

# Jonah: Dead or Alive?

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## PART 1 Passage to Tarshish

*Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me." But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep. (Jonah 1:1-5)*

The little Book of Jonah is one to which I have given a great deal of attention. When I was in seminary, the higher critics leveled their guns against the Book of Jonah more than against any other book in the Bible. Of course, the explanation that has been offered and is still offered today by some is that Jonah never existed, that he was only a myth. They classify his story in the realm of Aesop's fables and fairy tales. Although the critic has been hard put to come up with any reasonable explanation of Jonah, there have been some very interesting and humorous attempts. Some critics have said, without a scrap of evidence to support it, that Jonah was the son of the widow of Zarephath. There's no reason in the world for saying that other than her son was raised from the dead.

And then the theory is put forth that Jonah actually did live and that he did take a trip by ship but had a dream while he was sleeping, and the events recorded in the Book of Jonah are an account of the dream. There's no evidence, of course, to support this theory either.

Then there are those who believe that the Book of Jonah corresponds to the Phoenician myth of Hercules and the sea monster. Again, there's no evidence at all for that claim.

Others suggest that Jonah really lived, that he took a trip by ship, that there was a storm, and that the ship was wrecked. Then, they say, he was picked up by another ship that had as its figurehead a fish on its bow, and so Jonah thought he was picked up by a fish. Someone really had an imagination to come up with that one, and certainly you have to be gullible to accept it!

There are others who make the wild claim that Jonah went through all the experiences described in the Book of Jonah until he was wrecked, and then he took refuge in a dead fish floating around. That is their explanation of how he got to land! The only thing is, they have it in reverse. We believe it was not the fish that was dead; it was Jonah who was dead inside the fish. We'll see that as we go along.

In the Old Testament I consider each one of the twelve so-called minor prophets as a little nuclear bomb. They are not *minor* prophets at all; they all batted in the major league. Each one of them has a terrific message. The little Book of Jonah has several messages, as we're going to see.

While the Book of Jonah is not a prophetic book, the writer Jonah was a prophet, and he gave a prophecy. The very interesting thing is that the prophecy he gave *did not* come true. Yet I have never heard a critic find fault with him for giving a prophecy that didn't come true. Jonah said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jonah 3:4). But it was not destroyed in forty days. It was a hundred years later that the city of Nineveh was destroyed. However, may I say

that Jonah was speaking by the Spirit of God when he said what he did; therefore, it was fulfilled according to the Word of God. That will become clear near the end of the story, as we shall see.

### ***Grasping the Message***

I was about sixteen years old when I was saved, but I had not been brought up in a Christian home and was never taught anything concerning the Word of God. Probably no one ever went to seminary as ignorant of the Bible as I was, but I wanted to get a hold on the Bible and try to understand it. I found out that it met my purposes if I could outline the books of the Bible.

I have to admit that the most difficult portions of the Bible for me to outline were these little minor prophets. Even the last time through, when I tried to re-outline the Book of Hosea, I took it up six different times and put it down without being satisfied at all. It seemed as though the message that was there eluded me each time. Also I had a great deal of difficulty in trying to outline the Book of Jonah.

Then one night many years ago, I was waiting for a train in Nashville, Tennessee, and I did what you probably do. Trying to kill time, I walked around and looked at everything. When I came to the timetable, all of a sudden it occurred to me that the Book of Jonah should be divided according to a timetable such as you find in a union station or in an airport. There are three things that are always essential for a timetable: the destination of the train or the plane, the time it leaves, and the time it arrives. Those are the three things that you always look for.

So, I've divided the four chapters of the little Book of Jonah like that. In chapter 1 the destination of Jonah is Nineveh. He leaves his hometown of Gath Hepher in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and he arrives in the fish. And then in chapter 2 his destination is still Nineveh. He leaves the fish and arrives on the dry land. In chapter 3 the destination is still Nineveh. He leaves the dry land and arrives in Nineveh. Chapter 4 gives his destination as outside the city of Nineveh. He leaves Nineveh, and he arrives in the heart of God. May I say, that's a marvelous place for a backsliding prophet, a backsliding preacher, or a backsliding Christian to arrive—in the heart of God. That is the message, I believe, of the little Book of Jonah.

Now let me give just a word concerning the existence of this man. The text begins, "Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai..." He is identified for us here. Actually, we know more about Jonah than we do about most of the minor prophets. For instance, the prophecy of Obadiah that precedes Jonah tells us nothing about his person. Yet as far as I know there is not a critic who questions his existence. Isn't it strange that they question the existence of Jonah but not Obadiah, when there's not a historical record of Obadiah at all?

Well, we do know something about this man Jonah. There is an historical record in 2 Kings in connection with Jeroboam the son of Joash who was the king at that time. It says:

***He [Jeroboam] restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which He had spoken through his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hepher. (2 Kings 14:25)***

This is a clear historical reference to Jonah. First of all, his name is *Jonah*; second, he's the son of Amittai; and third, Amittai was a prophet. These three points of identification prove that this is the same man as in the book which bears his name. He's an historical character.

Many years ago, when I was much younger, I used to play handball with a very liberal preacher in Nashville, Tennessee. One day after we had finished playing and were sitting in the locker room resting, he said to me, "I saw in the paper where you were preaching on Jonah."

"Yes."

"You don't really believe he existed!"

"Yes."

"What proof do you have?"

So I gave him this reference, 2 Kings 14:25. Frankly, that stumped him because he'd never had that called to his attention before. Well, he came back the next time we played and said, "I think that's a different Jonah."

I told him, "Well, it's possible there could have been two Jonahs. But the interesting thing is Jonah was an unusual name; it's not *Jones* but *Jonah*. The telephone book may be full of Joneses but not Jonahs."

But this preacher still insisted that it was a different Jonah; so I said, "Well, you're just like Mark Twain, relative to the argument about Shakespeare." As you may know, the same argument goes on about Shakespeare. Many fine students of literature do not believe Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare. They think Francis Bacon or somebody else wrote it. And Mark Twain's wry comment was, "Shakespeare did not write Shakespeare. It was written by another man by the same name." And that's what we have here. We have "Jonah the son of Amittai," and if you think this is another Jonah, then it's another Jonah by the same name. Therefore, I believe that we have an historical character here in the Book of Jonah.

Now if that were not enough, we also have an authority. As far as I'm concerned, when the Lord Jesus Christ says it, it's final for me, and I have no other place to appeal. He made two very definite references to Jonah, which we'll be looking at later, but in Luke 11:30 our Lord says, "For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation." This Jonah was a sign. Now there could not have been another man who lived as a sign. Our Lord treated him as an historical character, and I believe He was in a better position to know than any man in any seminary or university today. He is the authority, and this record in the Book of Jonah actually took place.

### ***Purpose of the Book***

Let's look at the record that's given to us here. We are told,

***Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me." (Jonah 1:1, 2)***

God wanted to *save* Nineveh!

At the tower of Babel, God bade the world as a whole goodbye in order to concentrate on one family. In substance He said, "I'll have to leave you for a time, because I have to prepare a redemption for you." And that redemption came through the line of Abraham. I wonder if you have ever noticed how the New Testament opens: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). That genealogy is all-important.

God has prepared a redemption for man. The little Book of Jonah, in my judgment, is God saying to the world in the interval from the tower of Babel to the coming of Christ, "I haven't

forgotten you. I'll save you if you will turn to Me." The Book of Jonah speaks of the most wicked, brutal people who have ever lived on this earth—the Assyrians. Even secular history says that about them. Yet God saved them! And if God would save them, He would save anyone who would turn to Him. This entire city turned to God, and God saved them!

### ***Problems With Jonah***

God says to this man Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me." This is where the problem begins. My problem is not with the fish. I think it's nonsense to make that an issue today. The fish is only one of the props; it's incidental. We do well to keep separate the essentials and the incidentals. The essentials are Jonah and Jehovah. The fish is only a byproduct.

But I'm having trouble now with Jonah:

***But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.***

(Jonah 1:3)

And may I say, this upsets our theology. Will you notice, here is a prophet of God! God calls him to go to Nineveh. Nineveh is in the northeast—east by north. And this man goes in the opposite direction. He goes down to Joppa; he buys a ticket for Tarshish, which was in Spain, the jumping-off place of the world in that day. It was believed that you couldn't go any farther west than Tarshish, and if you sailed out through the Pillars of Hercules you would sail off the earth and perish. So Jonah bought a ticket for a place as far away as he could go.

Now the thing that disturbs me is this: Here is a prophet of God who has been called to go in one direction, so why does he go in another direction? Why in the world didn't the man do what God called him to do?

