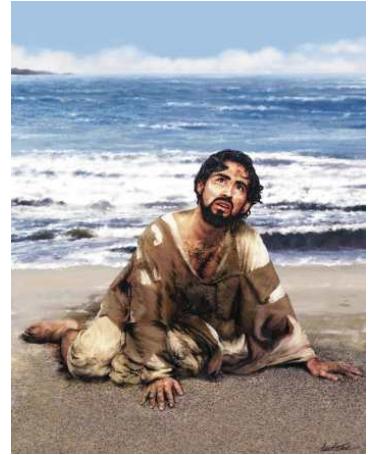


Jonah

by Ross Callaghan

<http://rosscallaghan.yolasite.com>



- Author** The prophet Jonah.
- Date** Around 853-824 BC.
- Type** Narrative of events in Jonah's life.
- Theme** God's mercy and salvation are available for all who repent and turn to Him.
- Purpose** To encourage obedience in God's people.
To encourage sharing of God's Word.
To predict aspects of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (Matthew 12:39,40).

Key verses

And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights. 1:17.

In my distress I called to the Lord and He answered me. 2:2.

Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to You. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord. 2:8,9

Let everyone urgently call on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we will not perish. 3:8,9.

Outline

Chapter 1: Jonah flees from the Lord

God told Jonah: *Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.* 1:2 But Jonah ran away from the Lord and caught a boat in Joppa that was heading for Tarshish.

The Lord sent a violent storm such that the sailors on the boat were afraid *and each cried out to his own god.* 1:5. Jonah was asleep at the time and was wakened and asked by the captain to call on his God. The sailors cast lots to find who was responsible for the calamity and the lot fell on Jonah. He explained that he was a Hebrew who worshipped the true God and that he was running away from God. Jonah said *"Pick me up and throw me into the sea. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you"*. 1:12. The men tried to row back to land but couldn't so they took Jonah *and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him. But the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.* 1:15-17.

Chapter 2: Jonah prays from inside the fish

Jonah prayed to the Lord and repented of his sin in disobeying the Lord. In response to this, the Lord delivered Jonah from the belly of the fish.

Jonah's prayer is a model for prayers when we are in distressing situations.

- Jonah knew that God would listen to and answer his prayer. *In my distress I called to the Lord, and He answered me. ... and You listened to my cry.* 2:1,2

- Jonah turned to the Lord. He recognized that God was the only one who could rescue him. *From the depths of the grave I called for help.* 2:2
- Jonah honestly acknowledged the reason why he was in the situation. *You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas.* 2:3 .
- Jonah knew that it was his sin that had got him into the situation and recognized that God was justified in punishing him for that sin. *I said, "I have been banished from your sight".* 2:4
- Jonah trusted God and this gave him hope. *Yet I will look again towards your holy temple.* 2:4.
- Jonah knew that only God could rescue him from the situation. *You brought my life up from the pit, O Lord my God.* 2:6.
- Jonah asked God to deliver him. *When my life was ebbing away, I remembered You, Lord, and my prayer rose to Your holy temple.* 2:7
- Jonah promised to do what God had told him to do. No longer would he trust in himself or in worthless idols. *What I have vowed I will make good.* 2:9.
- Jonah recognized that it was God who saved him. *Salvation comes from the Lord.* 2:9.

And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. 2:10. A pretty convincing answer to Jonah's prayer!

Chapter 3: Jonah goes to Nineveh

God told Jonah a second time to *go to Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.* 3:1. This time he obeyed!

Nineveh was a *very important city.* 3:3. It took three days to go from one side to the other. It was situated on the Tigris River in modern day Iraq. Jonah's message was that the people of Nineveh needed to repent or the city would be overthrown in 40 days time. *The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.* 3:5. The King issued a decree that *"everyone was to call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we will not perish".* 3:8,9.

And God responded to their repentance. *When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction that He had threatened.* 3:10.

What a contrast to today! Imagine if someone came into your city and said everyone would be destroyed in 40 days time if they didn't repent.

Would the people listen? Would they ridicule the messenger from God? Would everyone (including the governmental leaders) repent of their sins and turn away from evil? Unlikely!

