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Jonah's Message



Jonah's mission to **Nineveh** was addressed to **Isra'el**. The book was written not simply to record a historical narrative; in addition, it conveyed a message to the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**. In one sense **Yonah** is not the principal person in the book . . . **ADONAI** is. **The LORD** had the first word **(1:1-2)** and the last word **(4:11)**. **God** commanded **the prophet** twice **(1:2** and **3:2). He** sent a violent **storm** on the sea **(1:4)**. **He** provided a **whale** to rescue **Yonah (1:17)**. **HaShem** commanded the whale to vomit **Yonah** onto **dry land (2:10). God** threatened **Nineveh** with judgment and **relented** in compassion **(3:10). God** provided **a plant** to **shade His prophet (4:6). The LORD** commissioned **a worm** to destroy **the plant (4:7),** and **He** sent a **scorching wind** to discomfort **Jonah (4:8).**

The book of **Jonah** contains only **forty-eight verses**. But in many ways the book is a microcosm of **God's** relationship to the whole of **His** creation. Although the narrative is sometimes melodramatic, it covers serious subject matter. **What then is the message God was seeking to deliver to Isra'el through His dealings with Jonah, the Ninevites, and natural phenomena like the sea, animal life, plant life and the wind?**

First, one apparent message to Isra'el was God's concern for the goyim, the Gentile nations. The Lord's love for the souls of all peoples was supposed to be mediated through **Isra'el**, **God's** elect and covenant nation (see my commentary on **Genesis, to see link click Dt – I Will Bless Those Who Bless You, and Curse Those Who You Curse**). Through **Isra'el** the blessing of **His**

compassion was to be preached to the nations (see my commentary on **Isaiah In – He Made My Mouth like a Sharpened Sword**). In other words, the book of **Jonah** was a reminder to the northern kingdom of **Isra'el** of **her** missionary purpose.

Second, the book demonstrates the sovereignty of God in accomplishing His purposes. Though the northern kingdom of **Isra'el** was unfaithful to its missionary task, **God** was faithful in causing **His** love to be proclaimed. In praise to **ADONAI** for raising **him** from the dead, **Jonah** proclaimed: **Salvation comes from the LORD (2:9). Isra'el** failed to proclaim **God's** grace and mercy, but **His** work gets done in spite of human weakness and imperfection.

Third, the response of the Gentiles served as a message of rebuke to God's sinful nation of Isra'el. The spiritual insight of **the sailors (1:14-16)** and **their** concern for **the Jewish prophet** contrast starkly with **Israel's** lack of concern for the Gentile nations around her. **Yonah's** spiritual hardness illustrated and rebuked Israel's callousness. In addition, **Nineveh's** repentance contrasted sharply with **Israel's** rejection of the warnings of **Jonah's** contemporaries **Hosea** and **Amos**.

Fourth, Yonah was a symbol to Isra'el of her disobedience to God and indifference to the religious plight of other nations. **Hosea, Jonah's** contemporary, graphically portrayed the unending love of **God** for **His** people by loving a prostitute (who was a symbol of Israel's religious waywardness). Similarly **Jonah** symbolized **Isra'el** by **his** disobedience and disaffection. **The LORD's** punishment of **Yonah** shows **His** wrath on **Isra'el**. Yet **ADONAI's** gentle miraculous dealings with **Yonah** also picture **His** tender love and slowness of anger with her. As **Jonah** wrote the book from a repentant heart, **God** desired that the nation would heed the lesson that **Jonah** had learned and repent as **Jonah** and **the Ninevites** had done.[14]

The book of **Jonah** is a very short book, only **four chapters** and **48 verses** in length. However, it is a most fascinating book, and one with an important message, not only for **Yonah**, but also for modern readers 2,600 years later.