Well, there are several explanations I can offer, and you can accept one of them or all of them. First of all let me say that this man Jonah hated Ninevites. I mean, he *hated* them with a passion. He did not want them saved, and he had a reason for this. We do know that in the days of Jonah the Northern Kingdom of Israel was subject to attack by Assyria. Certain detachments of the army were making forays down into the Northern Kingdom. They would capture an entire town and kill many of the inhabitants. And while I do not know this, I suspect that Jonah was living in his hometown of Gath Hopher in the Northern Kingdom when the Assyrians came. He may have seen his own mother and father slain before his eyes and maybe brothers and sisters taken away captive. Perhaps as a little fellow he witnessed all of that from some shelter where he was hiding. I do know this, he *hated* Ninevites. He did not want them saved, and so he went in the opposite direction, away from Nineveh. That's one reason.

Then the second reason is, God never asked any Old Testament prophet to go as a witness to the world. Have you ever noticed that? The fact of the matter is, one of the great distinctions between Israel in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament is the direction they are to go. God never said to the prophets of Israel, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Rather, He said, "I want you to talk to My people." He said, "I want you to speak to My people right here." Their invitation was "Come, let us go up to the house of the LORD." And, my friend, the world came. The queen of Sheba came from the ends of the earth.

We like to say today that Israel failed and the church has succeeded. I think it would be more accurate to turn it around.

In the days of Solomon, the kings of the earth came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and the Scripture says they came to see “the ascent” or the entryway that he had. What was that? It was that entry to the burnt altar where a sacrifice that pointed to Jesus Christ was offered for sin. I say to you, Israel witnessed to the world by having the world come to them.

And Jonah could have said, “Look here, Lord, You never told Elijah to go up to Nineveh, and he was a big, brave man. Why do You ask me to do something you’ve never asked any other prophet to do?” And I think Jonah would have had justification for that.

There’s a third reason, and this one will disturb you. Do you want to know why? Look down in your own heart today. We have a commission to take the glorious news of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. Why are we going in the opposite direction? Let’s don’t talk about Jonah disobeying God when, as a whole, we have miserably failed in taking the gospel out to the lost world. Examine your own heart right now, and you’ll understand the human side of Jonah. We are not busy carrying out our commission either. I’m not going to criticize Jonah. I just have some problems with him, that’s all.

Here is a man to whom God says, “I want you to go to Nineveh.” That’s to the east. Jonah says, “I’m going to Tarshish; I’m going west.” And that’s where he headed.

And will you notice something else that is here. He found a ship going to Tarshish, so he paid the fare and went down into it “to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.” Now when he talked to the sailors, one of the things he probably said was that he was sure it was God’s will for him to go to Tarshish now because the door opened. Oh, have I heard that! “I know the Lord is leading me because everything has been so easy!” Is that the way God leads? I don’t think so. I hear that today; then later I hear of the tragedy at the end of the road, and I wonder whether God was really leading or not.

My friend, may I say to you that when God leads He does not always lead through pathways strewn with flowers. He doesn’t always lead down a gentle slope with the stones removed from your path. Read the story of Abraham. He did well in Ur of the Chaldees until God called him, and then he started having trouble. But just because someone is having trouble doesn’t mean he is out of God’s will. And just because everything is going easy in your life doesn’t mean, my friend, you’re in God’s will. So often I hear today: “We know God is leading us because we prayed about this, and the door just opened, and everything else worked out beautifully for us.” It did? Well hallelujah for you, brother. But I didn’t find it easy. And I don’t find it easy today. I’m disturbed when I hear other Christians tell me how easy they’re having it. That’s *not* a sign God is leading you.

Good old Jonah! Can you imagine him going down to Joppa to the shipping company office and getting in the line of people buying their tickets? Right ahead of him is a man saying, “Do you have a ticket for Tarshish?” The agent shakes his head. “Sorry, all my reservations have been taken.” Well, Jonah is just about ready to turn away when the phone rings and the agent turns to answer it. And Jonah hears him say, “You mean that you can’t go, Mr. Smith? Well that’s too bad.” When he turns round again to the window Jonah says, “Well, I don’t know whether to ask it or not, but do you have a ticket for Tarshish?” And the agent says, “Are you lucky! You are *so* lucky! A man just cancelled, and I’m going to let you have his reservation. I can give you a first-class cabin.” Jonah pays the fare, and he goes down to the ship singing, “Praise the Lord!” I say to you, I have trouble with Jonah because, my friend, that isn’t the way God seems to do it. This man’s going to be in a lot of trouble before this trip is over!

You may remember the apostle Paul's final voyage to Rome and his encounter with a storm (Acts 27). He counseled the captain of that ship not to go on. But when "the south wind blew softly," the captain ignored Paul's advice. You be careful when the south wind is blowing softly, Christian. May I say to you, that's right before the storm. My dad used to say in west Texas when we had to go to the storm cellar at night, "It's time to go!" And as kids we'd say, "But, Dad, it's quiet now." He would insist, "This is the time to go. It's the quiet before the storm hits."

Jonah found everything so nice and easy. And in this affluent society today I'm hearing so many people say, "The Lord is leading us." Is He? How do you know? "Well, everything is so easy!" May I say again, the south wind blows softly. But you should have seen the storm that the apostle Paul got in! The ship was wrecked. And if Paul had not been there everyone on board would have lost his life. They did lose the cargo.

However, in Jonah's case notice who was responsible for the storm.

***But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.*** (Jonah 1:4)

This storm was supernatural; and these sailors sensed that, by the way.

It was also a supernatural storm that the devil used to try to destroy our Lord. You remember that Jesus was asleep in the boat, and the disciples on board were fishermen who knew the Sea of Galilee. They could have handled any boat in any storm they'd ever seen on that body of water, but this one they couldn't handle. Finally, in desperation they went and waked Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38). It was a supernatural storm.

And this is a supernatural storm that Jonah is in, as we shall see.

***Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.***  
(Jonah 1:5)

I find this troubling too. I have been told by the saints, "If you are a child of God, and you get out of the will of God, you won't be able to sleep at night; your conscience will bother you." Oh? Jonah, a backsliding prophet, called to go to Nineveh, is on the way to Tarshish, out of the will of God, and he's fast asleep! And the interesting thing is, he's the only man on board who is asleep! Everybody else is scared to death. My, how often I have heard it said, "If you get out of the will of God, Christian friend, your conscience will bother you."

May I say this to you, and I want to say it very carefully, there are Christians who have been out of the will of God for years, and they never miss a night's sleep. Their conscience doesn't bother them. They have been out of His will for so long that they can even let obvious sins come in their lives, and it doesn't disturb them. They go on keeping up a front. We have to keep up a front before the other saints, you know! God have mercy on us today that we can have a conscience so seared that we can tolerate this in our lives. We can be spiritually cold and indifferent, and it doesn't bother us.

Poor old Jonah, he's asleep! Everybody else is wide awake and frantic, and he is sleeping!

## PART 2

### Going the Wrong Way On a One-Way Street

Using Jonah as an example, may I say to you, we ought to be very sure when we get on board ship that we are in God's will. I talked to a couple here several years ago who were going to the mission field. I questioned them, "Are you sure this is what God wants you to do?" Oh yes, they had God's leading! And what they told me was His leading is not leading at all; but they thought it was. I'm sorry to say, they came back inside of a year. They were casualties. They will never go to the mission field again, I'm confident. My friend, before you buy your ticket, be sure that you're in the will of God. We need to do a great deal of testing today concerning that.

Now there is a storm breaking over this boat because there is a backsliding prophet aboard.

***So the captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish."*** (Jonah 1:6)

This is embarrassing for Jonah. Imagine having the pagan captain of that ship come down and rebuke him because he is the one asleep—and he should have been leading the prayer meeting! May I say to you, Jonah is far from God. He's really out of fellowship with God, and yet he could sleep.

A lot of Christians are asleep as well. It doesn't bother them that they're out of fellowship with Him. I'm sure that a great many people on the outside observing Christians today would say under their breath, "If I believed as you believe, I wouldn't live like you are living." Well, this captain doesn't mind rebuking Jonah.

***And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us."*** (Jonah 1:7)

These sailors are accustomed to the Mediterranean, and they detect that this is no *natural* storm.

***... So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, "Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?"***  
(Jonah 1:7, 8)

They cast lots to find out why or who on board is responsible. The critic has said, "That's superstition!" And if you want to know my view, superstition is exactly what it was. Somebody says, "You mean to tell me that God is going to use that?" Yes, God is going to use superstition to accomplish His purpose. We have several examples of this in the Word of God. In the days of Moses, when God carried on a battle with Pharaoh, He dealt with him in terms he could understand. Every one of the plagues was leveled at a particular idol in the land of Egypt. God communicated down on their level.

