵ He recovered the territory of Isra'el between the entrance of Hamat and the sea of the 'Aravah, in keeping with the word of***

ADONAI the God of Isra'el, which he spoke through his servant Yonah the son of Amitai, the prophet from Gat-Hefer. ²⁶ For ADONAI saw how bitterly Isra'el had suffered, with no one left, either slave or free, and no one coming to Isra'el's aid. ²⁷ ADONAI did not threaten to blot out the name of Isra'el from under heaven, but saved them through Yarov'am the son of Yo'ash.

This King Jeroboam of 2Kings 14 is actually Jeroboam II, and he reigned over the northern kingdom of Ephraim/Israel from 793 to 753 B.C. So, clearly, Jonah lived and prophesied somewhere during this time period. The city he is said to be from...Gath-Hepher... was part of the territory belonging to the Israelite tribe of Zevulun, and is very likely the same place known today as Khirbet ez-Zurra located no more than an hour's-walk from Nazareth. At this time in history, Israel was a divided nation consisting of the Kingdom of Judah and (separately) the Kingdom of Israel; Zevulun fell within the Kingdom of Israel. And, just so there is no misunderstanding, I will switch back and forth with identifying the name of this Northern Kingdom as simply that...or as Israel, or Ephraim, or most often as Ephraim/Israel because that's what the Scriptures do. In the era of about 950 to 720 B.C., the tribe of Ephraim was the dominant tribe in the northern part of Hebrew-held territory (Judah was the dominant tribe in the south), and so in reality that Northern Kingdom went primarily by the name Ephraim, and not Israel. However, the Bible does at times refer to it as Israel. Let me say that another way: while the name Israel technically meant all 12 tribes combined as a single nation, we'll also at times see the term Israel used to refer **only** to the Northern Kingdom. The only way we can know which is which is by the context of the statement. Without any other evidence to the contrary, then, Jonah must himself have been part of the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim/Israel, was part of the tribe of Zevulun, and he was a trained, experienced, and recognized Prophet of God called to minister to King Jeroboam II starting early in the 8th century B.C.

However, that does NOT mean that the Book of Jonah itself was composed at that same time. In fact, Jonah almost certainly had no hand in the writing of this book named for him. Rather, it was an anonymous person that Bible academia typically calls "the narrator" who wrote it. Jonah is not what is dubbed a "writing prophet". That is, he didn't write down (or have a scribe write down) his own

prophecies and circumstances like many other prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others did.

There is no consensus among scholars that Jonah was written by a single hand; some believe it is a composite work of several authors and editors over time due to what they believe are different styles reflected in different parts of the work. However, the preponderance of both Jewish and Christian scholars sees no reason to doubt that Jonah was composed by one person. The arguments against this being the work of a single author are extremely technical and often far-fetched that make large leaps and unlikely assumptions about how people wrote. There are even a handful of scholars who believe Jonah wrote his own book. Very unlikely for a couple of reasons. First is because the story is not told in the style of a person describing his own experiences. But second is the rather critical tone, if not downright negative portrayal, of Jonah from beginning to end. It would be so unusual as to be nearly without precedent that a person would write about themselves in such a way, at least without speaking of their repentance of having behaved in such a manner, or offering some good reason or rationalization for that bad behavior. Without any solid evidence to think it otherwise, I'm going forward with the understanding that a single person we'll call The Narrator wrote the Book of Jonah some years after Jonah lived, and that the events recorded in Jonah actually occurred. To summarize: the Book of Jonah is *about* Jonah, but it was not written *by* Jonah.

