

1:1-3

Many scholars, Biblical and otherwise, do not take the book of Jonah seriously. The consensus is that Jonah is a fable; made up. Alas, even in many churches Jonah's story is seen as a children's tale; and it is treated accordingly. This is an unfortunate trend because Jonah is authenticated by Jesus Himself. The book of Jonah deserves serious consideration and respect.

Outside of the book of Jonah, the prophet Jonah is mentioned only a hand-full of times in Scripture: once in 2 Kings, twice in Matthew, and once in Luke. The New Testament appearances of Jonah, however, are in the very words of Christ.

¹ *The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying,*

Jonah 1:1 NASB95

Although much is revealed about the character of the prophet, far less is known about the man himself. Several questions surface, after reading the first verse of Jonah chapter 1: Who is Jonah? Where is he from? What was the world like in his day? To start answering these questions, let's find the one and only mention of Jonah in the Old Testament, outside of his book.

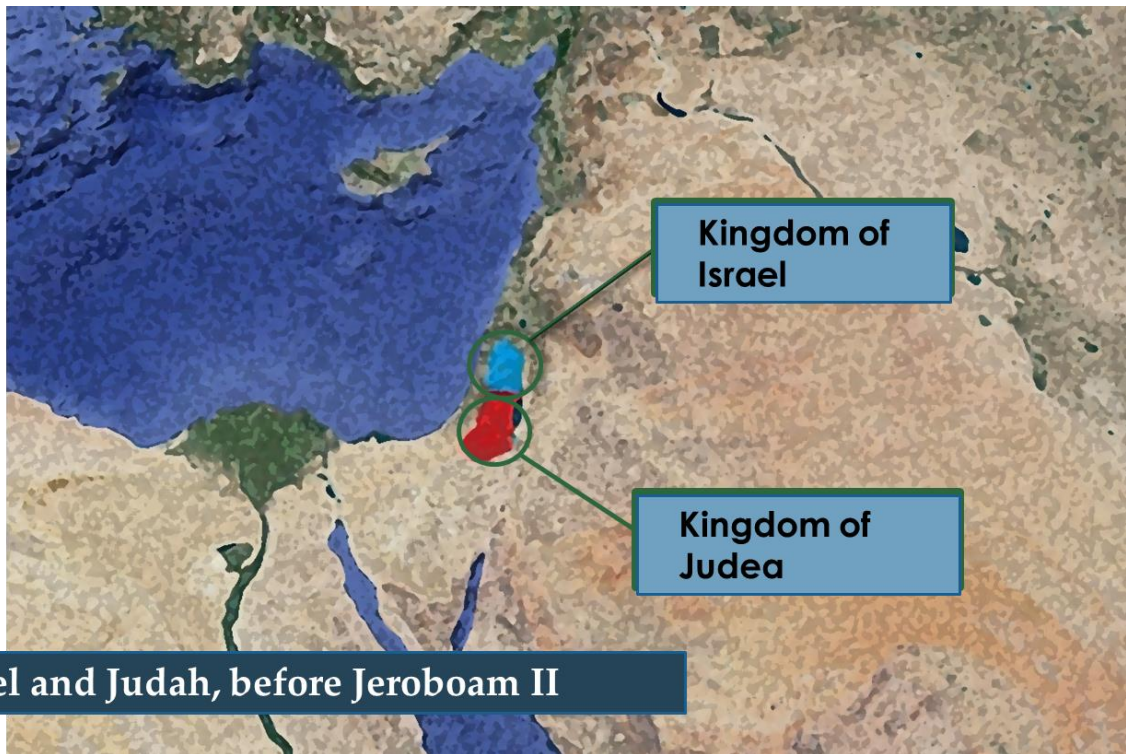
²³ *In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel became king in Samaria, [and reigned] forty-one years. ²⁴ He did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin. ²⁵ He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.*