This shows how far we have come from acknowledging God's rule in our modern society.

Chapter 4: Jonah is angry at God

Jonah got angry because he knew that God would relent and not judge the people of Nineveh. *I knew You are a gracious and compassionate god, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.* 4:2. He said he would rather die than live, got in a huff, and went and sat under a tree east of the city.

The Lord then taught Jonah a lesson. He provided a vine that grew over Jonah's tree, which protected him from the sun and wind. *Jonah was very happy about the vine.* 4:6. The next day God made a worm chew the vine so that it withered and Jonah grew faint. Again Jonah said he would rather live than die. What an over-reaction! And all because Jonah's pride had been hurt.

God then made His point. Jonah had neither tended the vine, nor made it grow. He was only concerned about himself. But God cared for the people in Nineveh, and wanted to do what was best for them: *Should I not be concerned about the great city.* 4:11. Jonah's concern was for himself, but God's concern was for the people of Nineveh and their salvation.

Lessons from Jonah

1. Obedience

When God tells you to do something it is best to obey Him. Jonah got into all sorts of trouble because he disobeyed God. Always remember that God knows best, and will bless you when you obey him and do His will.

2. Disobedience

There are always consequences when you disobey God. They may not be as dramatic as what happened to Jonah, but anywhere that is outside of the will of God is not a good place to be.

3. Repentance and restoration

If you disobey the Lord and get outside of His will, you can always repent, be forgiven, and be restored back to fellowship with the Lord. There is always hope, no matter how far you have strayed. God will always welcome you back if you confess your sins, make restitution and re-submit your life to His control. There are no hopeless cases with the Lord! He got Jonah out of the belly of the fish, and He can get you out of any situation you may get yourself into.

4. Prayer

God hears and answers prayer. If you are genuine in your repentance, confession, restitution and requests He will respond by doing what is best for you, by bringing you back into His will.

5. Salvation

God is concerned for the salvation of individuals, but He is also concerned for the salvation of cities. Pray for your city and its leaders.

6. God's sovereignty

God knows what He is doing! He has His plan and is working it out in the individuals, cities and countries. You can choose to co-operate with God in His plan or try to do things your own way (as Jonah did). God's way is best!

7. Anger

It's not worth getting angry with God! Much better is to accept His will for your life and try always to be obedient to whatever it is that He wants you to do. This was the big lesson that Jonah learned.

8. The sign of the prophet Jonah

Some Pharisees and teachers of the law wanted to see Jesus do a miraculous sign. *He answered. "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign. But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Matthew 12:40.*

Jesus was to be in the tomb for 3 days and 3 nights and then would rise again, just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days and 3 nights and then was given his life back. Jesus said that His death and resurrection of Jesus would be the only sign given to an evil and adulterous generation. His death on the cross made atonement and fully satisfied God's righteous requirements for judgment of sin, and His resurrection proved that He was the Son of God.

Unfortunately the timeline given here doesn't fit with our traditional celebration (at 'Easter') where Jesus was (supposedly) crucified on Good Friday and rose on Easter Sunday. There is no way that this covers a period of 3 days and 3 nights.

Jesus' death and resurrection took place during the Jewish Feast of Passover and a careful study of Old Testament references to the Passover and New Testament descriptions shows that Jesus was crucified on Wednesday Nisan 14th and rose early in the morning of Sunday Nisan 18th. In other words He was in the tomb for 3 days and three nights! Read all of the Scriptures in the table on the next page to check this out!

The sign of the prophet Jonah

Matthew 12:38-41

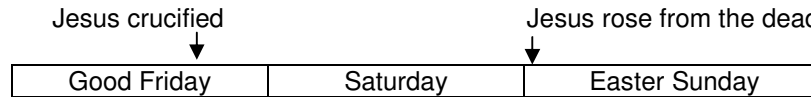
The Jews wanted a sign from Jesus to prove He really had come from God. Jesus said there would only be one sign: 'the sign of the prophet Jonah'. As Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights, so Jesus would be dead in the tomb for three days and three nights. After that He would rise again from the dead. Mark 8:31

The Cross is God's only sign. It is the only proof we have of the truth of Christianity:

Jesus died → Jesus was in the tomb for three days and three nights → Jesus rose again from the dead

Our tradition

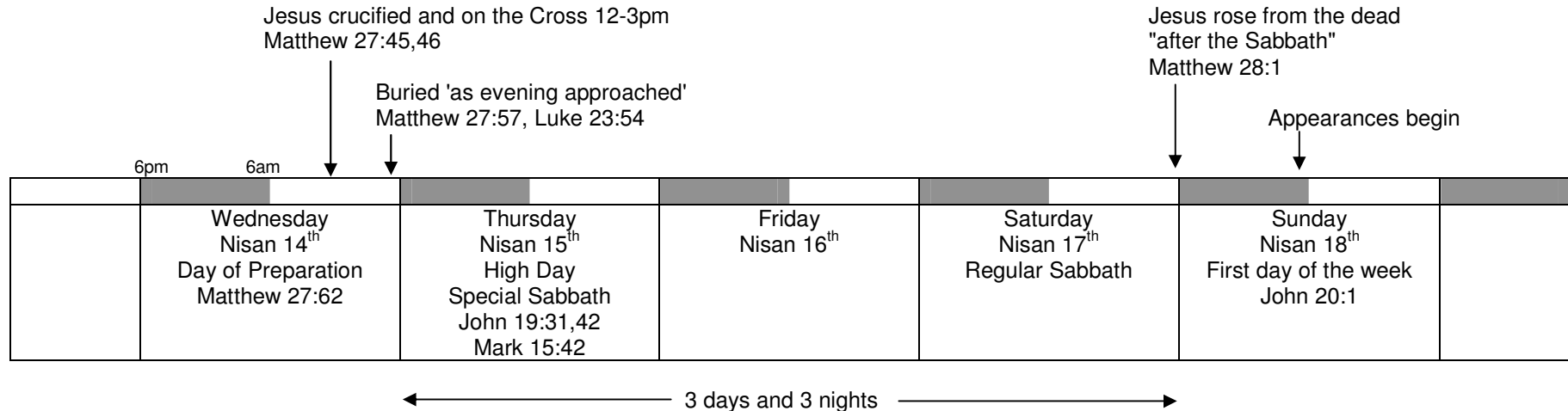
(See what Jesus said about traditions at Matthew 15:3-9).



Jesus died and was resurrected during the Feast of Passover

The death and resurrection of Jesus took place during Passover Week. Leviticus 23:5,6.

In an amazing fulfillment of the Passover Feast, Jesus (who is *the Passover Lamb who was sacrificed for us*. 1 Corinthians 5:7) was crucified at the time the Jews sacrificed their Passover lamb. He fulfilled all that the Passover lamb had accomplished in the time of Moses (and more). His blood was shed so that all who accepted His salvation might be free. This was God's greatest act of love: His only sign. John 3:16. And Jesus was in the tomb three days and three nights!



Discussion questions

Do you think the events in Jonah were historical or were they a story that was written to illustrate a point?

Why did Jonah disobey the Lord's command to go to Nineveh? What were the results of this disobedience? What did he learn from this?

Jonah repented of his sin and God heard his prayer, and restored him. Analyse Jonah's prayer of repentance. What made it effective? Why did God and hear and answer it?

God is sovereign (as shown in His ability to rescue Jonah from the fishes belly). Why didn't God make Jonah go to Nineveh, which would have pre-empted the need for the disastrous things Jonah and the sailors went through?

Jonah shared the word of God in Nineveh and the people repented and turned to the Lord. Does this kind of thing happen today? Are modern, secular cities open to hearing God's word, and would they turn to the Lord if a prophet preached the Gospel there? What about your community? How could you share the Gospel effectively there?

Jonah got angry with God. Is it acceptable to do this? How did God respond? What was the result of Jonah's anger?

Jesus said that He would be in the tomb for 3 days and 3 nights and then would rise again, just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days and nights. This is the sign of the prophet Jonah. Matthew 12:38-41. How does this reconcile with our tradition that Jesus died on Good Friday and rose on Easter Sunday? Is there a better explanation?

What have you learnt from your study of Jonah? How will this affect your life?