So, when was it written? There is little evidence within its passages to date it with any accuracy. It could have been written any time from 750 B.C. to about 250 B.C. However, the latest date is probably too late to consider because the Book of Tobit mentions Jonah, and the composition of the Book of Tobit is thought to be in the 3rd century B.C. Further, the Book of Ben Sira, which was written very early in the 2nd century B.C., speaks of the twelve minor prophets. This tells us that the order of the 12 Minor Prophets and the inclusion of the Book of Jonah as one of the 12 Minor Prophets had already been well established. So, the likelihood that Tobit and Ben Sira would mention a book it deemed as Holy Scripture as having been only very recently written and placed in the Hebrew Bible is quite small. Therefore, we can probably narrow down the date Jonah was written to being from the late 8th century to the 4th century B.C., which of course is still a sizable window of time. Yet, in intellectual honesty, we can do no better.

Both Christian and Jewish (but especially Jewish) scholarship on Jonah tend to see Jonah as either having influence upon, or being influenced by, the writer of Jeremiah. Others see Jonah as a midrash (a commentary) on the Book of Amos or even of Hosea. A few even think it was a Jewish midrash on the Book of Obadiah or Joel. They base these possibilities mostly on where in the order that the 12 Minor Prophets is given to us that we find the Book of Jonah. If Jonah has any direct relationship to another Prophetic book, I think it is closest in nature and subject to the Book of Amos, but not as a midrash of that book. This possible relationship is simply because Jonah lived and was active about the same as was Amos, and they both were dealing with circumstances of the Northern Kingdom and of Assyria as they existed in the early to mid-8th century B.C. It is unthinkable that they wouldn't have at the least known of one another, and could well have been personally acquainted.

What is interesting (at least to me) is that this book is placed among the Minor Prophets instead of somewhere in the section of the Old Testament called The Writings where we find Daniel, Esther, Ruth, and other books that tell stories. Jonah is so extremely different than other prophetic books such that the great Bible scholar Karl Budde even suggested that it was added to the Minor Prophets section so that the total number of them would add up to 12 (12 being a highly symbolic number in the Bible). Although I find that possibility remote at best, it can't be entirely dismissed and it does tell us how difficult it is to classify the nature of the literature to which Jonah belongs. This is also why many Jewish scholars believe that Jonah ought to be taken as more of a long, stand-alone parable or even as a midrash on some other book of Scripture than it is a book of prophecy. So, why was Jonah placed where we find it? Probably because it is a short book (as is the nature of all the books of the Minor Prophets), and because of the subject, and because of the time period it speaks about.

One relationship between Jonah and another book that, to me, is obvious but never seems to be talked about is to the Book of Exodus. The Jewish Publication Society's commentary on Jonah highlights this relationship, and I can do no better than to simply quote from it.

There is a fundamental analogy between the overthrow decreed for Nineveh and the sentence of total destruction passed upon Israel after the sin of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32: 10). Yet, readers seem to be unaware of this similarity until they realize that the king's decree to the people of Nineveh (which is), "Who knows, God may turn and repent and turn back from His wrath so that we do not perish" (Jonah 3:9), (also) echoes Moses' prayer on behalf of his people, (which is) "Turn back from your wrath, and repent of the evil to your people" (Exodus 32:12), while the narrator's comment (in Jonah) that "God repented the evil which He had said (He would) do to them and did not do it" (Jonah 3:10) echoes (God's) acceptance of Moses' entreaty, (when we read that) "the Lord repented of the evil which He had said to do to His people (Exodus 32:14)".

While we could dissect this relationship on mostly technical grounds, for our purpose I want only to highlight that what we should take from this is that |God is always **consistent** in His actions. In Exodus God was dealing with a gentile king that was an enemy of Israel, and in Jonah it was the same. In Exodus the enemy nation was Egypt; in Jonah the enemy nation was Assyria. In both cases the Lord's goal was not to find a reason to destroy a pagan gentile nation but rather to find a reason to show them mercy. Just as God spared the Israelites, He wants to spare the gentile nations His wrath. However, for that to happen, after being warned by a Prophet, real action by Israel was required, just as action had to be taken by gentile nations for God to forgo His wrath upon them. This message needs to be dug up from the many years it seems to have been buried and separated from Christian tradition, and reborn in our hearts.

