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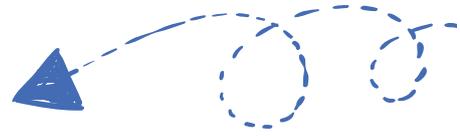
## Lord, I will go! *Guide Me*

(Jonah 1:1-2)

### INTRODUCTION

**D**id you know that the book of Jonah is one of the most exciting books in the entire Bible? The book of Jonah has caught the attention of children, young people and adults. This book, which belongs to the group of minor prophets, has inspired hymns, dramas, paintings, films, and plays.

This being said, although the book contains several of the most famous accounts of all the Holy Scriptures, it has been the subject of a variety criticism. For example, many question Jonah's story, saying, "It is impossible for a human



being to live seventy-two hours in the womb of a large fish. Scientifically it's impossible!"

The disbelievers ridicule Jonah's story, because it is impossible for them to even believe it. For believers, however, that is not the case. Why, you may ask? Because we believe in the God of miracles. We believe in the God who divided the Red Sea in two, so that his people would pass as if it were dry land! Yes, we believe in the God of miracles. And you know what? That is the God who shows us the book of Jonah; and it is the God I desire to introduce you to: an Almighty God, sovereign, merciful, and full of grace, who has always been and will always be willing to give an opportunity to all who turn to Him in repentance.

## DEVELOPMENT

The book of Jonah begins with a command given by God to the prophet. "The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." (Jonah 1:1-2).

Let me begin by asking: Where was Jonah sent? The prophet was sent to the city of Nineveh. Have you heard of this city before? According to the book of Genesis, chapter 10, verses 8 through 11, Nineveh belonged to the group of Assyrian cities, founded by a mysterious character named Nimrod, whom the scriptures describe as a "mighty hunter before the Lord" (Genesis 10:9). The Assyrians were devotees of pagan deities. They worshipped the sun, moon and stars. So, Nineveh, like the other cities, was dedicated to **idolatry**.

On the other hand, Nineveh is described as a "**city of blood**" (Nahum 3:1). It is deeply striking that among the characteristics that the Bible emphasizes of Nineveh is the violent character of its inhabitants. How violent were the Ninevites? In a document written by one of the kings of Nineveh he describes his degree of cruelty and violence:

I built a wall in front of its city and **skinned** all the bosses who had risen against me and **covered the pillar with their skin**. Some of them **I locked inside the pillar**, others I **hung on the pillar with stakes**, and others I tied with stakes around the pillar. And **I cut**



**off the limbs** of the royal officers that had rebelled against me. **I burned many captives among them, with fire** and many of them I took hostage. **Many of them had their noses, ears and fingers cut off; and many had their eyes taken out.** I made a pile of the living and cut some on their heads, and I tied their heads to tree trunks all around town. And I burned their young men, older men and women with fire.”<sup>1</sup>

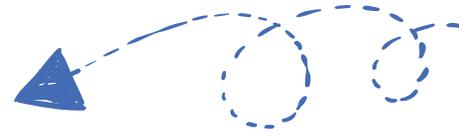
So were the kings of Nineveh: bloodthirsty, cruel, violent. And as if all this were not enough, the city was dedicated **to immorality and vice**. Note that in Jonah 1:2, God says that Nineveh’s wickedness had risen before his presence. It is interesting, but this same expression God used it to describe the moral condition in which the inhabitants of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were located (Genesis 18:21; 19:13).

We can conclude that Nineveh was a city dedicated **to idolatry, violence, and vice**, whose inhabitants, according to Jonah 4:11, had no moral discernment. However, to this city that lived in open rebellion, God sent a messenger to preach the message of salvation. This idolatrous, violent, and immoral city was given a second chance from God.

That’s right, dear listener, our God is a God who gives multiple opportunities. In the book of the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 33, verse 11, one of God’s most moving words appears: “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?”

God extends a second opportunity to all those who, like the inhabitants of Nineveh, live in sin and wickedness. God gives a second chance to all those who have lost their moral course. God extends this second opportunity because His desire is that **“all people [...] be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth”** (1 Timothy 2:4).

