

Through the Bible

JONAH

Zac Poonen



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JONAH



OUT OF THE 16 OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS, JONAH WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO DID **NOT** PROPHECY ANYTHING EITHER TO ISRAEL OR TO JUDAH. HE PROPHESED ONLY TO **NINEVEH**. THE BOOK OF JONAH IS NOT REALLY A PROPHECY, BUT A BOOK OF **HISTORY**. IT IS A STORY THAT ILLUSTRATES GOD'S TREMENDOUS LOVE FOR **ALL** PEOPLE.



JONAH IS THE GREAT **MISSIONARY** BOOK OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. IT SHOWS THE **NARROW-HEARTEDNESS** OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE AND THE **LARGE-HEARTEDNESS** OF GOD -- AND HIS CONCERN AND LOVE FOR **EVEN** THE MOST **WICKED** NATION ON EARTH



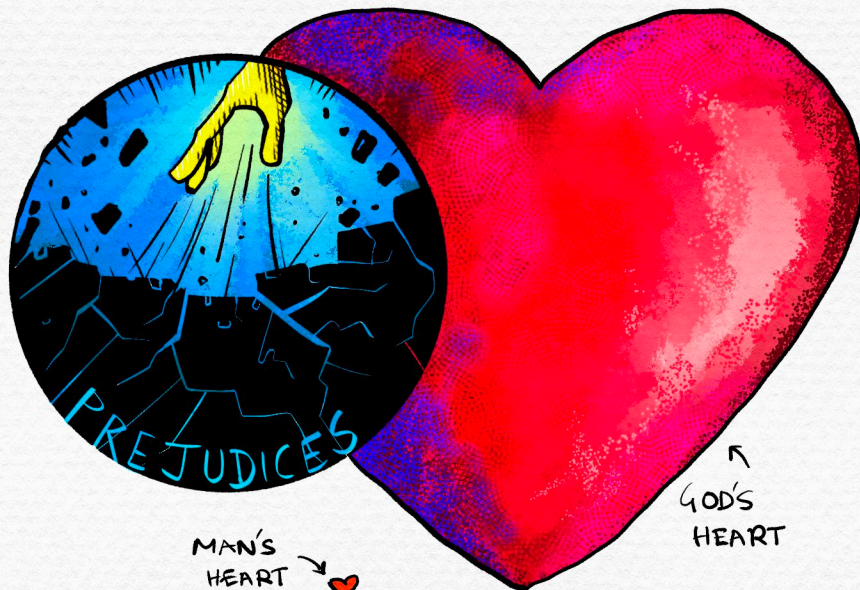
WHEN GOD NEEDED A MESSENGER TO GO TO NINEVEH, HE PICKED **JONAH**. THAT WAS A TREMENDOUS **HONOUR** -- FOR JONAH WOULD BE THE **FIRST** PROPHET OF GOD TO THE **OUTSIDE** WORLD -- TO THE NON-JEWISH NATIONS. BUT HE **ALMOST** MISSED THAT PRIVILEGE BY HIS **DISOBEDIENCE**.



WE SEE HERE AGAIN HOW GOD IS DEPENDENT ON A **HUMAN** CHANNEL TO **CONVEY** HIS MESSAGE. AND IF THE MESSENGER IS **NOT** WILLING TO COOPERATE, GOD IS **LIMITED**. GOD HAS TO **WAIT** UNTIL THE **VESSEL** IS **READY** -- AS IN THE CASE OF **MOSES**. WHEN ISRAEL WAS **READY** TO BE DELIVERED FROM EGYPT, **MOSES** WAS **NOT** READY. AND SO ISRAEL HAD TO **WAIT** FOR THEIR **DELIVERANCE** UNTIL GOD HAD **FINISHED** PREPARING **MOSES**. WE SEE SOMETHING **SIMILAR** HERE.



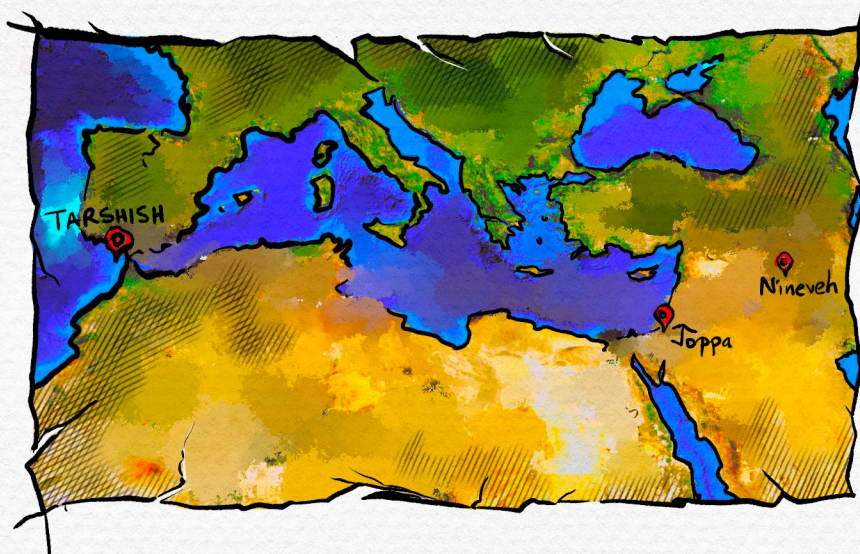
GOD WANTED TO GIVE NINEVEH A MESSAGE. BUT HE HAD TO **PREPARE** HIS SERVANT FIRST TO TAKE THAT MESSAGE. JONAH WAS **PREJUDICED** AGAINST THE ASSYRIANS AND WAS UNWILLING TO GO TO THEM, JUST AS **PETER** LATER WAS UNWILLING TO GO TO THE **GENTILES** -- TO THE HOUSE OF CORNELIUS.



