

The Story of My Experience with God (As told by Jonah)

Hi. You're probably wondering who I am and why I'm here. My name is Jonah and don't look at me that way. I just bathed this morning but God had other plans for my appearance. Anyway, I came here today to bring you a message. God sent me and this time I figured that I should come right away. But, just in case I decided not to, God reminded me what happened to me last time I didn't do what He told me to do by making me look like what I did when I came out of that fish! By the way, if any of you get the chance to take an all-expense paid trip inside a fish, by all means pass!!! Unless your into smelling like a fish and having this crazy hairstyle. Of course, that might not be a problem in your society. . .I mean I thought I had some pretty strange hair until I saw what you would call punk-rockers, skaters, head-bangers, stoners, and a couple other names I won't go into. Well anyway, I'm just going to give you the message from God and then leave. I was right in the middle of trading a few fish stories with a couple of the boys when God told me to come. That's where I plan to be in about five minutes as soon as I tell you. . .What?!?! God, you said to tell them a message, not tell them my story. Aww, come on God, do I have to go through it again? I mean isn't it enough that I have to tell all the new arrivals to heaven about it? I mean they're going to hear it when they arrive, too. . .I mean

God, what are you going to do? There aren't any fish in this building that could swallow me now. Are you going to make the floor open up and swallow me? . . . Oh, oh yeah. You have done that before. . . with Korah and a couple of other fellows as I recall. Come to think of it I haven't seen him around heaven either. Is that where you go when the ground opens up to take you?!?!? Okay, well, then, by all means, let's tell the story and follow God's orders.

Perhaps some of you have read my critically acclaimed, internationally renowned story, the book of Jonah. (Thank you, Thank you very much! Thank you!) But, to help you understand the book a little bit better, let me tell you about myself. I was born in a small village named Gath-Hepher in the Galilean region¹ of Northern Palestine.² My father was Amittai³ of the tribe of Zebulun.⁴ In 805 BC I was a young kid and it was at this time that the Assyrians set out to put Israel under tribute.⁵ It was a new hotshot king of Assyria and he wanted some more money for his pocket. He did a pretty good job of taking the area. He conquered the Hittites, Tyre, Sidon, Amurru, and Israel.⁶ The Assyrians were a cruel people, but I'll tell you about them in a bit: first, more about me! I got to work with King Jereboam II. He reigned in Israel from 790 to 749 BC.⁷ Any of you ever get to work for a King. Oh it's a marvelous thing: luxury, aarrgh, aarrgh, arrgh, aarrgh. It's a "more power"

job. Well you'll get to work for THE KING. That's an "ALL POWER" job. Enough about me, let's talk about the Ninevites.

I hated those people--yes hated. Here I was serving the Most High God and I hated the Assyrians terribly. Well maybe you would too if you saw what they did to my country and to others around us. They would make pillars around the cities they were beseiging and skin the people they had captured and hang their carcasses and skins on the pillars.⁸ They also would cut off body parts of people after they had surrendered.⁹ Perhaps now you can see why I didn't want to go to Nineveh, a chief city of the Assyrians in my time and later the capital of the empire.¹⁰ Yes, Nineveh was not a city that I put on my list of places to visit for vacations!

Now let me tell you the story that God put me through. I was sitting in the court of the king one day and God started to speak to me. Normally, I enjoy hearing from God. I get a kick out of being God's spokesman--you can probably understand. Well anyway as soon as I heard the word "Nineveh" my skin began to crawl. I couldn't believe God wanted me to go to Nineveh and tell them of their coming destruction. It wasn't really that I minded telling them that their lives, property, families, culture, and livelihood was going to be destroyed--no, I enjoyed thinking about that. I could just imagine them going through the same torture that they had inflicted on so many others. The part I hated was that in telling them of the destruction to come, God was

offereing them a way of escape. That was what burned me up so bad. I didn't want them to repent and be saved from destruction. I wanted them to burn in a hell hotter than any even the worst sinners suffer! So rather than giving them a chance, I ran from God. I set out for Tarshish in Spain. It was rumored that this place was a sight to behold--a virtual paradise. It didn't hurt either that it was "exactly opposite" from Nineveh and was the farthest point to the West that I knew of!¹¹ But of course when you try to run from God, you usually end up running straight into Him--and I did in a big way! The boat I was on was just out of the sight of land when a huge storm came up. I was sleeping below deck at first, but the captain woke me up. The crew had already thrown all the excess baggage overboard. I realized this was no normal storm. No, God was doing a magnificent work with His creation in that storm. After the crew had cast lots to see whose God was causing the storm, I told them that I was the problem and to throw me overboard. These men, however, were basically good men: if they had been Assyrian, they would have wasted no time in throwing me over. No, these men tried to row back to shore, but couldn't. With nothing left to do, they cried to the Lord for mercy for throwing me into the sea and then did it. The sea became calm. Naturally this made those men know Who was Lord, Boss Supreme of Land, Sea, and All the earth!