Especially in the West, and especially in the last couple of centuries, the Church has (for the most part) decided that our behavior has little to no connection with our salvation. In fact, should we attempt to work out our salvation through our deeds, that itself is a sin. To put it another way: whereas the first step to peace with God is repentance, that repentance only involves a change of hearts or minds, but no physical, tangible change of how we behave is required. Biblically speaking, this turns the actual meaning of repentance on its head, and that fact is strongly and plainly reflected in the Book of Jonah. I will say without equivocation that repentance has no meaning or effect if it does not also involve a direct and sudden change in our behavior. A true and sincere repentance...a saving kind of repentance...then, consists of two elements that, even though

they can be spoken of separately they cannot be separated in actuality. While it isn't our good behavior per se that saves us, it is our wrong behavior that leads us to needing a Savior. Therefore, a change in our behavior to the better is what God seeks of us, and at the same time that change of behavior is the proof that the repentance of our heart is real. I'll say it this way: Salvation MUST result in a change in our behavior and in our choices or we are deceiving ourselves no matter how much we may insist otherwise.

This is something that Yeshua, Himself, emphasized and later on His biological brother James did as well.

CJB Matthew 7:15-22 ¹⁵ *"Beware of the false prophets! They come to you wearing sheep's clothing, but underneath they are hungry wolves!"* ¹⁶ *You will recognize them by their fruit. Can people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?"* ¹⁷ *Likewise, every healthy tree produces good fruit, but a poor tree produces bad fruit.* ¹⁸ *A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, or a poor tree good fruit.* ¹⁹ *Any tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire!* ²⁰ *So you will recognize them by their fruit.* ²¹ *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants.* ²² *On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?'"*

I often refer to this passage as the most frightening one in the Bible. Its message is clear. If you claim Yeshua as Savior, you WILL bear good fruit (you **will** do good works). If you don't bear good fruit, then you are either a liar or you are seriously self-deceived. Using an agricultural metaphor that any child would have understand, Jesus said that obviously a bad tree is inherently incapable to produce good fruit, nor can a good tree, by its very nature, produce bad fruit (or no fruit at all). But further, a bad tree can pronounce itself "good" from sun-up to sunset, but if it bears no good fruit, then this is absolute proof that it is not a good tree.

After that statement, He immediately goes on to explain what happens to those who make the claim of being a good tree, but bear no good fruit. It is cut down and destroyed by fire. Why? Because good trees are made good by God, but they

are made good for one overriding purpose: to produce fruit. What use is a fruit tree that doesn't produce good, usable fruit? Even more, on Judgment Day, that person who claims to be a Christ follower, saved by Grace, but whose life reflects no evidence of it, will be denied entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven. Bottom line: good fruit is NOT merely a changed heart (a changed mind); it is also changed physical and tangible behavior. One without the other serves no purpose before God, so it is destroyed.

James puts it another way.

CJB James 2:14-22 ***¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith but has no actions to prove it? Is such "faith" able to save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food, ¹⁶ and someone says to him, "Shalom! Keep warm and eat hearty!" without giving him what he needs, what good does it do? ¹⁷ Thus, faith by itself, unaccompanied by actions, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say that you have faith and I have actions. Show me this faith of yours without the actions, and I will show you my faith by my actions! ¹⁹ You believe that "God is one"? Good for you! The demons believe it too- the thought makes them shudder with fear! ²⁰ But, foolish fellow, do you want to be shown that such "faith" apart from actions is barren? ²¹ Wasn't Avraham avinu declared righteous because of actions when he offered up his son Yitz'chak on the altar? ²² You see that his faith worked with his actions; by the actions the faith was made complete;***

And by the way: the entire Book of James has been part of, then removed, then part of, then removed from, only to be put back in our Bibles for centuries by the Church mainly because of what is seen as a "too Jewish" mindset based upon James's focus on the need of a Believer's life to be one of action and good works. Without this action, our claimed faith in Christ is dead...it is false...no matter how much we have convinced ourselves that it is sincere. That is, it is not a matter of us being convinced of a proper faith in Christ; rather, it is God being convinced and that only happens with our good works and deeds.