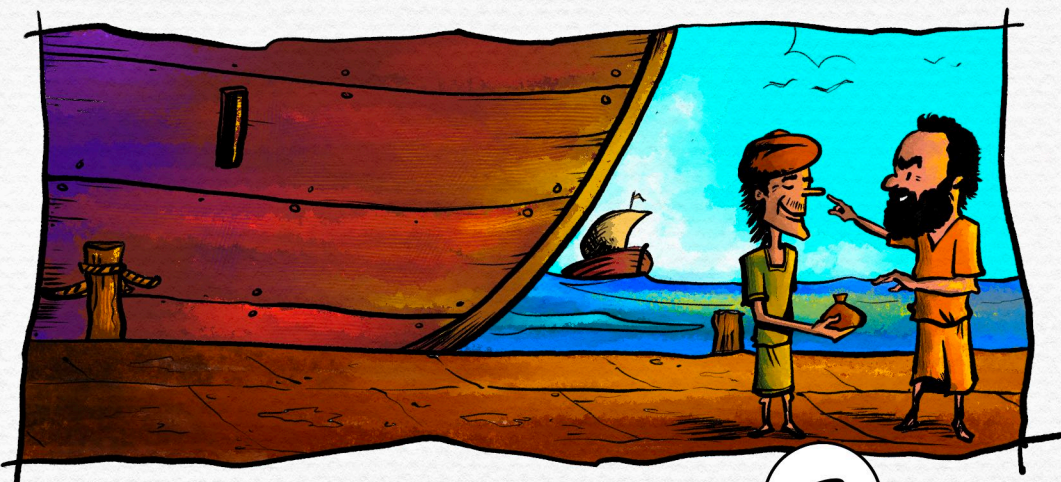
PREJUDICE IS A VERY **STRONG** THING. ALL OF US HAVE CERTAIN PREJUDICES. AND IF GOD IS NOT ABLE TO **BREAK DOWN** THOSE **PREJUDICES**, OUR SERVICE FOR THE LORD WILL BE **LIMITED**. GOD MAY STILL USE US, BUT HE WILL BE LIMITED IN HOW **MUCH** HE CAN USE US, BECAUSE HIS **HEART** IS MUCH **LARGER** THAN OURS.



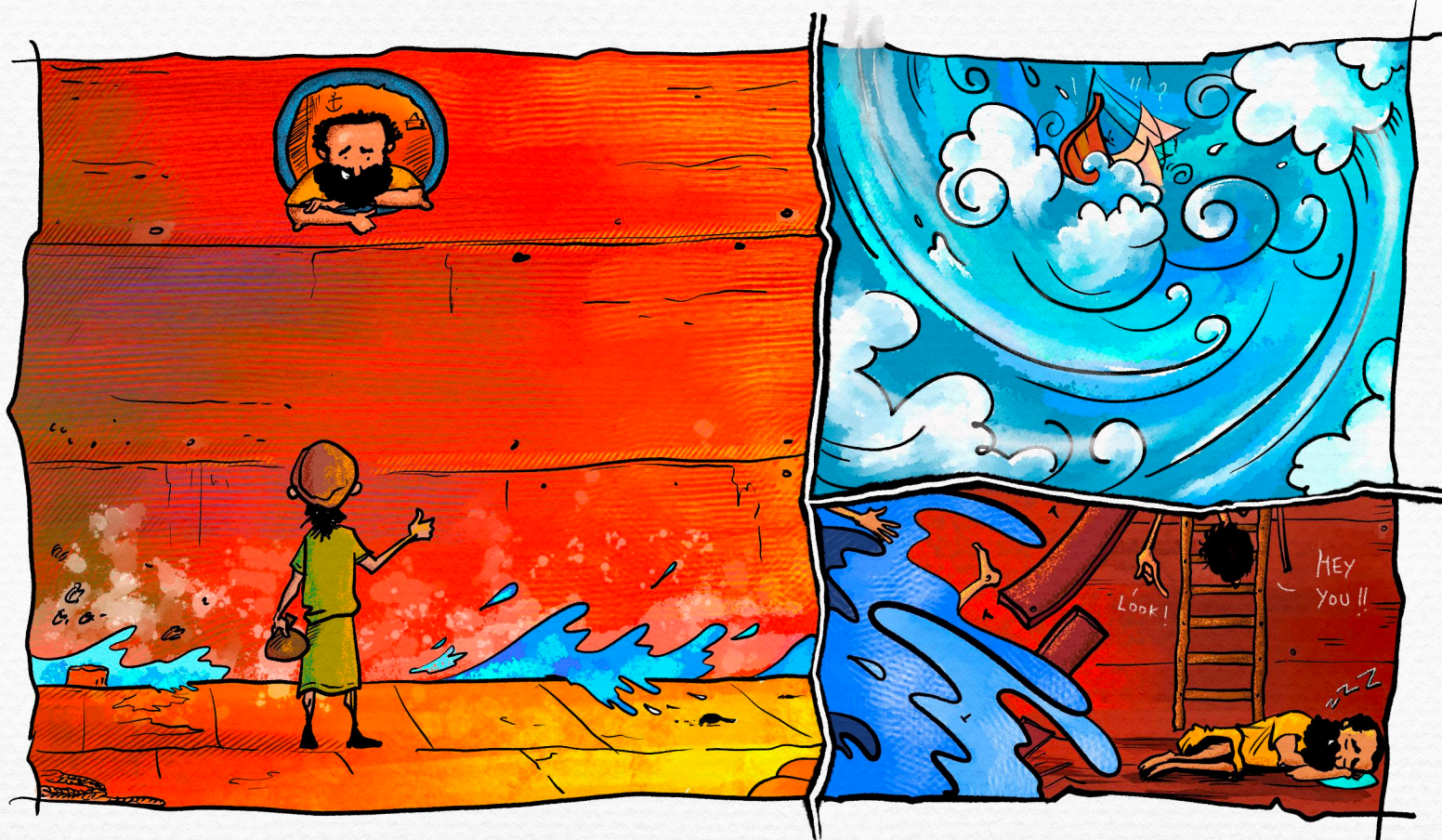
NINEVEH WAS ABOUT 600 KILOMETRES EAST OF ISRAEL. THAT WAS A **LONG** DISTANCE FOR JONAH TO TRAVEL. BUT THAT WAS NOT THE PRIMARY REASON WHY HE DID NOT WANT TO GO THERE. EVERYONE IN THE WORLD **HATED** THE ASSYRIANS, BECAUSE THEY WERE SO **CRUEL**. AND JONAH DID **NOT WANT** THE **WICKED ASSYRIANS** TO **REPENT** OF THEIR SINS, BECAUSE HE KNEW THAT IF THEY REPENTED, GOD WOULD **SPARE** THEM -- AND THEN THEY WOULD COME AND **DESTROY ISRAEL**.