Now, let’s back to the book of Jonah and allow me to ask you a question: What did Jonah do when he was mandated to go to Nineveh? Did he fulfill the order given by the Lord? I would like to be able to answer this affirmative and resounding yes, but sadly the Bible says that Jonah, the prophet, **refused**



**his responsibility.** Please read Jonah 1:3 with me, and let us look at the action followed by the prophet:

But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

Where did Jonah run to? He headed for Tarshish. According to scholars, Nineveh is located 800 kilometers east of Jonah's home. But Tarshish is more than 3,000 miles to the west. Can you believe it? The prophet of God was fleeing his responsibility. He was going the other way! God sent him east and Jonah is heading west!

But Jonah not only shuns his responsibility, but also becomes **indifferent to the situation**. The story tells us that when Jonah was on his way to Tarshish, a great storm struck the vessel in such a way that it almost broke apart (Jonah 1:4). The storm was so strong that the sailors, full of fear, threw all the cargo into the sea and began to cry out to their gods (Jonah 1:5). What was Jonah doing in the middle of this situation? Funny enough, Jonah was **"sleeping soundly"** (Jonah 1:5). Do you understand his actions? How could he be sleeping during a storm? Jonah had not only run away from his responsibility, but now he was also indifferent to what was happening around him. Isn't that sad?

It is then, when the indifferent prophet is cast into the sea and swallowed by a great fish (Jonah 1:15-17). We must emphasize that this great fish that swallowed the prophet was prepared by God Himself. But, for what purpose did God prepare this fish? Did the prophet die in the belly of the great fish? No! The great fish was the means used by God to direct Jonah to the purpose for which he had been called. Miraculously the fish vomited Jonah, where? Well, none other than on the beaches of Nineveh (Jonah 2:10). And that's where God speaks to Jonah again. Notice what the Bible says in chapter 3, verse 1 and 2.

The scriptures point out that God spoke to Jonah a second time. I believe that God wants you and I to understand that He also gives a second chance to the believer who rebelliously and indifferently refuses his responsibility. God



gives you a second chance, dear brother and sister who has been indifferent to the crisis in which we find ourselves. God gives you a second chance, dear young person, who time and again has shunned God's calling. Yes, God gives you a second chance that; You, who like Jonah, have not fulfilled the purpose of His calling.

## CONCLUSION

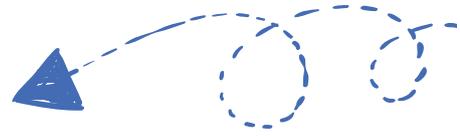
It is encouraging to know that God is a God of multiple opportunities. It is comforting to understand that God grants a second chance not only to those who live in sin, but also to believers who have indifferently ran away from their responsibility. A long time ago I read the story of a young football player, who played for the University of California. During a championship game, this young man regained a ball, but got confused and ran in the wrong direction. A teammate intercepted him before he made points against his own team. At half-time, all the players went to the locker room and sat down, wondering what the coach would tell them. This young man was sitting alone, with a towel over his head, crying.<sup>2</sup>

When the team was ready to return to the field for the second half, the coach astonished the team when he announced that the same players who had started the first half would start the second. Everyone left the locker room except this young player. He didn't want to move. The coach turned his gaze when he called him a second time and saw that tears were streaming down his cheeks. The player said, "Coach, I can't do it, I jeopardized you. I've led the University of California to disgrace. I can't face the crowd in the stadium again."

The coach put his hand on the player's back and said, "Get up and come out again. The game is only in halftime."

Friends, when I think of this story, I say to myself: What a great coach! But when I read Jonah's story and the story of thousands like him, I say, "What a great God, who gives us over and over, another opportunity! Friends, if as the Ninevites you too have lived far from God, today the Lord extends a second

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Alice Gray. *More stories in refreshing waters* (Miami, FL: Editorial Unilit, 1997), p. 30.



chance to you. Brothers and sisters, if as Jonah you have ran away from your responsibility, God also grants you a second chance.

When you experience God's mercy in your life, like Jonah, you will say, "Lord, I will go."

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What was the character of the inhabitants of Nineveh like?
2. How did Jonah respond to the divine calling?
3. What did God do to take Jonah to Nineveh?
4. How many opportunities is God willing to grant?