Meanwhile, I was sinking to the floor of the sea. I knew that death was close but at least I wouldn't have to preach to the Ninevites! The wet soggy feeling and lack of air would only last for a short while and then I would be gone from this life. Little did I know that this wet soggy feeling would be mine for the next three days and nights. God using His great ingenuity had a fish swallow me. Yuck! I haven't eaten fish since then! After I had sat in the fish surrounded by seaweed, dying fish, and the fishes stomach acids long enough, I decided that it would be better to follow God than to be in the fish any more! Then I started praying to God. He wasn't far away--He was waiting for me to say "uncle." Then God told the fish to spit me out on dry ground. Then, just in case I forgot why I had the ordeal, God reiterated His command to me. So I went to Nineveh and began to tell the people that destruction was coming in forty days. I didn't say much else--I still didn't want them to be saved, but what choice did I have but to tell them. Well, everyone repented; everyone. Naturally, I was thrilled. The ruler of the city even declared a fast for everyone. And I knew just how God was going to react. It made me mad too. He was going to **forgive** them! Well, He did forgive them and that was when He and I began our "discussion." I told Him that this was the very reason I didn't want to come in the first place--I knew they would repent and that He would forgive them as He had the Israelites so many times! It made me

so mad that I wanted to die and I even asked God to take my life. It was about this time that God started asking me those questions that we all hate to hear: questions that cut you to the quick. First, he asked me if it was right to be angry. Well I didn't exactly feel like answering because I would have to say "no." So, I went outside the city to sulk. I made myself a little hut and shaded myself. God in His mercy grew a large plant to shade me that grew up over me. The next morning he made a big worm come and eat at the plant so that it died. At this I wanted death again. Then God asked me if it was right for me to be angry about destroying the plant. In essence, He was asking me it was right to judge His actions! My response, of course, was "Yes! it is right for me to be angry." It was then that God ended the "discussion" we we're having. He made the points that I could not respond to no matter how hard my heart was. He said that I had pity for a plant that came and went quickly that I didn't work for; yet I didn't have pity for 120,00 people who didn't know right from wrong. POW! How do you answer that?!?! I couldn't.

Through all this, I learned many things. First of all I learned that you should never get angry with God.¹² If you're angry, you missed it somewhere--not Him. Another thing, don't have a hard heart.¹³ This is what caused me so much trouble. In fact, it's probably the reason I only have a four chapter book instead of a longer one! Don't be stub

born like I was--you can't outlast God.¹⁴ He will win in the end no matter your stubbornness. Always give God your best.¹⁵ I could have been more involved in helping the Ninevites come to God. Instead I was outside the city sulking--not giving God my best. Don't run away from God¹⁶: you will only end up running right into Him and only worn out for your trouble. Never question God's wisdom.¹⁷ He alone is wise--you don't know anything! Never overlook God's power.¹⁸ I tried to when I ran away but God showed me His power in a mighty way!

Before I go, I need to tell you a message from God. As ministers, you will have to face situations that you will want to run from, situations that you don't want to deal with. You may hate the people involved or the ones needing help. You need to repent for those feelings of hate. Remember, the gospel is to everyone! Not just to people you like. Jesus went to all that would have Him: great or small, rich or poor, sinners all. You as ministers of the next generation need to go forth proclaiming the salvation message without the hang-ups that I had. Perhaps longer books will be written about you because of your faithfulness to God.

Well, it's time for me to go. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Amen. (Whoa, I've been hanging around Paul a little too much--I'm starting to say goodbye like him!) Anyway, farewell and remember my story and the message.

I leave you with this song (DC Talk, "Time is. . .") to "pump you up" and remind you that graduation is not ~~far away~~ ^{31 days away} nor is the coming of the Lord. Jesus' return is close and wasting time as I did is not good. Take the message to the people as Jesus commanded. If you don't you may end up a victim of God's ^{C.C.P} creative correctional process). God Bless.