And when God wanted to speak to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon who worshiped idols, how did He speak to him? Through an idol, that multimetallic image he saw in his dream. God came down to his level. And God used that method also with His own people. I've always wanted to know what the urim and the thummim were in the high priest's garments. I'm

confident that they were used in determining the will of God. Now somebody again is going to say, “You don’t mean to tell me that God’s people used something mechanical?” Yes. Let me ask you, child of God, how do you determine the will of God? I know some folk who come at it like this: They open the Bible at random with their eyes closed, then read the first verse they see. And whatever it is, that’s going to be God’s will for them. Now don’t laugh, because many Christians have used that method. In fact, I have used it.

Many years ago when I was considering a call to a certain church, I put my Bible under my arm one night and told my wife, “I’m going over to the study, and I’m not going to leave it until I know what God’s will is for me.” So I went over there, and I got down on my knees and said, “Lord, I’m staying here until You show me.” And I should probably still be there because I don’t think He did show me. But I opened the Bible and turned to a verse which was, “Woe to the worthless [or idle] shepherd who leaves the flock! ...” (Zechariah 11:17). I took that as meaning I wasn’t to go to the church that had called me, and I’m sure I made a mistake by using that method.

Now I’ll grant that this type of thing is superstition, but I have discovered that God sometimes uses these methods. I’m of the opinion today that God is wanting to communicate with the human family more than He has ever wanted to before. I’m confident of that. And I think God uses many methods today to direct us. Let me give you one more illustration of how He can use superstition.

When I was pastor in Nashville, Tennessee, we had in the Sunday school one of the most precious little girls I’ve ever seen. Every now and then one of those comes along, a Miss Personality, an attractive child whom everybody notices. And she had the meanest father that I’ve ever met. He was a godless man. The child came to Sunday school, and twice a year she’d bring him to church—on Christmas and on Easter. At the first Christmas she told me that he was going to come, and I alerted everybody to be sure and shake hands with him and make him feel at home. And they did. So his criticism was, “They make over you too much in that church. I don’t like it.” His little daughter had told me this; so at Easter time I said to the folk, “This time rather ignore him, because he doesn’t like to be made over.” And after the service he made the statement, “They’re certainly a cold crowd in that church. They’re not friendly at all.” You can’t win with a fellow like that! It was my first pastorate, and I went by his home one day to talk to him about the Lord. That was a great mistake. He ordered me out of his house. He said, “I do not want to talk to you about that. My religion is my business, and I don’t intend to talk to you at all.” And so I just decided that this man was beyond being reached.

But then it happened. He ran a dry cleaning place, and he had a cashier working for him who told him one morning, “I went to a fortune teller last night.”

“You did? What did she say?”

“Well, I’ll tell you what she said. She told me that I was going to die suddenly, be killed accidentally, and that the man I work for would die shortly after that.”

A few days later that woman stepped off a streetcar, and an automobile that didn’t stop for the unloading of passengers hit her and killed her. You know what that unsaved fellow began to think—that he was next! He believed that his time was short, and he became desperate. One night in the manse where I lived I heard the door rattle so loud I thought somebody was knocking it down. When I opened the door I had never seen such a wild-eyed man as he was. He came in, and he said, “I want to talk with you.”

“What do you want to talk about?”

“I want to talk about getting saved. You wanted to talk to me about it; now I want to listen.”

“Well, what brought you to this?” And he told me the story about his cashier. He said, “I guess I’m next, and I want to get right with God.” Then he said, “You were talking about dispensations when my daughter brought me to the church one night, and frankly I was a little interested in that. Would you explain it to me again, because that sort of began to open the Bible to me.” So I got a piece of brown wrapping paper and a pencil, and we both got down on our knees on the floor while I drew a chart of the dispensations like I always use. We went from the dispensation of creation to the dispensation of innocence, the dispensation of conscience, then promise, then the Law, and then we came to grace. And that’s when I began to talk to him about the fact that God, in this age of grace, was asking of man nothing but faith, that we need only to trust Christ as Savior. When I looked up from the chart and into the face of this man, I saw by his expression that he was ready to be saved. So I said to him, “Wouldn’t you right now like to accept Christ as your Savior?” He said, “I sure would.” We didn’t even have to get down on our knees because we were already on our knees; and that man, right there and then, received Jesus Christ as his Savior.

He became, may I say, a different man. I knew he was converted because he began to come to all the services, and he laughed at my jokes after that! My friend, God used superstition. He used a fortune teller who, to my judgment, was as big a fake as they come. Her prediction just happened to work out for the cashier. But it was the means of bringing to Christ that man, the father of a precious child in our Sunday school. I’m confident nothing else would ever have brought him to the Lord. You say to me, “This was superstition.” Sure it was, and God will get down to your level if it means reaching you, my friend.

Now back in the days of Jonah, God used the superstition of casting lots to reach a bunch of pagan sailors. When the lot fell on Jonah, they began pelting him with questions.

***Then they said to him, “Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” (Jonah 1:8)***

Jonah was a talkative fellow. It seems that he had talked a lot when he first came aboard, but he hadn’t told them the thing he should have told them. We don’t hear him telling them that God could save them. Apparently he was not a witness for God. They never would have asked him what nationality he was if he had said he was a Hebrew, since a Hebrew was a Hebrew because of his religion as much as his nationality. And if Jonah had just said to them, “I’m a Hebrew,” it would have opened the door for him to witness; but he hadn’t said that. Instead he talked about other things. It’s amazing when you are out of fellowship with God that you don’t want to talk about Him—any more than the unsaved man wants to talk about Him, by the way. And you’re not a very good witness at that time.

Now will you listen:

***So he said to them, “I am a Hebrew [and that gave it all away] and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” (Jonah 1:9)***

These men were idolaters. They worshiped the sun, moon, and stars. Now Jonah tells them that he does not worship these things, but he worships the Creator of these things, the Maker.

***Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, “Why have you done this?” For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. (Jonah 1:10)***

When you, as a child of God, are out of the will of God, you’ll rationalize your actions. And if you rationalize your actions, you’re going to confide in somebody. Have you ever done that? You’re not sure about what you’re doing, so you go and talk it over with somebody—maybe a friend or your pastor. I’m confident that a great many folk who have come to me for counseling did not want my advice. They only wanted me to agree with what they had already decided to do. You see, they were rationalizing, and they wanted to get me over on their side.

I have a notion that when the ship got underway Jonah stepped up to the pilot and said, “How do you like your job?” The pilot said, “Fine. Where are you going?”

“Well, I’m going all the way with you. I’m going to Tarshish.”

“Ever been there?”

“No, never been there.”

“Well, you’re going to find out that’s a jumping-off place. It is way out there.”

“I know, but I’ll let you in on something. I’ve really been called to go up to Nineveh, but the way I look at it ...”

When anybody starts talking to you like that, you know he is rationalizing. “The way I look at it is that I should not go to Nineveh. To begin with, I don’t care for Ninevites at all. Do you know anything about those people?”

“Yes, this ship was attacked by the Ninevites.”

“What?”

“Yes, we got away from them, but they got another ship, and they killed every sailor.”

“Well then, you understand my feelings of not wanting to go to Nineveh.”

The pilot patted him on the back. “I think you’re doing the right thing,” and Jonah went away feeling good, so good he could fall fast asleep.

### ***Man Overboard***

But now in the midst of the storm, Jonah is on deck and has been singled out as the reason for the ship’s terrible predicament.

***Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?”—for the sea was growing more tempestuous. (Jonah 1:11)***

You see, these men are moving cautiously. Actually, these pagans show up much better than Jonah does here at the beginning.

***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 this great tempest is because of me.” (Jonah 1:12)***

Jonah knew now that God was speaking to him.

“Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land....” I’m sure some would say these pagan sailors were uncivilized, but they act very civilized to me. They did not want to throw Jonah

overboard. Do you notice, he said to them, “Throw me into the sea.” In their hearts they were saying, “Oh, no; not that! We’ll make another effort to try to get this boat into port somewhere.”

***Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. Therefore they cried out to the LORD...*** (Jonah 1:13, 14)

Do you notice what’s happening? They’re crying out now to the Lord! Something did happen, didn’t it? These pagan sailors are not bowing down to an idol to ask for mercy, nor are they entreating the sun, moon, and stars; but they’re speaking now to the Creator.

***... and said, “We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man’s life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You.”*** (Jonah 1:14)

In other words, they are calling upon God to forgive them for what they are going to do because they have no alternative.