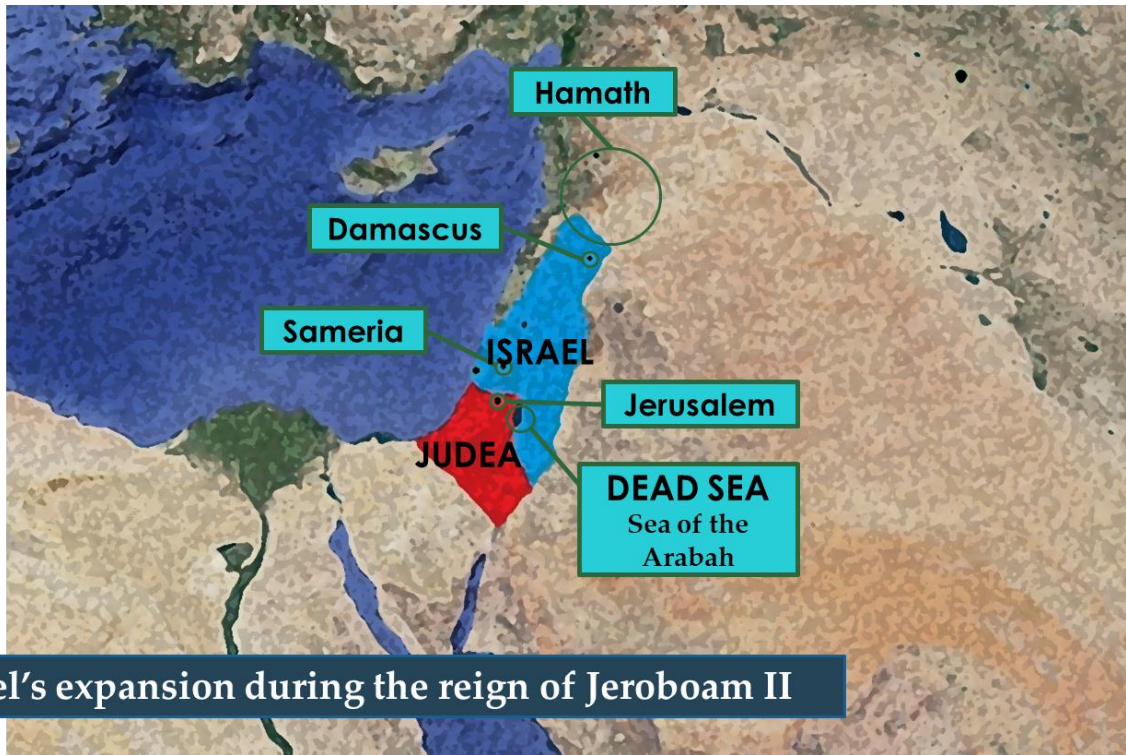
2 Kings 14:23-25 NASB95

From this passage, we ascertain that Jonah was a servant of the LORD, a prophet, he was from Gath-hepher in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and that he ministered in the time of king Jeroboam II.



Jeroboam II, the son of Joash, is a significant character who does much to shape the world of his time. There is some dispute, however the best scholarship places his reign between 793 BC to 753 BC. He has the distinction of having the longest tenure on the throne of any king of Israel, forty-one years. More significantly, he ushered in restoring the borders of Israel tremendously, bringing back much of the territory which was lost by generations past. His reign in Israel was marked by great economic prosperity, as well.