THE LORD TOLD JONAH, "GO TO NINEVEH AND CRY AGAINST THE CITY, BECAUSE THEIR **WICKEDNESS** HAS COME UP BEFORE ME" (1:1, 2). BUT JONAH, INSTEAD OF GOING **EAST**, WENT **WEST**. HE WENT TO JOPPA, FOUND A SHIP, PAID THE **FARE**, AND WENT DOWN TO **TARSHISH**, **FLEEING** FROM THE **PRESENCE** OF THE LORD (1:3).



BECAUSE JONAH HAD **MONEY** TO TRAVEL, HE **MISSED** THE WILL OF GOD. HOW BLESSED IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FOR HIM IF HE DID **NOT** HAVE ANY MONEY TO BUY A **TICKET** TO TARSHISH. WHEN GOD TELLS US TO GO SOMEWHERE AND WE WANT TO GO SOMEWHERE ELSE, IT WILL BE **GOOD** IF WE DON'T HAVE THE **MONEY** TO **TRAVEL** TO THE PLACE OF OUR **CHOICE**.



MANY **CHRISTIAN** WORKERS FEEL THAT IF THEY HAVE THE **MONEY** TO TRAVEL SOMEWHERE, THAT INDICATES THAT IT IS **GOD'S WILL**. IF THAT ARGUMENT WERE A **VALID** ONE, THEN **JONAH** WAS IN THE **WILL OF GOD** WHEN HE LEFT FOR **TARSHISH!!** JUST BECAUSE YOU HAVE THE **MONEY** TO BUY SOMETHING OR TO GO SOMEWHERE, DOES **NOT** MEAN THAT THAT IS **GOD'S WILL** FOR YOU. **MONEY** IS A GREAT **DECEIVER**. NEVER ALLOW THE AVAILABILITY OF **MONEY** TO BE THE **DECIDING** FACTOR IN DECIDING WHERE TO **GO** OR WHAT TO **BUY**.