***So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.*** (Jonah 1:15)

You can be sure these men were startled at the sudden calm! This was a positive confirmation that the storm was supernatural.

***Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows.*** (Jonah 1:16)

Did they fear their gods? No. They feared the One who is the Creator of the sea and of the land.

I believe these men came to a knowledge of the living and true God. They did two things: They made “a sacrifice to the LORD.” I believe that sacrifice, which was obviously a burnt sacrifice, pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ. And I believe that in the best way they could, with the little knowledge they had, they looked in faith to God.

And then it says they “took vows.” A vow in the Old Testament was very important. I had this impressed on my mind when studying the Book of Leviticus. And the writer of the Proverbs says that when you make a vow to God you be sure that you pay it, because if you don’t, He will hold you to it. God doesn’t like anyone making an idle vow to Him, and that’s my reason today for believing that we ought to be very careful of what we promise God. Oh, how many people under the emotion of the moment make a promise to God that they never keep. I believe God holds us to our vows.

These sailors made vows, which means in Old Testament language that they not only came to the true God at this time with a sacrifice, but they also promised to serve Him. And I think we have a right to believe that these men, through this tremendous experience, turned to the living and true God. So something good was accomplished by the storm, by Jonah’s being on board the ship, and by his being cast overboard. But the mariners disappear over the horizon, and we do not know what actually happened to them.

But I do know what happened to Jonah.

***Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*** (Jonah 1:17)

Here is the crux of this story. It has been assumed that Jonah spent three days and three nights inside the fish like you would spend a weekend in a comfortable motel—that somehow or other he spent three days alive inside the fish.

Years ago I took the position, which I still hold today, that Jonah was not alive inside the fish but that he died and God raised him from the dead. I have been verbally attacked for this position. In fact, a theological professor in this area said that because Jonah was a backsliding prophet he could not have been a type of Christ. And yet this same professor taught that King David is a type of Christ! I think Jonah makes a better type of Christ than David, if you're going to measure him by the sin in his life. Neither of them is a type of Christ when it comes to their sin or their backsliding. Jonah is a type in only one area, and that is in his death and resurrection. And that's the way the Lord Jesus put it when He was asked for a sign. He said,

***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.*** (Matthew 12:39, 40)

Now, my friend, was the Lord Jesus alive or dead? "Well," you say, "He was dead for three days." Yes. Was Jonah alive or dead? He had to be dead in order to bear out what our Lord is saying. I do not think that the Scripture passage makes it clear that this man was alive for the three days.

And then may I add this: If I'm wrong, and Jonah was alive—and if in heaven someday Jonah comes up to me and says, "Boy, did you misrepresent me!"—then I want to say to him, "I'm very sorry, Jonah. But you should have made it lots more clear for this poor preacher."

If Jonah had stayed alive inside the fish, that would not have been a miracle. You say, "Not a miracle?" No. Did you know that other men have been swallowed by fish and have lived to tell the story? It's nonsense for anyone to argue that it's impossible for a fish to swallow a man whole. I have read of seven or eight instances. In fact, there are several accounts on record of men being swallowed by large fish and living to tell the tale. Grace W. Kellogg, in her excellent little booklet on the subject, *The Bible Today*, has compiled a list of the records—which have been authenticated—of the experiences of living creatures in fish who later were rescued alive. We are quoting in full from this section of her book:

There are at least two known monsters of the deep who could easily have swallowed Jonah. They are the Balaenoptera Musculus or sulphur-bottom whale, and the Rhinodon Typicus or whale shark. Neither of these monsters of the deep has any teeth. They feed in an interesting way by opening their enormous mouths, submerging their lower jaw, and rushing through the water at terrific speed. After straining out the water, they swallow whatever is left. A sulphur-bottom whale, one hundred feet long, was captured off Cape Cod in 1933. His mouth was ten or twelve feet wide—so big he could easily have swallowed a horse. These whales have four to six compartments in their stomachs, in any one of which a colony of men could find free lodging. They might even have a choice of rooms, for in the

head of this whale is a wonderful air storage chamber, an enlargement of nasal sinus, often measuring seven feet high, seven feet wide, by fourteen feet long. If he has an unwelcome guest on board who gives him a headache, the whale swims to the nearest land and gets rid of the offender as he did Jonah.

The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* recently quoted an article by Dr. Ransom Harvey who said that a dog was lost overboard from a ship. It was found in the head of a whale six days later, alive and barking. Frank Bullen, F.R.G.S., who wrote, *The Cruise of the Cathalot*, tells of a shark fifteen feet in length which was found in the stomach of a whale. He says that when dying the whale ejects the contents of its stomach.

The late Dr. Dixon stated that in a museum at Beirut, Lebanon, there is a head of a whale shark big enough to swallow the largest man that history records! He also tells of a white shark of the Mediterranean which swallowed a whole horse; another swallowed a reindeer minus only its horns. In still another Mediterranean white shark was found a whole sea cow, about the size of an ox.

These facts show that Jonah could have been swallowed by either a whale or a shark. But has any other man besides Jonah been swallowed and lived to tell the tale? We know of two such instances.

The famous French scientist, Msr. de Parville, writes of James Bartley, who in the region of the Falkland Islands near South America, was supposed to have drowned at sea. Two days after his disappearance, the sailors made a catch of a whale. When it was cut up, much to their surprise they found their missing friend alive but unconscious inside the whale. He revived and has been enjoying the best of health ever since his adventure.

Another version of the James Bartley experience has been recorded in *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, 1971 edition:

We were recently reminded of the true story of a man SWALLOWED by a whale who lived to tell about it! It concerns one James Bartley, a crewman aboard *The Star of the East*, a whaling ship off the Falkland Islands in February of 1891. Bartley was a member of the boat crew that was overturned by a large bull whale already wounded by a harpoon thrust. When another boat picked up the survivors, Bartley and one other man were missing. Later that afternoon, two other boats saw the same whale, captured it and drew it alongside. The *Star of the East* Captain, Mike Dolan, describes what then took place:

“With lines around its stomach, the crew hoisted the whale to the deck of the ship. Something moved inside the covering. Working feverishly with sharp knives, they quickly slit the stomach of the whale open and found James Bartley quivering and unconscious.

“Dashing salt water over the still form of Bartley they seemed to revive him. After he had been washed and a few sips of brandy forced through his pale lips, he was carried to the ship’s cabin.

“For two weeks he hovered near death. When he finally recovered, he told a weird tale.

“Remembering being dashed high in the air when the giant whale struck the boat with his tail, Bartley said he heard a rumbling sound like a train roaring over a bridge. He imagined the noise was caused by the whale pounding the sea. In the darkness he said he made an effort to reach out and his hand touched a slick substance which yielded to his feeble efforts to escape. Then he felt himself being drawn forward into a chamber where there was more air.

“Each time he tried to crawl forward in the black chamber some invisible force seemed to draw him back. Then his terrible plight dawned upon him. He was inside the body of a whale. The heat was terrific. Weak from the strain and the heat, he sank into oblivion. Death seemed dreadfully near. He collapsed and remembered nothing until he awakened in the ship’s cabin. And although his skin never quite regained its natural color, he regained his strength and lived for many years, continuing to fish in the dangerous waters where he almost met his doom.”

So, was Jonah alive or dead inside the fish?

***Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish’s belly.*** (Jonah 2:1)

I know, somebody is going to say, “Preacher, your theory is upset already; it has gone by the board because the Bible says that Jonah prayed to the Lord inside the fish’s belly.” Well, my question is, when did he pray? Did he pray on the third day? Maybe he said, “Now I’m in a tight place. I’ve got to figure on a way of getting out of here. The thing for me to do is to pray about this. I want to pray the right kind of prayer, so I’ll have to give it some thought.” So he composed a prayer, then prayed it on the third day. Now may I say, if that’s the way it happened, I admit my theory is no good at all, because that means he was alive if he prayed this on the third day. But I don’t think he waited until the third day, do you? When would you have prayed if you had been swallowed by the fish? May I say to you, before I got through the gullet of that fish and dropped into his tummy, I would not only have prayed the prayer, but I would have covered the Book of Jonah, something you can do in three minutes. My friend, Jonah prayed this *before* he lost consciousness. “Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish’s belly.”

I have a friend who was for years pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Summerville, Tennessee. His index finger had been cut off, and it was nothing more than a stub below the second joint. When anyone would ask him about his call to the ministry, he would hold up that little stub and wave it. Then he would explain what he meant. “Well,” he’d say, “I’ll tell you....” Then he would tell the story of his call to the ministry.