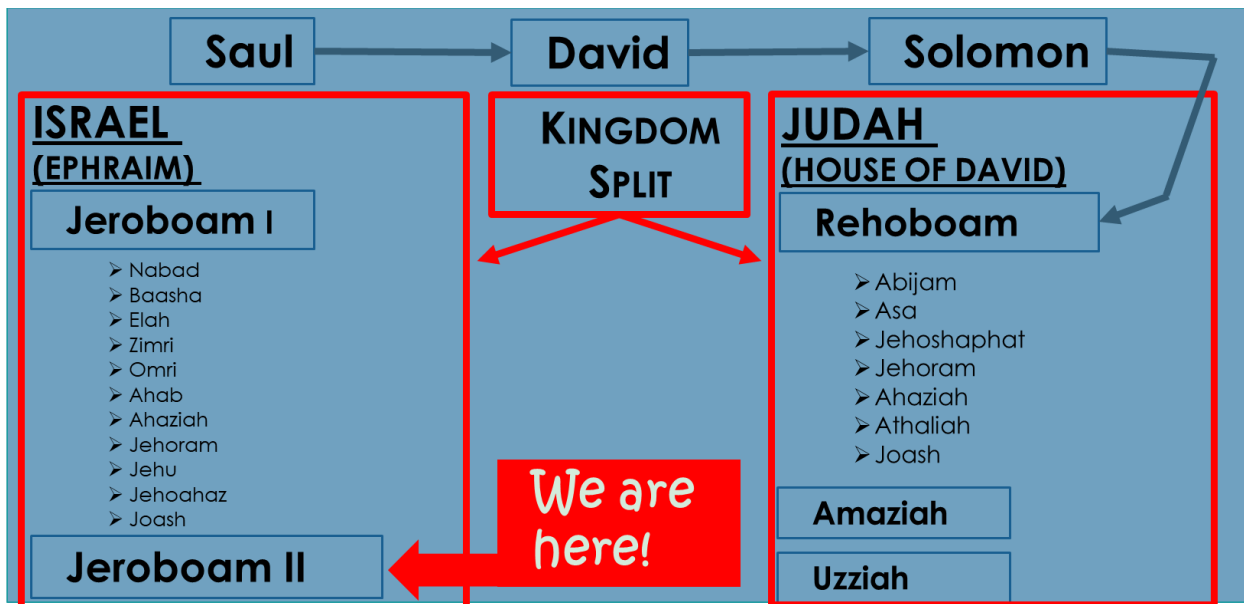


It appears everything was going well for Israel during the kingship of Jeroboam II, and Jonah had been the prophet who foretold all this. However, 2 Kings 14:24 says otherwise:

²⁴ He did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin.

2 Kings 14:24 NASB95

Jeroboam II, the son of Joash, continues the sin of Jeroboam I, the son of Nebat (the first king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.)



Solomon's son and successor, Rehoboam carried on with his father's sin, and thus God took the kingdom away from him. Since God loved David, Rehoboam's grandfather, He commuted the punishment to ten tribes, instead of the whole kingdom. This is the split kingdom: Benjamin and Judah become the Kingdom of Judah, and the rest of the ten tribes become the kingdom of Israel, sometimes called Ephraim. ****It's important to note that when the tribes of Israel are mentioned, the Bible, in this case, is talking about the land which was assigned to that particular tribe!**** Rehoboam

retains David's throne, as king of Judah, and Jeroboam, the son of Nebat becomes the first king of Israel. This story is covered in 1 Kings chapters 11 and 12. The sin of Jeroboam I, which is continued for hundreds of years, all the way to Jeroboam II, is relayed in 1 Kings 12:26-31:

²⁶ Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom will return to the house of David. ²⁷ "If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, [even] to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah." ²⁸ So the king consulted, and made two golden calves, and he said to them, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt." ²⁹ He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. ³⁰ Now this thing became a sin, for the people went [to worship] before the one as far as Dan. ³¹ And he made houses on high places, and made priests from among all the people who were not of the sons of Levi.

1 Kings 12:26-31 NASB95

Jeroboam I feared that the people of his new kingdom would rebel if they had to go to Jerusalem to worship God. Jerusalem stayed in the kingdom of Judah. He feared that they would rebel against his rule, return to Judah, and most likely kill him and his family, as usurpers. So, he sets up alternate places of worship within the borders of his new kingdom, places golden calves there, calls these idols the images of the God who led Israel out of Egypt, and he even makes priests of those who are not of the tribe of Levi. Simply, Jeroboam I, made Israel to sin, that is to worship not God, but convenient idols. The LORD does NOT approve of false idols:

¹⁵ 'Cursed is the man who makes an idol or a molten image, an abomination to the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets [it] up in secret.'...

Deuteronomy 27:15 NASB95

God has warned us, through Scripture and His prophets, against having idols, numerous times. The prophet Amos, who is also ministering during the reign of king Jeroboam II, and is a contemporary of Jonah, relates the word of the LORD:

⁹ "The high places of Isaac will be desolated And the sanctuaries of Israel laid waste. Then I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

Amos 7:9 NASB95

Amos' prophecies also addressed the pride of Jeroboam II's Israel: their military victories:

¹⁴ "For behold, I am going to raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel," declares the LORD God of hosts, "And they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath To the brook of the Arabah."

Amos 6:14 NASB95

God promises to reverse the territorial gain, of which Israel is so proud. The sin of Israel is great in the sight of the LORD. Jeroboam I, fearing that his people would eventually turn away from him, set up golden calves to be substitute places of worship. Subsequent kings continued this practice, fearing the same thing. During Jeroboam II's time, the prophet Amos railed against this sin among many other sins. He warned of God's judgment coming down on Israel. A sword consisting of the most brutal, cruel, and merciless people of the time, The Assyrian Empire.