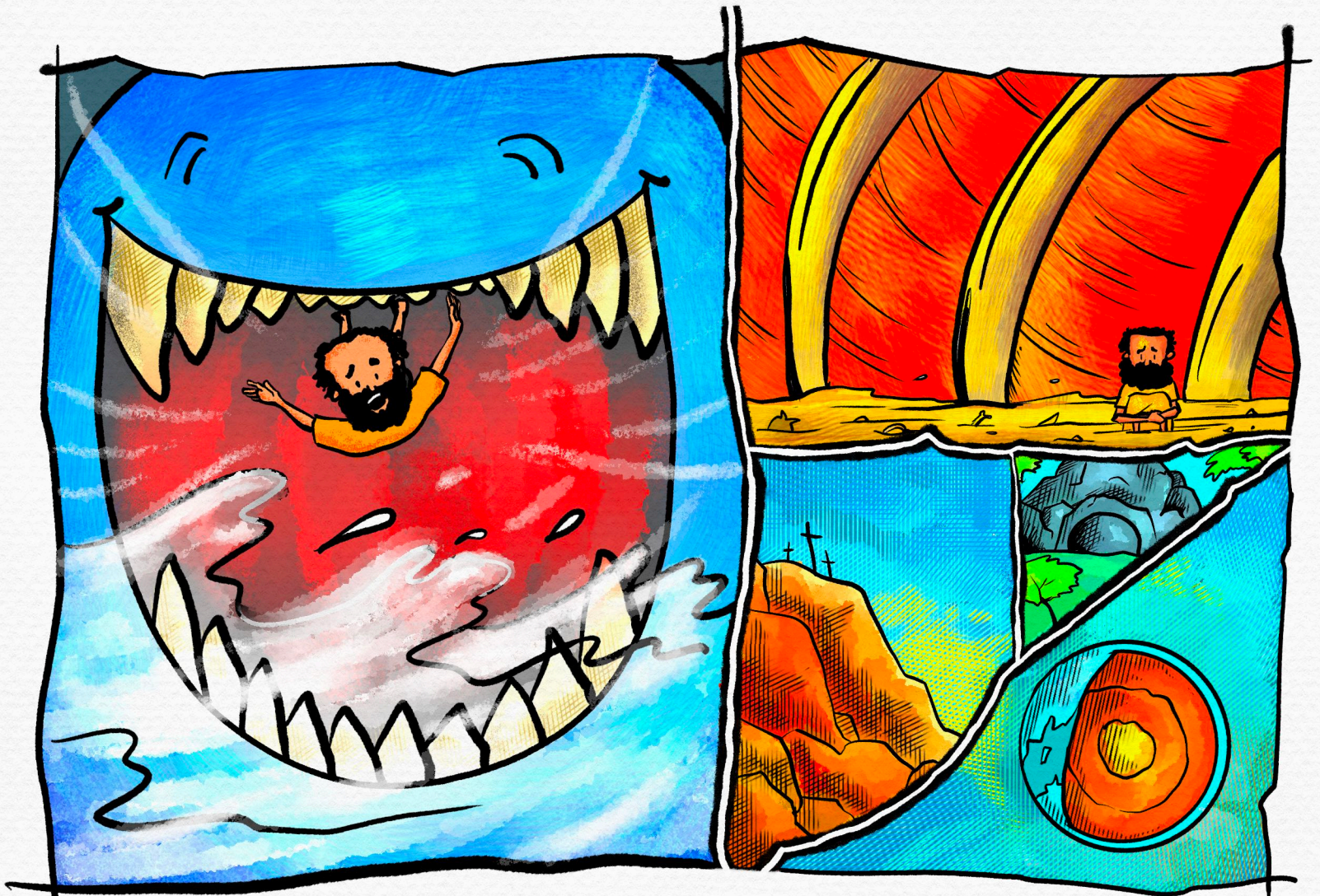
WHEN **JONAH** WENT AWAY FROM THE **WILL OF GOD**, THE **LORD** HURLED A GREAT **WIND** ON THE **SEA** AND A GREAT **STORM**, AND THE **SHIP** WAS ABOUT TO **BREAK UP**. THE **SAILORS** WERE AFRAID AND EACH CRIED OUT TO HIS **GOD** BUT THE **STORM** DID NOT **SUBSIDE**. WHILE THE OTHERS WERE **PRAYING** TO THEIR **IDOLS**, THE **ONLY** ONE ON THAT **SHIP** WHO KNEW THE **TRUE GOD** WAS **SLEEPING**. THEY **WOKE** HIM UP AND **ASKED** HIM TO **PRAY** TOO.



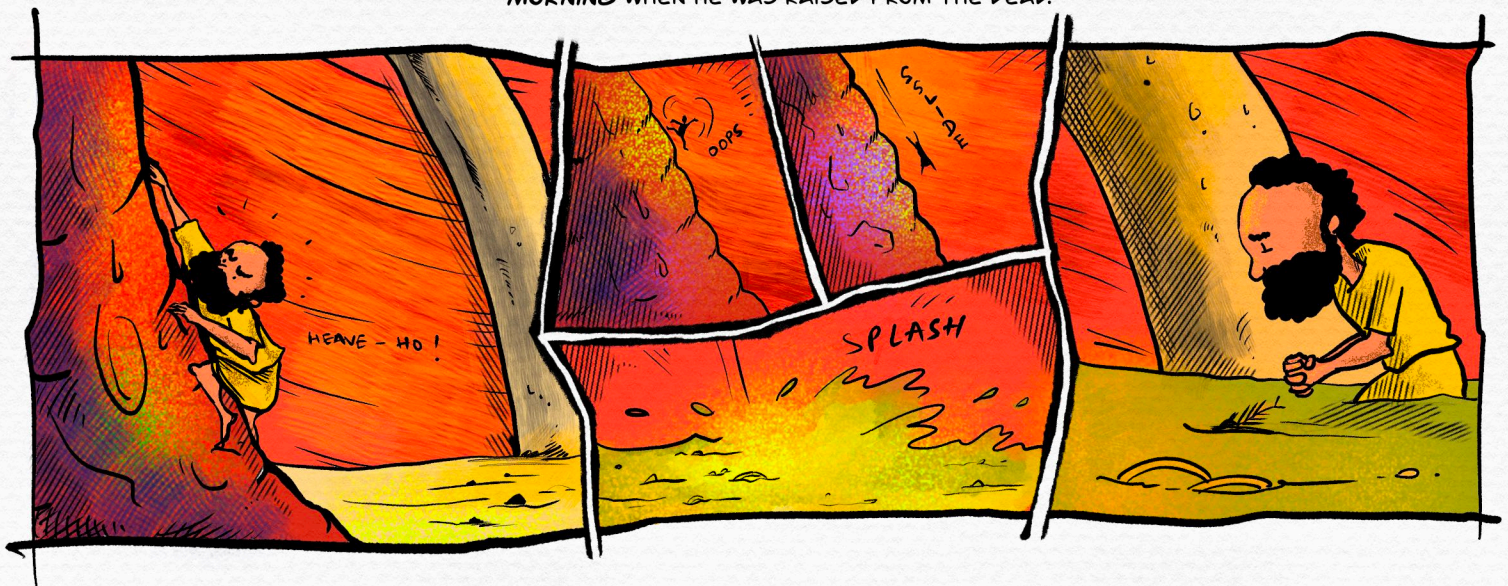
"PLEASE PICK ME UP AND THROW ME OUTSIDE INTO THE **SEA** AND IT WILL STOP, BECAUSE I KNOW THIS **STORM** HAS COME UPON YOU BECAUSE OF ME" (VERSE 12).

