

# The Book of Jonah

## The Reluctant Prophet

### Study 4 – A searching question

#### Introduction

From the reader's point of view it would perhaps have been preferable if the book of Jonah had ended with chapter 3. At this point, there had been repentance all round (the sailors, Jonah and the Ninevites) and in the light of this repentance, the LORD himself had turned from threatened judgement to compassion and grace. 'Salvation for sinners who repent', a happy ending to a story which had such a grim and complex beginning!

But as the reader knows all too well, the story does not end there. Just when we think that all difficulties have been removed, we are faced with Jonah's reaction to God and His decision to relent from sending calamity upon the Ninevites. Far from rejoicing with the angels, Jonah "was greatly displeased and became angry" (4:1). In an angry prayer to the LORD, he lets us into the real reason why he did not want to go to Nineveh in the first place – and it is a surprising and shocking one (4:2-3). Jonah's basic problem was that he wanted the LORD to judge the wicked Ninevites rather than to show grace to them. Jonah who was happy for ordinary sailors and rebellious prophets to be forgiven, did not want this same grace to be shown to those who were truly evil, even if they were to repent!

It is easy for us to stand in judgement upon Jonah at this point, but it is important for us to feel the weight of his moral dilemma and the burden that the reality of God's grace to sinners placed upon him. Think of the perpetrators of unthinkable deeds in our own time, those who have destroyed or raped or murdered in cold blood, merely for their own advantage or because they could. Do we want them, despite their great cruelty and evil, to be forgiven in the end and 'go to heaven'? Do we want God's grace to be shown to such as these when they repent? The truth is that many a person who have themselves received grace from God, struggles when confronted with God's grace to people such as these. We are happy with salvation for 'ordinary sinners' but stumble at the thought that people who are truly and deeply evil can be saved!

The question that ends the book of Jonah is thus a question, not just for the displeased prophet but for us as well – a question that the LORD Himself asks: "Should I not be concerned about that great city"? It seems sadly that Jonah's answer, at least as far as the book of Jonah is concerned was 'NO'. What will our answer be?





3. What do you think the main lesson of this chapter is for readers of the book of Jonah?

## Apply



In what way has this passage challenged your thinking?



In what way has this passage spoken to your heart and your personal walk with the Lord?



What needs to change in your daily life as a result of this passage?