Amos' condemnations did not win him any friends in the Israeli royal court. In fact, he was despised:

¹⁰ Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent [word] to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is unable to endure all his words. ¹¹ "For thus Amos says, 'Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will certainly go from its land into exile.'" ¹² Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Go, you seer, flee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and there do your prophesying! ¹³ "But no longer prophesy at Bethel, for it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence."

Amos 7:10-13 NASB95

Several Old Testament prophets, over the centuries, had been speaking against this practice by the Northern Kingdom of Israel. While Amos was unfavorable toward Israel, there seems to be only one prophet who had any good news for Jeroboam II; Jonah. Jonah, favorably prophesied of Israel's military victories and economic prosperity. It's not clear whether he ALSO condemned Israel's sin, but it's very likely that he would know of them and the prophecies condemning them. Jonah would also be the favorite prophet in Jeroboam II's court.

This is the circumstance, in which we find Jonah, when God calls him to minister to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire.

² "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me."

Jonah 1:2 NASB95

God has just commanded Jonah to go into the heart of the most imminent threat, the greatest enemy Israel faces. Jonah is to go and cry against it, to call them out for all their wickedness and brutality.

Nineveh is the capital of the Assyrian Empire, and it is one of the oldest and greatest cities in antiquity. It sat on the Tigris River, in the same approximate location as the modern-day city of Mosul, Iraq. The great city was originally founded by Nimrod:

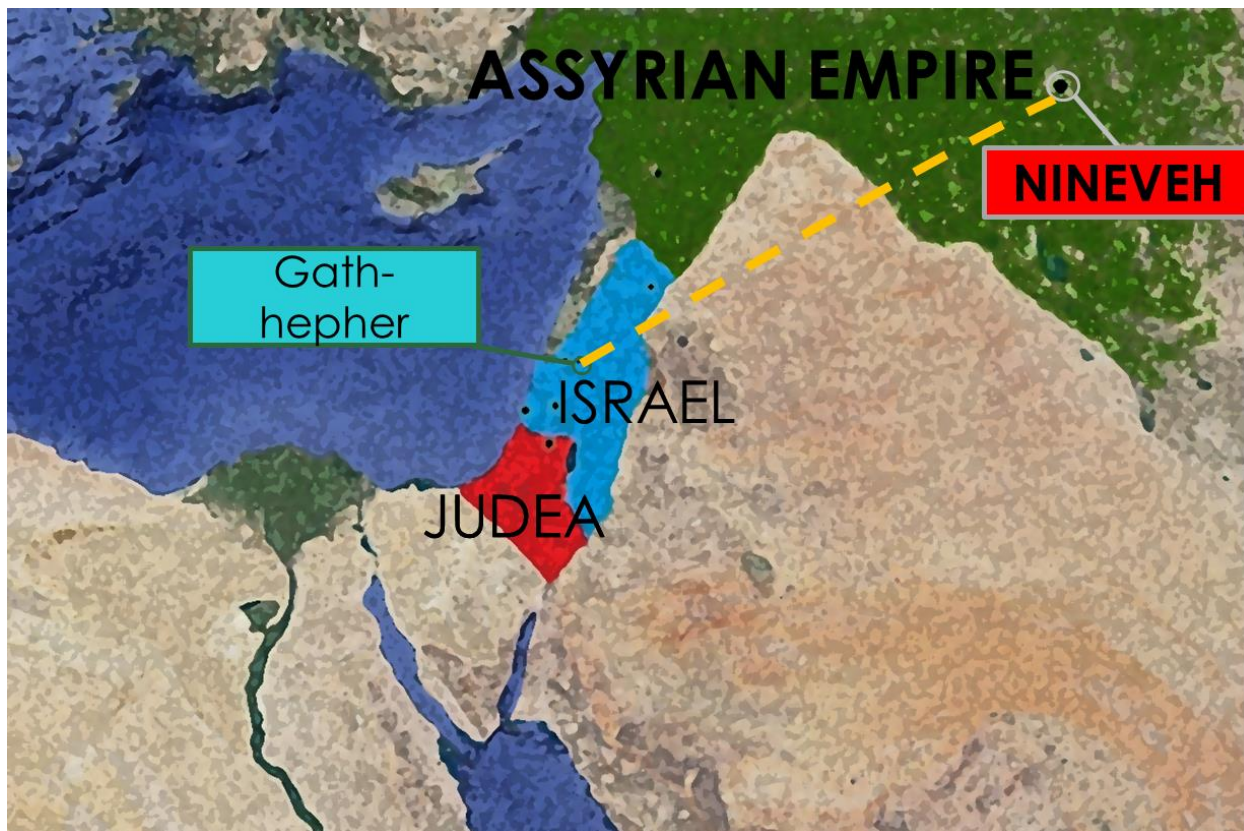
⁸ Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth. ¹¹ From that land he went forth into Assyria, and built Nineveh and Rehoboth-Ir and Calah,