THEN THEY CAST **LOTS** TO FIND OUT WHOSE **FAULT** IT WAS THAT THEIR **PRAYERS** WERE NOT BEING ANSWERED. **GOD** **SOVEREIGNLY CONTROLLED** THAT **LOT** SO THAT IT FELL ON **JONAH**. THE OTHERS IN THE **SHIP** WERE FAR **GREATER SINNERS** THAN **JONAH**; YET THE **STORM** CAME BECAUSE OF **JONAH**! **DISOBEDIENCE** IN A **CHILD OF GOD** IS MORE **SERIOUS** IN **GOD'S EYES** THAN MULTITUDES OF **SINS** IN AN **UNBELIEVER**. "OF ALL THE **PEOPLES OF THE EARTH**, I HAVE **CHOSEN YOU ALONE**. THAT IS WHY I MUST **PUNISH YOU** THE **MORE** FOR ALL YOUR **SINS**" (AMOS 3:2) **JONAH** THEN **ADMITTED** HIS **SIN**. HE TOLD THEM THAT HE WAS **RUNNING AWAY FROM GOD**.

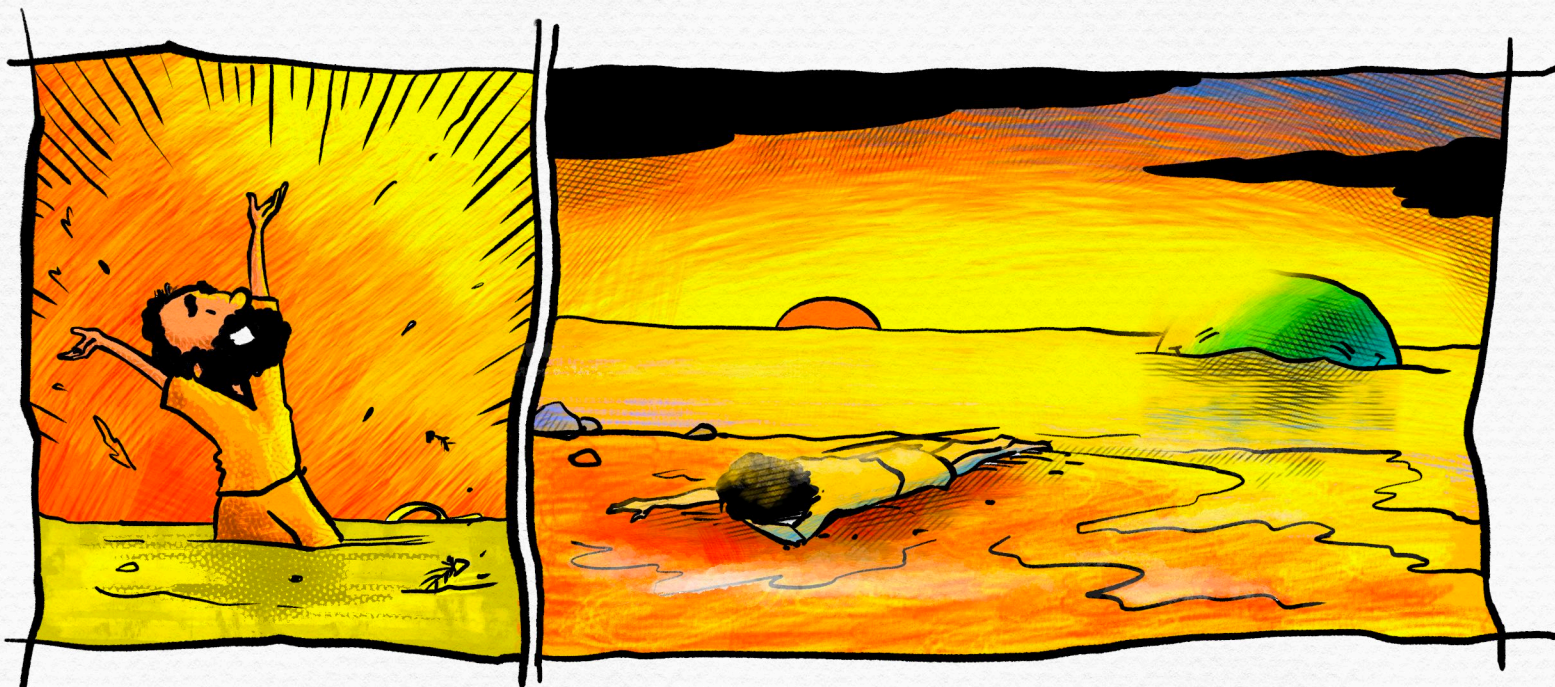
THEN THOSE **SEAMEN** WERE AFRAID THAT **GOD** WOULD **PUNISH** THEM IF THEY **THREW JONAH** INTO THE **SEA**. THOSE **HEATHEN** MEN SEEM TO HAVE **MORE** OF THE **FEAR OF GOD** HERE THAN **GOD'S PROPHET**. FINALLY, SINCE THERE WAS NO OTHER WAY, THEY **PICKED UP JONAH** AND **THREW** HIM INTO THE **SEA** -- AND **IMMEDIATELY** THE **STORM SUBSIDED**.