His father was an elder in the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Memphis. They were having evangelistic meetings in the church, and to obey his dad he would go every night and sit on the second row. He said, “That evangelist was getting to me, and I knew if I stayed another night I would accept Christ as my Savior. I also knew that if I did accept Christ as my Savior I would go into the ministry, and at that time I did not want to. So after everybody in the family had retired for the night, I put my extra shirt under my arm, slid down the rain gutter from my upstairs bedroom, and headed for Mississippi.” He found work in a sawmill down there, and his job was to take these great logs and run them on the conveyor to the saw. If you have seen an old-time sawmill, you know how they’d do that.

One day they ran out of good logs. They had some put aside that were knotty; in fact, some of them had already been to the saw, and it had ripped them partly through before they were

found to be inferior and the process reversed. It was decided, since they didn't have good logs, that they'd run these through as second class or third class lumber. He was rolling one of these logs that had been ripped almost through, and just as he let it drop onto the conveyor belt his index finger caught in the gash. The gash snapped shut, and it held him. He found himself being pulled toward that great band saw. He said, "I yelled at the top of my voice, but by that time the other end of the log had hit the saw, and no one could hear me. There I was—helpless. Between there and that saw, I covered my entire life. I prayed to the Lord and asked Him for forgiveness for every sin I'd ever committed. I accepted Him as Savior; I agreed to go in the ministry; I made any other promises that the Lord wanted me to make. Since it takes only 45 seconds for a log to go through, I did all of that in 45 seconds!"

When you get in trouble it's amazing the amount of ground you can cover! He said that when the saw got to the place where his finger was, it cut off his finger. That released him, and he rolled to the side. "I hit the ground running. I did go by the doctor's office, but then I didn't stop running until I got back home and told my dad what I'd done. And I started studying for the ministry. *That* was my call to the ministry."

My friend, don't you know that Jonah prayed his prayer the minute he went inside that fish? Then he lapsed, I'm sure, into unconsciousness and then death. And God raised him from the dead. He was dead inside the fish; he didn't spend a weekend in a comfortable motel. This man spent time in the tummy of a fish, being churned up and down. He says, "Weeds were around my head." He's not trying to tell you he was alive at all! He says

***... The earth with its bars closed behind me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God. (Jonah 2:6)***

The important thing for you and me to recognize is that this explanation gives young people a tool to defend the Word of God against godless professors in many of our schools.

The first time I took the position that Jonah died and was resurrected, I was a seminary student serving at the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia, as the interim pastor before Peter Marshall came there and had his first famous pastorate. As a student, I was frightened to begin with, and for the first evening service I spoke on the Book of Jonah for the great company of young people who were there. God blessed, and several of them accepted the Lord. On my second Sunday night I was standing in the back when a young fellow came up to me and said, "Mr. McGee, I'm a student over at Georgia Tech. I'd like to accept Christ, but to be honest with you I have trouble with the Book of Jonah."

"What's your trouble?"

"Well, I have a professor who teaches mathematics, but he never misses an opportunity to ridicule the Book of Jonah. He always talks about 'that man who lived for three days inside the fish.' And I have trouble with it. How could a man live for three days inside a fish?" And I asked him, "Who told you the man lived inside that fish?"

"Well," he says, "I've heard preachers say it."

"I know, but what does the Bible say?"

"Doesn't the Bible say it?"

"Mine doesn't say it." And so we opened the Bible right there, and I went over it with that young man. He said, "Boy, wait until I get back to class!" And that young fellow accepted the Lord. When I saw him the next Sunday I asked, "How did it work out?"

“Well, my professor *always* mentioned Jonah, but we had a class Monday morning, and he didn’t mention Jonah. We had a class Wednesday morning, again he didn’t mention him; and I thought I was sunk, because I wanted him to mention it. So Friday morning, here he came. He said, ‘Now about that fellow that lived for three days inside of a fish,’ and the class laughed.”

So this young fellow said to him, “Doctor, who told you the man was alive three days and three nights inside of a fish?”

He fumbled for a moment, “I’ve heard preachers say it.”

“Yes, but what does the Bible say?”

“Well, I think the Bible says it. We’ll get one.”

When they finally located one, the student went over it with him, and the professor said, “Well, this is certainly a new approach, and I don’t have an answer for it.”

Friend, you may have been brought up to believe that Jonah was alive all that time, and if you want to believe it that way, go ahead. But for goodness sake, give some of these young people an anchor to use in these godless schools. Back there in Georgia that professor said to the student, “Oh! Then Jonah was raised from the dead!” He answered, “Yes, and so was Jesus. And if you have trouble with one, you’ll have trouble with the other.”

***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.***  
(Matthew 12:40)

Was Jonah alive or dead?

## PART 3 God of the Second Chance

Now I want to write Luke 11:30 over this section:

***For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation.***

Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites. When this man arrived in the city of Nineveh, he not only *had* a message, he *was* a message. He was a sign to the Ninevites. And that is something to keep in mind as we get into this third chapter of the Book of Jonah.

We read here in the first verse, “Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time....” I know some folk who consider this verse their favorite verse in the Bible. You may wonder why this could be the favorite verse of anyone. Suppose our government had commissioned a man, for instance a general, to carry a message, and he disobeyed as Jonah did. What would be done with him? They would dismiss him, wouldn’t they? Would they trust him with orders a second time? I don’t think so. I asked a friend of mine who was one of the vice presidents of the Bank of America in San Francisco, “Harry, if you had a cashier in one of these thousand and one branches you have, and he absconded with all the funds and then returned after spending the money down in Mexico, would you take him back and give him another chance?” He said, “Absolutely not! He had his chance. We would never give that man another chance—never again trust him with any money.” I do not know, but I have a notion that would be the policy of every corporation in this country. And I’m sure many churches would never give a man a second chance. Aren’t you glad, beloved, that *God* will give you a second chance? “The word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time.” It’s wonderful, isn’t it! God gave him a second chance.

A schoolteacher spoke to me when I was teaching the Book of Jonah at Mt. Hermon. Teachers always have had the faculty of asking me questions I couldn’t answer! On this particular morning she came with this question: “Dr. McGee, suppose Jonah had bought a ticket again for Tarshish and started out, what then?” Well, I had never thought of that, so I said to the lady, “The only thing I can think of is that there would be another fish out there waiting for him—or maybe the same one. I’m confident that this man is going to Nineveh. ‘The word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time,’ and since he is God’s man, I don’t think it will be necessary for it to come to him the third time.”

In a parallel situation, I have never read of the prodigal son asking his dad to stake him the second time or the third time to go out into the far country. He had one fling and that was it, because he was a son of the father. And Jonah, this backsliding prophet, is now on the way to Nineveh, I can assure you of that. And he is going there to give God’s message. “The word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time.”

I like to think of our God as the God of the second chance. *He* gives us a second chance. And, by the way, He gives us more than two. I’m working somewhere up in the hundreds. I do not know exactly where, but I’m working way up there. God has been so gracious to me! He gives us many chances, and He has always done that. For instance, you may remember Jacob in the Book of Genesis. God had made wonderful promises to that man, yet he failed God again and again. But God would not let him go. And one night at the Brook Jabbok, God crippled his leg to get him. God would not give him up. He is the God of the second chance.

And then David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, committed an awful sin. And I do not know why, but over the years I've noticed the soapbox orators, whom I've heard as I have walked through the park, are usually preaching on David. They feel like God made a terrible blunder choosing David and letting him have a second chance. Without question the double sin he committed was awful. The Bible doesn't tone it down. But aren't you glad God gave him a second chance? If He had not, we wouldn't have Psalm 23; we wouldn't have Psalm 32; we wouldn't have Psalm 51; and we wouldn't have almost a hundred other psalms, for David wrote most of these psalms following that experience. And you don't read about David continuing to live in disobedience to God. David slipped, and God gave him a second chance. He is the God of the second chance.

And then Simon Peter, you remember, stumbled and fell. And our Lord had even warned him,

***“... Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail....”*** (Luke 22:31, 32)

God says, “I'll not give you up.” And this man Simon Peter was given the privilege of preaching the first sermon on the Day of Pentecost when 3,000 men came to Christ. And God gave him a wonderful lifelong ministry. God did not give him up.

Also, John Mark is an example in the Scriptures of one who failed. He was on the first missionary journey with Paul and his uncle Barnabas, whose name means “son of consolation.” But when John Mark looked out on that frightful wilderness of Asia Minor, he showed a yellow streak down his back, and he headed home to mama. So when they were ready for the second journey, Barnabas said, “Let's take John Mark with us again and give him another chance.” In effect, Paul's response was, “Absolutely not! Do you think I would take a man who had so failed on the first missionary journey? I won't give him another chance.” But Uncle Barnabas took him anyway. The team of Paul and Barnabas split over John Mark because Paul wouldn't have him. But Paul was proven wrong. And there came the day when Paul acknowledged it—in fact, in his swan song he wrote, “...Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11). Isn't that a wonderful thing—John Mark made good! God didn't give him up after his first failure. God gave him another chance.