The Assyrians were incredibly good at war, quickly becoming the dominant military empire of the time. They had also developed the use of torture as both psychological warfare and civil punishment. The Assyrians would have masses of people impaled through the rib cage and watch as their own body weight drove them slowly lower on the spike. They would flay the skin from people and hang those strips on the walls of the city as warning to criminals. Assyrian soldiers would behead their enemies and make pyramids of the decapitated heads. The Assyrian cruelty, brutality, ruthlessness, and inhumanity was known and feared throughout the region. God had had enough! Thus, He sends Jonah to proclaim the judgment of the LORD upon Assyria. As far as Jonah is concerned, he is being sent to the people who will imminently destroy his beloved Israel. Instead, Jonah had another idea:

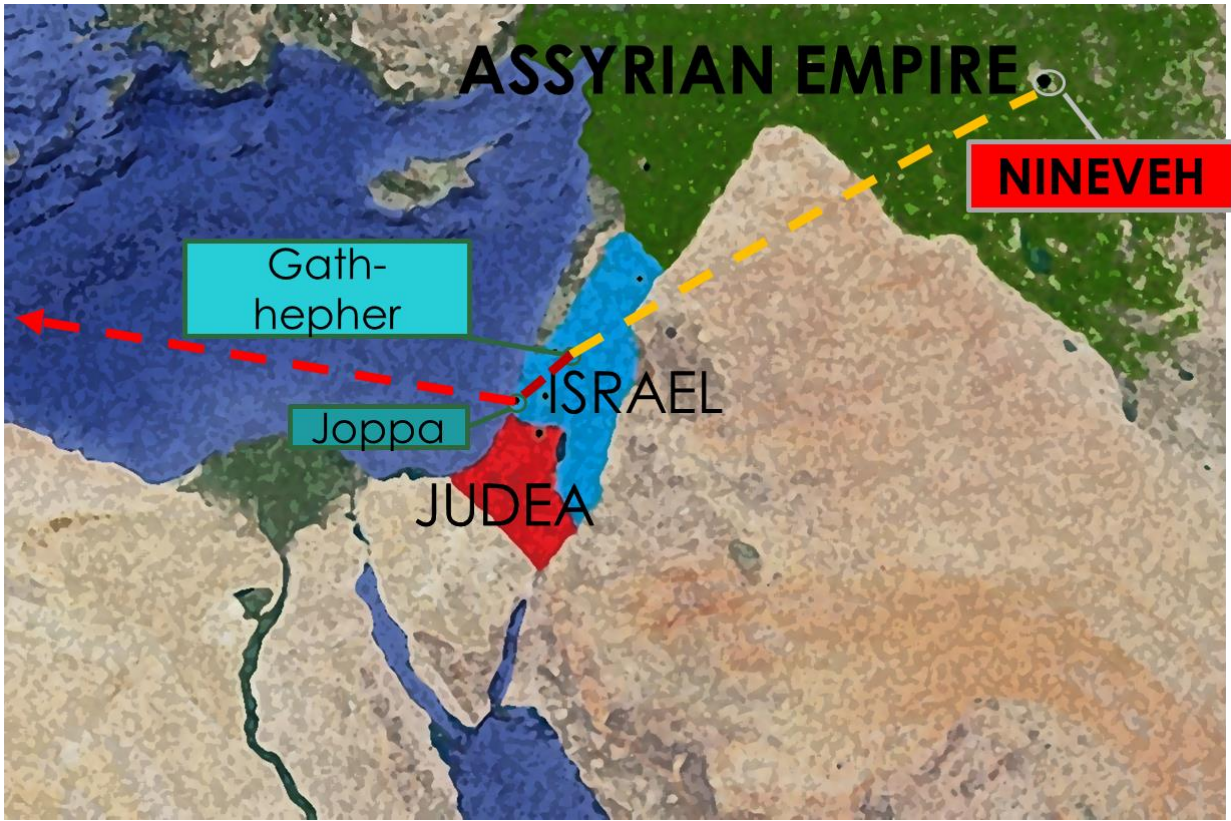
3 But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

Jonah 1:3 NASB95

Jonah's home is Geth-hepher, in Israel. Assuming he was at home when God called him to Nineveh, the journey would have taken about between 2 – 4 weeks on foot, covering some 600 miles.