Thus, as we will read in the Book of Jonah, once warned, God will give mercy ONLY when He sees that there is a change of behavior (in the case of Jonah, it is the behavior of the people Nineveh of Assyria). Old Testament or New, that

message is the same. Now, for the difficult part. Is the story of Jonah historically true? Did he really fall overboard into a raging sea and get swallowed up by a whale? Then survive for 3 days inside that sea-beast only to be taken to a distant shore where that whale vomited him out! The good news is that whether the story is real or fictional the moral to it is true and it remains the same. So, is it important for us to know whether this is actual history or alternately is it is a well-fashioned fable with a divine truth as its point? No one can know the answer to this question with absolute certainty. Yet, there are ways we can think about it to arrive at a reasonable conclusion.

Human nature is generally predictable over the span of history (usually for the worse than the better). Humans will identify and act upon what they believe the story is telling them to do (or not to do) more **if** it is real and it actually happened than if it is merely a pleasant fable with a good moral to it that is essentially only theoretical or idealistic. A moral ideal that is theoretical has less effect upon us than one which we know has been demonstrated in practice. The theoretical says "this is how we **ought** to think, believe, and behave". The actual historical says, "this is how we **must** think, believe, and behave and this outcome shows us why". This is the reason that true evangelism by Believers is far more in how we live our lives than in what we profess with our mouths. How we behave over time is so much more convincing and effective than any tract that we can hand out or speech we can give.

Jonah has had a huge effect on the Jewish people, especially. The story of Jonah was so well-known, accepted and believed to have actually happened that Yeshua referred directly to it when speaking of His death, burial, and resurrection.

CJB Matthew 12:36-41 ***³⁶ Moreover, I tell you this: on the Day of Judgment people will have to give account for every careless word they have spoken; ³⁷ for by your own words you will be acquitted, and by your own words you will be condemned." ³⁸ At this some of the Torah-teachers said, "Rabbi, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." ³⁹ He replied, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign? No! None will be given to it but the sign of the prophet Yonah. ⁴⁰ For just as Yonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea-monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the depths of the earth.***

⁴¹ The people of Nineveh will stand up at the Judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they turned from their sins to God when Yonah preached, but what is here now is greater than Yonah.

It is not credible that Yeshua would draw on Jonah if Jonah was merely a figment of some writer's fertile imagination...and of all people He would know. There is little more important "sign" of Yeshua's actual fulfillment of prophecy than the one we find in the Book of Jonah. Jesus even continues by drawing a comparison and contrast between the Jews of His generation and the gentiles of Nineveh, saying that the people who think of themselves as God's chosen are seen by Him as worse than the people of Nineveh that Jonah spoke to and pronounced doom upon. And, that as great as Jonah the Prophet was, Yeshua is even greater. The bottom line: Christ certainly thought that Jonah and his sea-saga was historically true. So, I'll take His word for it and we'll approach our study of Jonah believing it as true.

However, let's not whitewash this either. How could Jonah actually have been swallowed by a whale and survived in its stomach for 3 days? We can say that this seems improbable to impossible on its face; but, if we do that then we are saying that God has a limitation on His ability to issue miracles. The Bible is full of miracles, and of prophecies many more miracles that are yet to come. In this era of scientism and an insistence by even people of faith...whether Jews or Christians... on complete rationality as accepted by human intellect as the laboratory test for biblical truth, then the answer is that what is purported to have happened to Jonah could not possibly have happened and is but a primitive fairytale. This mindset is why we have large and growing segments of the Church that are denying Yeshua's resurrection and ascension or His virgin birth. Others of His miracles have been rationalized away by saying that the dead that He brought back to life weren't really dead; or that the fishes and the loaves episode is but a great exaggeration, as was His walking on the water at the Sea of Galilee, etc. But, if that is so, then what use is the biblical record to us? Paul hits that matter head on.