MEANWHILE, THE LORD HAD APPOINTED A **GREAT FISH** TO SWALLOW JONAH, AND JONAH WAS IN THE STOMACH OF THE FISH FOR THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS. GOD'S WORD IS INSPIRED AND I BELIEVE IT JUST AS IT IS WRITTEN. **JESUS** HIMSELF ENDORSED THIS **TRUE STORY** WHEN HE SAID, "AS JONAH WAS IN THE BELLY OF THE GREAT FISH, SO SHALL THE SON OF MAN BE IN THE HEART OF THE EARTH" (MATTHEW 12:40). **PARADISE** WAS LOCATED IN THE **HEART OF THE EARTH** BEFORE THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF JESUS -- AND JESUS WAS THERE, IN PARADISE, IN THE HEART OF THE EARTH, FOR THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS -- FROM THURSDAY EVENING (YES, HE WAS CRUCIFIED ON A **THURSDAY**) UNTIL **SUNDAY MORNING** WHEN HE WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD.

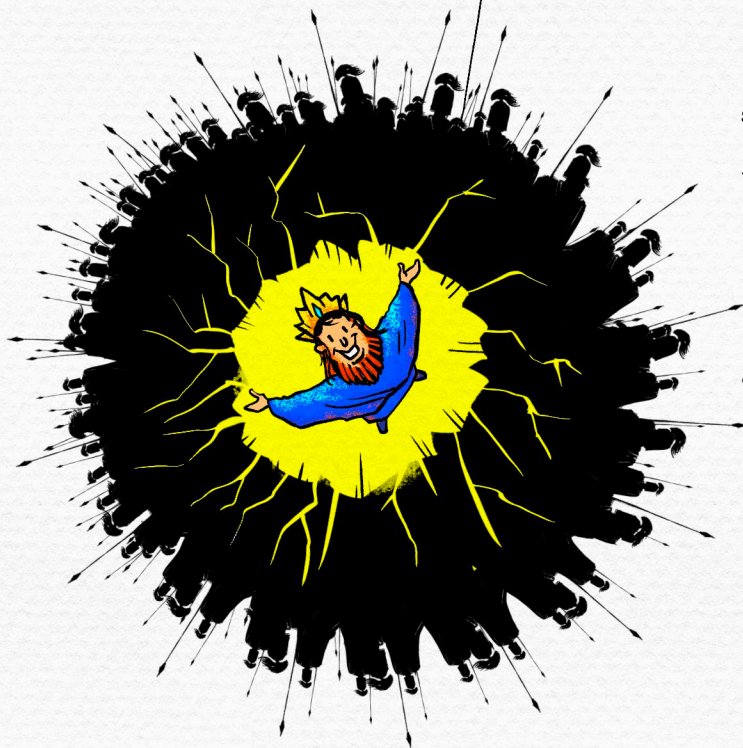


AFTER THREE DAYS, JONAH PRAYED. NOTICE THE WORD "**THEN**" IN 2:1. THAT WORD MAKES IT CLEAR THAT JONAH DID **NOT** PRAY DURING THE **FIRST** THREE DAYS AND NIGHTS. SO WHAT WAS HE DOING DURING THOSE THREE DAYS AND NIGHTS? HE WAS MOST **PROBABLY** TRYING TO **CRAWL** OUT OF THE STOMACH OF THE GREAT FISH. HE MUST HAVE **TRIED** AGAIN AND AGAIN AND ALWAYS **SLIPPED** BACK INTO THE FISH'S SLIMY BELLY. AFTER THREE DAYS OF FUTILE EFFORT, HE **FINALLY** DECIDED TO **PRAY**.



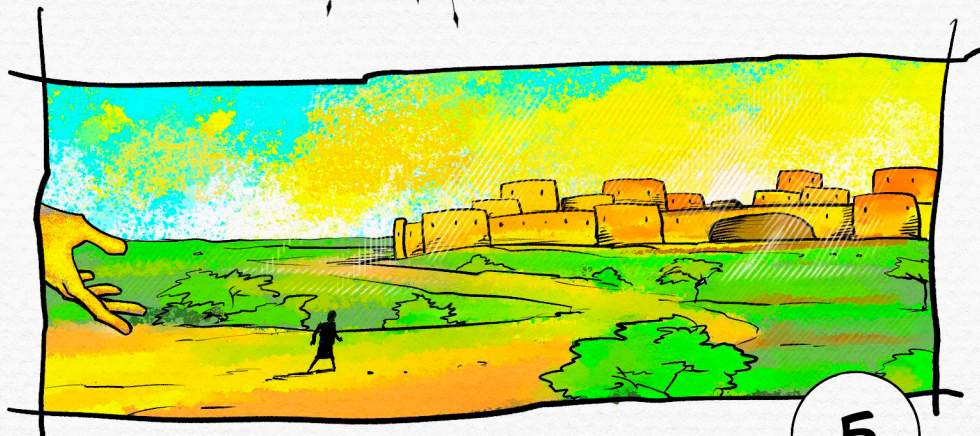
NOTHING HAPPENED EVEN AFTER HIS PRAYER. FINALLY, HE STOPPED PRAYING AND STARTED PRAISING THE LORD. HE SAID, "I WILL SACRIFICE TO YOU WITH THE VOICE OF **THANKSGIVING**. SALVATION IS FROM THE LORD (DELIVERANCE CAN COME ONLY FROM YOU)" (2:9).