Rather than doing as he was commanded, Jonah goes to the port city of Joppa, boards a ship and heads in the opposite direction.



The boat's destination is Tarshish, which was a colony in what is modern-day Spain.



Some scholars aren't convinced that this was the Tarshish, for which Jonah headed, but it seems to make sense; Jonah is heading as far as he can in the complete direction from Nineveh.

If we just take Jonah 1:3 at face value, it seems that Jonah thought that it was possible to hide or run from God. Later in this study we will learn exactly why the prophet chose to run, but for now, let's examine this idea of hiding or running from God: the idea of invisible sin:

¹³ *Why has the wicked spurned God? He has said to himself, "You will not require [it]."*

Psalm 10:13 NASB95

¹¹ *He says to himself, "God has forgotten; He has hidden His face; He will never see it."*

Psalm 10:11 NASB95

Sometimes we all feel like God is not watching; or that we are clever enough to fool God; or that our sin is not significant enough for God to care. The bad news is that it is unequivocally, utterly, and in all other ways IMPOSSIBLE to hide from God!

¹² *For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.* ¹³ *And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.*

Hebrews 4:12-13 NASB95

Nothing escapes from the sight of the LORD, and that means that ALL of our sins require an account.

⁵ *O God, it is You who knows my folly, And my wrongs are not hidden from You.*

Psalm 69:5 NASB95

All sin is indeed before Him; He sees all of it. David says, in Psalm 14:2-3:

² *The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God. ³ They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one.*

Psalm 14:2-3 NASB95

And Paul echoes in Romans

²² *...For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

Romans 3:22-23 NKJV

Jonah's sin is right here, laid bare, and immortalized on the pages of Scripture. Countless generations have read it and know it. For almost three millennia, Jonah's sin has been naked before the eyes of the world, and before the sight of God. It makes no difference; we have all sinned and fallen short of the Perfection of God. That means that all sin is before His sight, just as Jonah's is before the sight of the world. None of it is ever hidden.

Sin has but one recompense! Paul explains with concrete clarity:

²³ *For the wages of sin is death...*

Romans 6:23 NASB95

Death! Not just a simple return to the dust, from which we were formed. This is a terrible death. This is a death that manifests as a complete and horrific separation from God; separation from Light; separation from Truth; separation from all Goodness. This is a death that is utter destruction, ruin, and oblivion!

But our God would not leave us in this, our well-deserved doom. We can read the rest of Romans 6:23:

²³ *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Romans 6:23 NASB95

Ezekiel says, in chapter 18, verses 21-22:

²¹ *"But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. ²² "All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live.*

And Jeremiah, in chapter 31, verses 33-34:

³³ "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ "They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Jeremiah 31:33-34 NASB95

There is one kind of sin which God can't see: That is sin which He has forgiven and, just as Jeremiah states, He remembers no more! Every sin, from anyone and everyone who has attained forgiveness by appealing to the Blood of the Lamb of God. He who is our Savior, our Messiah, our Christ; the very Son of God, who came to us in His flesh. He who hung on a Roman cross, after a Roman scourging, which left that flesh hung in ribbons, shredded, and ripped from the bone. He was beaten, humiliated, cursed, and mocked. He suffered the punishments for transgression we have earned; that we deserve, but only He could bear...So that whoever believes in Him, shall be saved. Whoever believes in Him, shall have their sins washed away to be remembered NO MORE!

⁹ *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

1 John 1:9 NASB95

⁹ *that if you confess with your mouth Jesus [as] Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;*

Romans 10:9 NASB95

Here is the choice before us: what do we do in response to a Man who hung on a cross, some two-thousand years ago. Ought we to accept this Free Gift of Salvation? Or do we ignore it? This, a single act in a point in history, but because it was a deed performed by God, has an eternal effect. This one deed applies for all time, and is offered to Jonah, to me, to you...to every one ever.