After giving these messages on Jonah on a radio program in downtown Los Angeles many years ago, I received a letter from a doctor in Beverly Hills. He wrote: “Thank God for Jonah 3:1. That now is my favorite verse, and I'll tell you why.” Then he told me his experience. He had been an officer in a church in Chicago, and some problem had arisen. Charges had been brought against him. He said he was not guilty at all, but everyone turned against him. He found no sympathy, no understanding from anyone in the church. So he walked out. He even moved his practice to Southern California and became a success out here, but he would never darken the door of a church. He said, “Never again!”

However he did listen to our radio program. And, friend, may I say to you, that has been the wonder of radio. We never know who is listening. We find that there are countless numbers of people who have never darkened the door of anyone's church, but they will listen to the radio. And that doctor was listening the night we came to this third chapter of Jonah. He said, “If God would give those men a second chance, He will give me a second chance.” And this man came back to the Lord. So as a preacher I wrote a very professional letter and urged him to become

active in some church, and he wrote back: “I’ve already done that!” May I say to you, the word of the Lord came to this doctor in our contemporary society the second time; and there are any number of people to whom the word of the Lord has come the second time, giving them a second chance. Only God will do that. And God will give you and me a second chance.

### ***Putting It On the Line***

So let’s follow this man Jonah as God gives him a second chance and sends him into the city of Nineveh. We’re told, “So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land” (Jonah 2:10). At last he is out on the dry land, and we believe God has raised him from the dead.

***Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.”*** (Jonah 3:1, 2)

And this man now will give one of the most startling messages that city ever heard.

***So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent.*** (Jonah 3:3)

Now if you were to go back to the nineteenth century, you would find writers of the school of higher criticism ridiculing this story, not just on account of the fish, but on account of the statements attributed to the Lord that Nineveh was a great city; and Jonah says it was an *exceedingly* great city! An ancient city of that size just wasn’t possible at all, according to the critics, because anyone knows that the ancient cities—certainly one as prominent as Nineveh—would have had walls around them. Even Babylon in all of its glory was not a great city in size. It was compressed together, with very narrow streets, so that in time of a siege people could get inside of it. Babylon was walled in, and that had to be true of Nineveh, the critics reasoned; and in their view, by no means could it be said that it was an *exceedingly* great city.

Well, that was before Sir Austen Layard, the French archaeologist, and others with him were in Mosul. They could see across the Tigris River a very large tell or mound two and one-half miles long in the shape of a trapezium. These men began to make inquiry of the natives there and came to the conclusion it must be ancient Nineveh. When they began to excavate, they found that it was, indeed, the ancient city of Nineveh. But even with that discovery, the size didn’t meet the measurements necessary for what Jonah was saying. So these men probed further and found there was a tremendous valley there, a valley that was filled not with just one city but quite a few of them; and three of them were prominent cities. You see, Nineveh was located at a juncture of the Tigris River and the upper Zab. It was the city farthest to the north. About twenty miles south of Nineveh, at another juncture of the upper Zab and the Tigris River, was the city of Calah. Then on the upper Zab and about ten miles east of Nineveh was the city of Khorsabad. Now there were other cities also in this area. It was low, rich land—in the South we would call it bottom land—which was easily farmed. And so this was a very rich and apparently irrigated area. It was the center of a tremendous population.

There’s a very interesting passage in the Bible, way back in Genesis 10:11-12, which speaks of this particular area:

***From that land he [Nimrod] went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that is the principal city).***

So we know now that Nineveh was a tremendous area by all standards. Even by today's standard it would be considered very large. Obviously, the man who wrote the Book of Jonah was an eyewitness. He had been there!

Frankly, I think it would correspond to the Los Angeles basin in many ways. They had natural fortifications with the Tigris River on the west, and on the south and to the east the Zab River; plus, there was a wall. As a result, this entire area could be protected from an enemy and was protected for many centuries. It was actually a flood of the Tigris River which took out a portion of the wall that finally permitted an enemy to come in and destroy this city. Nineveh was an exceedingly great city.

Now we are told here that Jonah entered the city:

***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!"*** (Jonah 3:4)

This man comes into the city with this very startling message, a message that would shock the people. His only problem was, how would he get a crowd? He was not known in the city of Nineveh. The king didn't know him; none of the great people in Nineveh knew him, nor was there a committee to arrange for a campaign. So how did Jonah get a crowd? If you were a preacher you would worry about this. It would be of great concern to you, especially in these days of apostasy. How would a prophet of God, going into the pagan city of Nineveh, get a crowd?

Well, let me call you back now to this man Jonah who had spent three days inside a fish with the gastric juices working upon the epidermis of this backsliding prophet. I can tell you that he was a mess when he came out of that fish!

I have given one account of a man being swallowed by a fish near the Falkland Islands. But, let me briefly give you another. Dr. Harry Rimmer, President of the Research Science Bureau in Los Angeles, writes of another case. "In *Literary Digest* we noticed an account of an English sailor who was swallowed by a gigantic Rhinoden in the English Channel. Briefly, the account stated that in an attempt to harpoon one of these monstrous sharks the man fell overboard, before he could be picked up again, the shark turned and engulfed him. Forty-eight hours after the accident occurred, the fish was sighted and slain. When the shark was opened by the sailors, they were amazed to find the man unconscious but alive! He was rushed to the hospital where he was found to be suffering from shock, and a few hours later was discharged as being physically fit."

Dr. Rimmer was in London, England, two years after that, and this man was being advertised as the Jonah of the twentieth century. When Dr. Rimmer went to see him, he noticed that he was very strange, in fact, startling looking! He didn't have a hair on his body, and his head looked like a billiard ball. His skin was covered with patches of a very peculiar yellowish brown color. Dr. Rimmer said you would notice him anywhere he'd go, and that was two years after he had been inside the fish.

Now Jonah spent three days inside a fish. (We don't think he was alive, but that's beside the point right at this moment.) Inside that fish the gastric juices had been working on him for three days and three nights, and now this man has come into the city. I want to tell you, he was a sight to see! And our Lord makes it very clear. He says, "As Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites ..." (Luke 11:30). I think when this man came to a street corner and stopped to wait for a street light,

the people gathered around him and said, “Brother, where have you been?” And it didn’t take him long to gather a crowd. He probably said to them, “I’m a man who has come back from the dead to bring you a message from God.”

“You don’t mean it!”

“I certainly do, and I’ll tell you my experience.” And he’d give them his experience, then say, “I’m back here to tell you that in forty days this city is to be destroyed.” May I say to you, the entire population of that city began to listen to this strange-looking man.

Now let’s get this down to where we can get hold of it. These things are real, you know. I think of that area where Nineveh was located as very much like Southern California where we are spreading out in every direction. Maybe that’s true in your city. Suppose a man began in the city center and walked from corner to corner all the way to the outskirts. Don’t you think that by the time he had gotten halfway the word would have spread until everybody was coming to hear what he had to say? Obviously this man Jonah was a sensation in the city of Nineveh! And our Lord says he was a *sign* to these Ninevites.

### ***When God Relents***

Jonah began to enter the city—a day’s journey. He cried out with a startling message, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” But even more startling than the message, more sensational than the fish or anything else in the story, is the reaction of the people.

#### ***So the people of Nineveh believed God... (Jonah 3:5)***

And I want to say to you, friend, had I been the head of a mission board sending out missionaries in that day and somebody said to me, “Why don’t you send one of your missionaries into Nineveh?” I would have said, “Let’s forget that place. That’s a godless city. They are the most brutal people in the world. There’s no use sending a missionary there. It wouldn’t do a bit of good!” I don’t know but what you might say the same thing. You would look at the brutality and sin in that city and say it’s hopeless. God didn’t think so. God wanted a message brought to this city. And all it says here is that the people of Nineveh believed God.

Now think this over very carefully. Did you know that all God has ever asked any person to do is to believe Him? That’s all. It’s amazing today how easy it is to believe *people*. While we were away recently, we heard a rumor that our organist at the church had broken her arm on Thursday night. I told everybody she had broken her arm, because that’s what I had been told. I just believed them. Then on Sunday morning, much to my chagrin, there she sat, playing the organ as usual. You may think I’m gullible anyway, and maybe I am; but I believed what I heard. Isn’t it interesting that we readily believe what people say and yet find it difficult to believe what God says? “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater....” (1 John 5:9). But these godless, brutal people of Nineveh believed God!