CJB 1 Corinthians 15:13-18 ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then the Messiah has not been raised; ¹⁴ and if the Messiah has not been raised, then what we have proclaimed is in vain; ¹⁵ furthermore, we are

shown up as false witnesses for God in having testified that God raised up the Messiah, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then the Messiah has not been raised either; ¹⁷ and if the Messiah has not been raised, your trust is useless, and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Also, if this is the case, those who died in union with the Messiah are lost.

Let me put this in plain terms: if we remove miracles from our faith, our faith collapses. Therefore, those who cannot believe in miracles, yet claim a Christian faith, in reality harbor a false faith that is worthless. Merely believing that Jesus Christ lived and died, and that He was an exceptionally good man with an exceptionally good philosophy of life that we all ought to live by, won't save us. Yeshua's resurrection was a miracle just as was Jonah's time in the belly of a giant sea-creature a miracle. End of story.

At the time of the Jonah story, the northern kingdom of Ephraim/Israel was prosperous and admired in the region. On the other hand, Nineveh, a large city in Assyria, was not and in fact was struggling. Historical records show that Nineveh was not doing well. Assyria had suffered a series of military defeats and also were dealing with famine. Additionally, during this same time a major earthquake happened as did a solar eclipse. Earthquakes and solar eclipses were seen as bad omens; that they happened so close together only elevated the anxiety of the people. The monarchy that ruled Assyria at this time (Assur-Dan III) was weak and vulnerable. Therefore, Assyria was at this time no threat at all to Israel, and of minimal threat to other neighboring nations in the region; they were too busy simply trying to survive than to be a serious bother to other nations. I bring this up because the question of "why would God send the Hebrew Jonah to gentile Nineveh?" needs an answer.

During this era, Assyria was nearly universally despised. This was partly due to their religion, and partly because when they did have some power they treated conquered people inhumanely, and partly because they were known as a ruthless, immoral society. Yet, it is not Assyria that is singled out, rather it is a large city in Assyria: Nineveh. Nineveh was an important city (probably the most important) with a population of well over 100,000 people. Yet it was in no way the official capital of Assyria. Even so, it seems that Nineveh the city was made representative of Assyria the nation. This is not an unusual thing in the Bible. For

instance, in several of the Minor Prophets we find that the capital city of the Northern Kingdom (which is Samaria) is regularly used to represent the entire nation of Ephraim/Israel. We even read about a so-called King of Samaria. In reality, cities didn't have their own king alongside a national king. So, the King of Samaria is actually the King of Israel; it's just that Samaria was his capital. But, Nineveh was NOT the capital city of Assyria. Rather, Nineveh was an important city because it was highly populated, large in geographical size, and it was highly influential on Assyrian society. Various Kings of Assyria were known to have residences there as opposed to (or perhaps in addition to) their residence in the nation's official capital city. Thus, in Jonah the mention of the King of Nineveh is definitely referring to the King of all of Assyria.

Another question that needs to be answered: since Jonah didn't write this book, where did The Narrator get his information about all that happened with Jonah? Especially about what happened with those sailors on the ship that nearly sank? Some of it could have come directly from Jonah, but other parts of the information could have come from the sailors on that fateful cruise who nearly lost their lives to a storm. It could also have been by word of mouth not too long after it all happened; or it could have been an oral tradition that had been developed, which had been handed down for decades or even centuries. Jonah was a very well-known figure and so one can imagine that when those sailors returned home safely they began spinning their yarn about all that happened. It's not terribly unlike how the Gospel accounts came to be. They were written by writers who didn't witness all that they wrote about. Some didn't witness any of it, but rather they investigated and interviewed eye witnesses, researched other documents and pieced together an account. We just don't know how the information about Jonah got put together into a book form. Yet, clearly every generation of Israelites who knew of it accepted it as real and true...just as did Messiah Yeshua.