AS SOON AS HE STARTED PRAISING GOD, THE LORD COMMANDED THE FISH TO VOMIT JONAH OUT ON TO THE LAND. NOTICE THE WORD "**THEN**" AGAIN IN 2:10. THAT MAKES IT **CLEAR** THAT IT WAS ONLY WHEN HE STARTED PRAISING THE LORD, THAT THE LORD COMMANDED THE FISH TO VOMIT HIM OUT. THERE IS A PRINCIPLE HERE. WE SAW THIS PRINCIPLE WHEN WE WERE STUDYING PSALM 50:23: "WHOEVER OFFERS A SACRIFICE OF THANKSGIVING (THE SAME PHRASE JONAH USES HERE) MAKES A WAY THEREBY FOR ME TO SHOW HIM MY **DELIVERANCE**."



WE HAVE SEEN HOW JEHOASHAPHAT FOLLOWED THAT PRINCIPLE TOO. SURROUNDED BY GREAT ARMIES HE BEGAN TO PRAISE THE LORD AND THUS GOD DELIVERED HIM FROM HIS ENEMIES (2 CHRONICLES 20:22).

PRAYER BY ITSELF IS NOT NECESSARILY AN EXPRESSION OF FAITH, BUT SINCERE PRAISE TO GOD IS ALWAYS THE EXPRESSION OF FAITH (SEE PSALM 106:12). YOU MAY PRAY WITHOUT FAITH. BUT IF YOU PRAISE GOD, WHEN THE SITUATION IS NOT YET RESOLVED, THEN YOU ARE EXPRESSING YOUR FAITH. WHEN YOU SAY, "I PRAISE YOU, LORD, FOR I KNOW THAT DELIVERANCE COMES ONLY FROM YOU", YOU HAVE EXPRESSED YOUR FAITH IN GOD AND MADE A WAY FOR HIM TO DELIVER YOU.



THEN THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME TO JONAH A SECOND TIME. PRAISE THE LORD THAT WHEN WE FAIL ONCE, THE LORD GIVES US A SECOND CHANCE. THAT IS ONE OF THE GREAT MESSAGES THAT COMES TO US FROM THE BOOK OF JONAH. HAVE YOU FAILED THE LORD? HE IS THE GOD OF NOT JUST A SECOND CHANCE BUT ANOTHER CHANCE, NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES YOU HAVE FAILED!



JONAH HAD LEARNED HIS **LESSON** NOW. HE HAD BEEN **CHASTENED** AND NOW HE WENT TO NINEVEH GLADLY. IT TOOK HIM **THREE DAYS** TO WALK THROUGH THAT **HUGE CITY**, PROCLAIMING IN EVERY STREET THAT NINEVEH WOULD BE **OVERTHROWN** IN 40 DAYS.

AMAZINGLY, THE PEOPLE OF NINEVEH REPENTED IMMEDIATELY.



THIS WAS THE **GREATEST** AND **QUICKEST** REVIVAL THAT EVER TOOK PLACE IN **HISTORY** -- AND IT TOOK PLACE IN A **HEATHEN NATION** .. AND JONAH'S SERMON CONSISTED OF ONLY **ONE SENTENCE**.

WHAT DO WE SEE HERE? WHEN GOD HAS **SUCCESSFULLY DEALT** WITH HIS SERVANT AND DONE A WORK IN HIM, **EVEN ONE** SENTENCE FROM HIS MOUTH HAS SUCH **TREMENDOUS POWER**. IF GOD HAS NOT SUCCEEDED IN DEALING WITH OUR **STUBBORNNESS**, OUR **DISOBEDIENCE**, OUR **REBELLION** AND OUR **PRIDE**, THEN **EVEN LONG** SERMONS WE PREACH **WON'T ACCOMPLISH** ANYTHING. BUT IF GOD HAS **SUCCEEDED** IN **BREAKING** US, THEN **EVEN ONE SENTENCE** WILL BE **POWERFUL**.



SACKCLOTH

TAKE !
... REPENT !

GOD SAYS :

I AM

FROM THE **KING** DOWN TO THE **BEGGAR** THERE WAS MUCH **WEeping** AND **REPENTING**. THEY PUT ON **SACKCLOTH** AND CALLED UPON GOD TO **FORGIVE** THEM. THEY KNEW THEY WOULD BE **JUDGED**. AND WHEN GOD SAW THAT, HE DID **NOT** PUNISH THEM.

ONE OF THE THINGS THAT ENCOURAGES ME HERE IS THAT **EVEN WHEN A WICKED CITY LIKE NINEVEH REPENTED**, GOD WAS **MERCIFUL**.

GOD KNEW THAT SOME YEARS **LATER**, THE CITY WOULD BE SO **EVIL** THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO **DESTROY** IT. BUT GOD TREATS EVERYONE AS THEY ARE **RIGHT NOW** -- AND **NOT** AS THEY WERE IN THE **PAST** OR AS THEY WILL BE IN THE **FUTURE**.

HIS NAME IS "**I AM**", NOT "**I WAS**" NOR "**I WILL BE**".