My friend, all that God ever asked any of us to believe is that He gave His Son to die on the cross for us; and if we will receive Him, God says, “I’ll save you.” All God asks a sinner to do is just to *believe* Him! And we’re told that the people of Nineveh believed God. Someone says, “They were terrible people!” They sure were, and Jonah believed that for a long time, too, as we’ll see in chapter 4 when we get to it.

*So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh...*

And this is amazing!

*... 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."*

All the way from the king on the throne to the peasant in the hovel, this entire city turned to God!

*"But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands."*  
(Jonah 3:5-8)

And this city was noted for its violence! Nineveh was hated throughout the world, probably more hated than any other nation in its day; but everyone turned from his violence and from his brutality. These people turned *to* God, and when they did, they turned *from* their evil ways.

Friend, there is nothing else like this on record anywhere. There has never been a great turning to God to equal this.

### **Why Nineveh?**

Why did God choose this wicked city? The very interesting thing is that the examples given to us in the Scriptures are always extreme. Whom did God choose to save in the city of Jericho? He picked Rahab the harlot. I heard a man speaking on the radio the other day who sure cleaned up Rahab's character. He said she was merely an innkeeper running a motel. May I say to you, that's not what the Bible says. But God saved her, if you please. Why? Because she believed God.

And God saved the entire city of Nineveh—a brutal, pagan, heathen city—to let the Gentile world know He will save anybody who will turn to Him and believe Him. And, of course, that still holds good today.

Now the king's word went throughout Nineveh; and the entire city went into sackcloth and ashes, crying out to God for mercy because they believed God. And what did happen?

*"Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?" Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.* (Jonah 3:9, 10)

God said He would destroy Nineveh, but He did not destroy Nineveh. The only prophecy of Jonah that we have recorded is, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" But it wasn't overthrown. God did not destroy Nineveh. So, did Jonah give a wrong prophecy? No, it happened to be a right prophecy. Had God changed His mind? Was God wishy-washy?

Someone asked that of Dr. G. Campbell Morgan years ago in England: “Dr. Morgan, is God as changeable as a weather vane?” His reply was, “You used the wrong illustration. A weather vane is not changeable. It never changes. It operates according to a law that says it doesn’t make any difference which way the wind will blow, the weather vane always points in the direction the wind is going. It is the wind that does the changing.”

Who really changed? God or Nineveh? The weather vane turned to Nineveh because God will always save when people turn to Him. He *has* never changed. He *will* never change. And if they don’t turn to Him, He will do what He promised—He will judge.

If you want the sequel to the story of Jonah, read the little prophecy of Nahum written a hundred years later. It is the judgment of Nineveh. By then the city had again turned from God, and this time they did not repent of it. The revival was gone. Judgment came, and Nineveh was left in ruins. Even the ruins were lost to civilization until the city was excavated in the nineteenth century. May I say to you, God never changes.

It does not matter which way the wind is blowing in your life, God never changes. He will save any sinner who will come to Him in faith. The writer to the Hebrews assures us that,

***Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*** (Hebrews 13:8)

## PART 4 To the Heart of God

Jonah had a most remarkable experience; he experienced what no other man ever has from the very beginning. From Noah's preaching down to the preaching of Billy Graham, no one has ever seen one hundred percent saturation of the Word of God bring one hundred percent conversion; but this man saw it. Jonah had the experience of seeing an entire city turn to God!

### *Jonah is Displeased*

Now if you and I had that experience, I think we would go down to Western Union and send a wire back to Jerusalem: "Rejoice with me. The revival is here! It's broken out in the city of Nineveh!" You'd think that Jonah would have done something like this. But no! Chapter 4 opens with a startling statement. This, to me, is the strangest part of the Book of Jonah:

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

Now God has more problems with this backsliding prophet than He had with the entire population of Nineveh! When this man declared the message, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" the people of Nineveh believed God. Do you know that all God has ever asked sinners to do is to *believe* what He has done for them? They need to know that He is a God of judgment but that He also is a God of mercy. Paul, when he reasoned with Felix, spoke with him about the mercy of God and the saving power of Jesus Christ, but he also reasoned with him about judgment. And, my friend, lost men and women today are moving to a frightful judgment without Jesus Christ!

And so this city of Nineveh believed God, and they turned to God; and this man Jonah was displeased by it! Now why was he displeased? If I had been in Jonah's shoes, and if I had been in Jonah's fish, I might have felt the same way he did. This Scripture will give us some insight into the heart of Jonah.

***So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish ...."***

There have been commentators who said the reason Jonah acted as he did is that he really didn't know God. But Jonah makes it clear the problem is that he *did* know God. Listen to him:

***... for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.*** (Jonah 4:2)

Oh, my friend, you and I haven't any conception of how gracious and merciful our God is and how He longs to save. But, you see, He is a holy God, and He has made one way for a man to be saved. The apostle Peter in speaking of Jesus said,

***... there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*** (Acts 4:12)

This is the message that must be gotten out if folk are to experience the mercy of God and know something of the grace of God; because, my friend, apart from Jesus Christ a frightful, awful eternity is before every individual. And it would be before us today if Christ had not borne that judgment death for us upon the cross.

Notice that Jonah says, “You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.” In other words, when God called him to go to Nineveh and speak to that city and tell them that because of their wickedness God would destroy them, Jonah knew what would happen.

The Ninevites were evil people. You talk about violence and lawlessness! This city was given over to it. It was dreaded and feared in the ancient world. When the Assyrian army moved against a city, sometimes an entire population in a community would commit suicide rather than fall into the hands of those brutal Assyrians. Jonah knew God was merciful and that actually God would save even Ninevites. And Jonah says in effect, “Those rascals, I don’t trust them. They might say they’ve turned to God, and then not do it. Or they might sincerely turn to God, and if they did, God would save them.” He knew what God would do, and he did not want the Ninevites saved, so he headed in the opposite direction. But then God gave him a second chance to do His will, detouring him around and sending him to Nineveh despite his mind-set.

Now, having done his assignment, listen to this man. He concludes his prayer by saying,

***Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!*** (Jonah 4:3)

Jonah wants to die. May I say to you, I think he’s the most miserable person on topside of the earth at this time. Actually, the most miserable people in the world are Christians out of the will of God. Dwight L. Moody, in his quaint way, used to put it like this: “Some people have just enough religion to make them miserable.” And other people may actually be saved, but are certainly not enjoying the ride to heaven. Neither are they being used of God. I won’t question Jonah’s salvation, because he is God’s man. But, again, God had more trouble with this backsliding prophet than He did with the entire city of Nineveh. And God was going to work on Jonah. He was God’s prophet, and he did deliver His message to the Ninevites.

Now will you notice God’s method. I think it still may be His method “for He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:14). God knows us. And He knew Jonah. In other words, God is a very good psychiatrist without having read any of the modern books! God understands human nature, especially fallen human nature. He understands this old nature that you and I inherited from Adam when he rebelled against God.

Listen to the Lord’s response to Jonah:

***Then the LORD said, “Is it right for you to be angry?”*** (Jonah 4:4)

In my judgment Dr. G. Douglas Young has the best translation here: “Is doing good displeasing to thee?” Jonah says, “I want to die.” And the fact of the matter is, I suppose that most of us at one time or another have said, “I wish I were dead,” and we didn’t mean it at all. We said it because we were miserable or some difficulty had come into our life. But nobody, as far as I know, ever died by wishing. You’re safe when you say that; it’s not incurable by any means. So Jonah says, “It’s better for me to die than to live.” And God says to him, “Is it right for you to be angry?” In other words, “Look, Jonah, you have to admit that I have done good. Whether you

like Ninevites or not, I've done good. You will have to admit that is true because I have saved these Ninevites."

"So Jonah went out of the city ...." He's in a huff now; he doesn't like what God said to him. He's out of fellowship with God; and you can be sure of one thing, he doesn't have a friend in the city of Nineveh. His hometown is several hundred miles away, and he is homesick, and he is lonely. This is the time when God is going to move in on this man.

***So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter.... (Jonah 4:5)***

Today you'd liken it to a trailer court, I suppose, but actually he made only a camp out there, just a booth or shelter to live in. We know the topography of the land where Nineveh and Calah and Khorsabad were, the three great cities in that valley. It was very extensive and supported a great population, and the land was all irrigated. I think Jonah went up on the hill, which was the protection for the city, where he could get a seat on the fifty-yard line to see if the Ninevites were really sincere in their repentance. Jonah didn't trust them. He did not believe they were genuine.