While information transmitted word of mouth might be impossible to accept if it had occurred in our time, when photographic, recorded audio or video, or written evidence is considered the best and most reliable source of information, oral transmission was actually the normal process for the biblical times, and even more so as we go back to the era of Jonah. Oral tradition was always in the hands of the tribal elders, whose job it was to protect it, assure its accuracy, and hand

it down faithfully to the future generations so that it wouldn't be forgotten. It might surprise you to know that the Torah was handed down through oral traditions for centuries long before it was ever formally written down. While the internal evidence is that much or all of the Law of Moses portion of the Torah was recorded soon after God gave it to Moses, there is no doubt that the remainder of the Torah was not. Yet, it's truthfulness and historical accuracy was never doubted and so it ought not to be doubted by us.

Further, because we have a copy of Jonah found at Wadi Muraba'at in the Dead Sea region dated to no later than 150 B.C., and when we compare that copy to what is found in the Masoretic Hebrew text from about 1000 A.D., the only differences are so minor that they are not worth mentioning. This is hard evidence that demonstrates how carefully and faithfully the Hebrew Scriptures have been handed down over the centuries... even through the millennia. Even more, we have ancient translations of Jonah made in several other languages and they all match quite well. We can have confidence that what we have in our modern Bibles is translated into English from reliable, well preserved source documents. That said, English interpretations of these documents do vary a bit, and we'll encounter an important variation nearly immediately as we begin our verse-by-verse study of Jonah.

Let's conclude with what the motive could have been for Jonah's strange reaction to God telling him to go and take God's oracle of doom to the people of Nineveh. Right at the beginning of Jonah chapter 4 we read this:

CJB *Jonah 4:1-2 But this was very displeasing to Yonah, and he became angry. ² He prayed to ADONAI, "Now, ADONAI, didn't I say this would happen, when I was still in my own country? That's why I tried to get away to Tarshish ahead of time! I knew you were a God who is merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in grace, and that you relent from inflicting punishment.*

Jonah admits why he behaved as he did. He despised the reality that Yehoveh was indeed consistent when it came to meting out mercy. And more that God was patient and long suffering even as it concerned gentile nations and not just Israel. Remember; from the time of Abraham onward, the Father divided the world into two foundational people groups: the Hebrews and everyone else. So,

when God gave Israel the Promised Land, even the territory that each nation of the world held was divided into two foundational groups: Israel and everyone else. This is why in the Hebrew Scriptures that when the term **goyim** is used, it carries the dual meaning of nations and of gentiles. That is, by definition the nations of the world ARE **gentile** nations. There's only 1 Hebrew nation: Israel.

Jonah was certain (as were Israelites nearly unanimously certain) that God only cared about them (or at least He SHOULD only care about them), and ought not to be at all concerned about the gentile nations. He was, after all, Israel's God. So, when Jonah finds God dispensing His grace and mercy to a gentile nation (Assyria) it angered him to his core. Let me say that again: Jonah confessed that he hated it that God showed mercy and compassion to gentiles...so we need not doubt if that was actually the case. Jonah wanted the Lord to limit the boundaries of His mercy and compassion only to Israel such that he could actually say to God (and I'll paraphrase): ***See, I just knew it. When you first gave me this assignment to go and tell Nineveh that you were going to destroy them (which I would have been perfectly happy to see happen because these lousy, foul gentiles deserved it) I suspected deep in my heart that you instead were going to give them a chance to change their behavior and then you'd relent and show mercy and you'd forgo destroying them. That's why I tried to run away from you. And you know what? I was right! You did exactly that, and I don't like it!***

We'll begin Jonah chapter 1 the next time we meet.