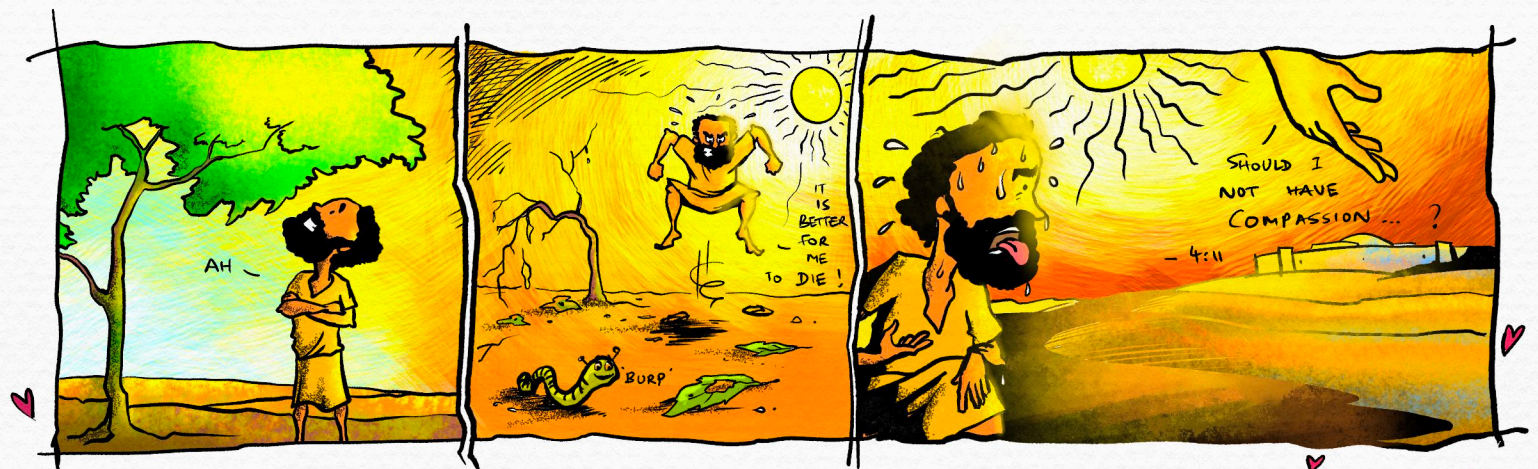




GOD IS MORE **COMPASSIONATE** THAN WE ARE. THERE IS NOT A **SINGLE CASE** IN SCRIPTURE WHERE A PERSON **REPENTED** AND TURNED TO **GOD**, WHERE GOD DID NOT FORGIVE. EVEN IF **JUDAS ISCARIOT** HAD GONE TO THE LORD AND ASKED FOR **FORGIVENESS**, HE WOULD HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN. BUT HE WENT TO THE **PRIESTS** INSTEAD -- LIKE MANY DO TODAY! YOU **CAN'T** GET FORGIVENESS BY **CONFESSING** YOUR **SINS** TO ANY **PRIEST**.

WHEN GOD HAD **MERCY** ON NINEVEH, ONE WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT JONAH WOULD HAVE BEEN **EXCITED**. BUT HE WASN'T. IMAGINE AN **EVANGELIST** WHO SEES AN **ENTIRE CITY** OF OVER 120,000 PEOPLE (4:11) **WEEPING** AND **REPENTING** -- THE **GREATEST** REVIVAL IN HISTORY -- AND **NOT BEING EXCITED**! JONAH BECAME **ANGRY** INSTEAD. FIRST OF ALL, BECAUSE HIS PROPHECY WAS **NOT FULFILLED**. SECONDLY, BECAUSE AS A **PATRIOTIC** ISRAELI, HE **HATED** THE PEOPLE OF NINEVEH AND HAD **HOPED** THAT THEY WOULD NOT REPENT AND THAT GOD WOULD **DESTROY** THEM.

ARE WE LIKE JONAH? IS THERE ANYONE ON EARTH WHOM YOU DO **NOT** WANT GOD TO BLESS? HAVE WE FORGOTTEN HOW **MERCIFUL** GOD HAS BEEN TO US AND HOW HE HAS **BLESSED** US EVEN WHEN WE DESERVED ONLY **HELL**.



TO TEACH JONAH A **LESSON**, THE LORD ALLOWED A PLANT TO GROW UP OVER HIS HEAD. JONAH WAS VERY **HAPPY** FOR THE PLANT. BUT THE NEXT DAY, BECAUSE GOD MADE A **WORM** EAT UP THE PLANT, IT WITHERED UP. JONAH WAS VERY **ANGRY** AGAIN BECAUSE THE SUN WAS **BEATING** DOWN ON HIM. THEN GOD RESPONDED IN 4:11. IN THIS VERSE (JONAH 4:11) -- MORE THAN IN ANY OTHER VERSE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT -- WE SEE GOD'S **TREMENDOUS COMPASSION** FOR **LOST SOULS, BABIES AND ANIMALS**!

GOD SO **LOVED** THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON THAT NO ONE SHOULD PERISH. JONAH SOMEHOW DID NOT GET INTO **FELLOWSHIP** WITH GOD IN THIS MATTER.

THE PROPER BASIS FOR AN **EVANGELISTIC** MINISTRY IS **FELLOWSHIP** WITH THE **HEART OF GOD**. GOD HAS SUCH A GREAT **COMPASSION** FOR THOSE WHO DON'T HAVE LIGHT. THE BIBLE SAYS GOD WANTS ALL MEN TO **REPENT**, TO BE SAVED AND TO COME TO THE **KNOWLEDGE** OF THE **TRUTH** (1 TIMOTHY 2:4). HE LONGS FOR THAT.