It is very interesting to compare the little prophecy of Nahum with the Book of Jonah. We read there that several generations later Nineveh had turned away from God and had lapsed back into idolatry. And when you read Nahum, you find God destroyed the city of Nineveh at that time. And, as we mentioned in Part 3, it was lost to mankind and to history until 1860 when Layard, the French archaeologist, saw that tell across from Mosul on the Tigris River and began to excavate. And he found out it was, as he suspected, the ruins of the ancient city of Nineveh. The first thing that had happened to cause its destruction was a flood that took out one corner of the wall. This let the enemy in, and the city fell to its enemies. But that did not happen until 100 or 150 years after Jonah's day.

Now under Jonah's preaching, the Ninevites have turned to God, and God has saved them. But this man Jonah wants to get a good seat up at an elevation where he can look out over the city, intending to stay there until the fire falls from heaven, because he doesn't believe they are sincere. And Jonah knows God. He knows He is merciful and that He will save these Ninevites. However, if they are not genuine, he knows God will judge them. And Jonah is so sure they will go back to their old sins, he is out there waiting.

### ***God is Gracious***

There sits this lonely, backsliding prophet, so unhappy he'd like to die.

***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. And the LORD God prepared a plant [in some versions called a gourd] and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. (Jonah 4:5, 6)***

This plant, this gourd vine, is as miraculous as the fish. The record tells us that the fish was prepared, and the gourd also was prepared. One is just as miraculous as the other. Now, friend, Jonah got attached to that little gourd plant. You see, it was God who made this gourd sprout up

and grow. Jonah hasn't had anything living that he can communicate with, and we are so made that even if we are not gregarious creatures, we want to communicate with somebody or something.

It's amazing how we can get attached to a living thing. I was speaking some years ago at the Moody Founder's Week Conference in Chicago, and some friends invited me out to dinner. As soon as I got inside their apartment the lady of the house wanted to show me her geranium. She said, "I know you come from the place where they grow geraniums, but I want you to see mine." So I went with her, and all I saw was a little stalk sticking out of a flower pot. That's all it was. There wasn't even a bloom on the thing! She said to me, "Isn't it nice?" And she petted the flowerpot and began to *talk* to the plant. She's a sane woman, I can assure you of that, a very wonderful Christian! But she actually talked to that little green stub and said, "Dr. McGee grows geraniums in California." And, friend, I want to tell you that if that geranium had spoken back, she and I both would have jumped out the window of that apartment. But she was attached to it, and I found out that you can get attached to living things like that.

For many years I was really rough on owners of dogs. But I've learned to appreciate dog owners. I'm attached to a dog now, and I'm not saying anything ugly about dog owners anymore. My daughter brought the dog home one night, a big husky, the biggest dog I'd ever seen. I asked her when she came in with him, "Did you bring a saddle?" And I thought, *My, we can't keep this dog.* And then there came along a young fellow who married my daughter and took her all the way across the country. When she left she said to me, "Now I'll leave the dog with you." Well, the dog misses her, and I miss her. The fact of the matter is, the dog and I sit on the patio, and do you know what? I *talk* to the dog! My wife came to the door the other day and said, "Who are you talking to out here?" I said, "I'm talking to the smartest dog in the world." He and I take walks up one of those trails in the foothills of the San Gabriel mountains, and I talk to him. One time we met a fellow on the trail, and he looked around to see who was with me. He sure seemed glad to get on down the trail, I'll tell you that! It's amazing how you can get attached to a living plant or animal.

Jonah became attached to the gourd. I imagine Jonah got a bucket that very day and went down to the Tigris River, filled the bucket with water, came back, and poured the water around the roots of the gourd and started to train the vine to grow up over his booth that he'd made. And I think he talked to it. "Oh, you're running the wrong way, little gourd." And, of course, Jonah had been running the wrong way too; and he was still running the wrong way. But he says to the vine, "I'll have to train you this way." Believe me, he got attached very quickly to the only living thing he could talk to. And God had arranged all this purposely. Watch how He is going to move in on Jonah:

***But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered.*** (Jonah 4:7)

"But God prepared a worm...." This worm is just as miraculous as the fish. "... And it so damaged the plant that it withered." This worm cut the vine down because worms just don't fall in love with vines—they would rather eat them.

***And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."*** (Jonah 4:8)

Here he goes again, *wishing*, but it won't do him a bit of good.

We have had here in the Book of Jonah a prepared fish, a prepared gourd, a prepared worm, and a prepared vehement east wind. All of them are miraculous—each one of them—and they are equally miraculous. The vehement east wind was just as miraculous as the fish was. You see, God is dealing with this man. Jonah has lost his gourd vine, the little living thing to which he had become attached. It's dead now, and he's actually grieving over it because it's the only living thing he had. You say such behavior is ridiculous! May I say to you, it's ridiculous the gourds that you and I get attached to in this world today. How many people have a "gourd" to which they are giving their time, giving their energy, giving their money, giving everything—and what is it really?

### ***Heart to Heart***

Listen now to God as He speaks to Jonah:

***Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"***

Then notice Jonah's answer:

***... And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!"*** (Jonah 4:9)

In other words, Jonah says, "This is it! I want to die. You didn't destroy Nineveh, but you did destroy my gourd!" He's a petulant little prophet, isn't he? He's an unhappy prophet. He's a miserable prophet. And he's like a lot of the critical saints today. They've got a gourd, and they don't want anybody to take the gourd away from them. How did the Lord respond?

***But the LORD 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."***  
(Jonah 4:10)

God is showing this man how ridiculous it is. He says to Jonah, "Jonah, a gourd is nothing." My friend, I hate to say this, but a pussycat is nothing, a little dog is nothing; but a human being has a soul that is either going to heaven or hell. And God did not ask you to *love* the lost before you go to them. He said, "*I love the lost, and I want you to go to them.*" That is what He is saying to Jonah: "Jonah, I love the Ninevites."

***And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?*** (Jonah 4:11)

Who does He mean by "one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left"? He means little children. God says, "You wouldn't want Me to destroy that city, would you, Jonah? If you can fall in love with a gourd vine, can't you at least fall in love with Ninevite children?"

Now, may I make this application? When I was teaching in a Bible institute, I used to say (like all the other teachers were saying) that if you are called to go as a missionary, you ought to

love the people to whom you go. I disagree vehemently with that now, because how can you love people before you know them? I first applied that to myself. I have never accepted a call to a church because I loved the people; I didn't know them to begin with. I went because I felt that God had called me to go there and preach. But I also have never been in a church in which I didn't become involved with the people. I have stood at their bedsides in hospitals; I've been at their gravesides when death came; I've been with them in the marriages that have taken place in their families; and I can truthfully say that I have never yet left a church where there wasn't a great company of people whom I loved—and I really mean that I *loved* them in the Lord. But I did not love them when I first went there, because I did not know them.

God is saying to a great many people today, "I want you to go and take the Word of God to those who are lost." And they say, "But I don't love them." God says, "I never asked you to love them; I asked you to *go*." I cannot find anywhere that God ever asked Jonah to go because he loved the Ninevites. He said, "Jonah, I want you to go because I love them—I love Ninevites. I want to save Ninevites. I want you to take the message to them."

Again, may I say that I am afraid there are a great many people in the church who are caterpillars. Church members are either pillars or caterpillars: The pillars hold up the church, and the caterpillars just crawl in and out. There are a lot of people just crawling in and out of the church—waiting for some great wave of emotion, waiting for some feeling to take hold of them—and they have never done anything yet. God says that we are to get busy for Him.

I remember talking to a missionary who was home from Africa, and he was showing me a picture of some little black boys in the orphans' home there. I could tell by the way he looked at the picture that he loved those little boys. I said to him, "When you first went to Africa, did you love the Africans?" He said, "No, I really wanted to go to my people in Greece, but at that time the door was closed and I could not go; so I had to go to Africa." As he held that picture, I said to him, "But do you love those little fellows now?" Tears came to his eyes. He said, "Yes, I love them now."

God says to you and me, "You go with the Word. I love the lost. You take the Word to them, and when they are saved and you get acquainted with them and know them, you will love them too."

Since Jonah wrote the book, I think it is reasonable to say that after this experience he left the dead gourd vine and went down to where the living were walking the streets of Nineveh, and I think he rejoiced with them that they had come to a saving knowledge of God. My friend, what a message this is! Why don't you get involved in getting the Word of God out to people? Don't wait to be motivated by things that are emotional. Take the Word of God to them because God loves them; and if you'll do that, I will guarantee that you will learn to love them also.