

- Jonah was a sign to the sailors, to the Ninevites and to all who heard of his deliverance. Jonah was a sign that there is a God who raises sinners from the dead. ‘*But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.*’ (Jonah 1:19)
- Jonah’s arrival in Nineveh was a resurrection from the dead that proclaimed to all the saving power of God. What an encouragement then and hopefully what an encouragement to us today!

#### 2.4.2 Frightened by the enormity of what God was asking him to do.

- Nineveh was a ‘great city.’ (Jonah 1:2) It was renowned for its wickedness and Assyria was the superpower of the day.
- Jonah, just like every Christian missionary at home or abroad has known that feeling. Will they listen? How will they respond?
- How keen would we be to preach in places like Tehran or Kabul or one of the many deprived housing estates here in the UK.

#### 2.4.3 Concerned by the severity of the message that God was asking him to share

- Most of the time prophecy is given for encouragement. It may well have been that the unrelenting severity of the message inhibited Jonah.
- There have certainly been many preachers who have balked at opening up the Bible’s doctrine of judgement. The law of God and the consequences of breaking it both in time and eternity are not popular subjects with godless people, even at the best of times

#### 2.4.4 Upset with the task God had asked him perform.

- Jonah runs away from God because he was afraid that God intended to be ‘gracious’ towards the dreadful Ninevites! After Nineveh repented, Jonah said to the Lord: “*Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.*” (Jonah 4:2)
- Jonah simply could not face the possibility that God would in the end be gracious to Nineveh. Jonah had no real problem with the severity of the message, the novelty of the mission or the difficulties associated with preaching to an unsympathetic audience. His real problem was that God might bring these people to repentance!
- Jonah’s theology did not have much room for the salvation of these Gentiles! That is why Jonah was angry when God spared Nineveh and showed that he was a God ‘abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.’ (Jonah 4:2)
- Jonah ran away for fear of the success of what he (correctly, as it turned out) suspected was a purpose of love and salvation on God’s part.

#### 2.5 Conclusion

- So what are we doing with our own call from God? Are we running away from God using the excuse of novelty, fear, concern or even downright disagreement with God’s planning? Or are we stepping out in faith, trusting God and experiencing what it is like to be operating outside of our ‘comfort zone’?

### 3. Questions to consider at home

- “*Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.*” (Jonah 1:2). What is so strange about this calling?
- Why does Jonah ‘sail for Tarshish’ (Jonah 1:3)?
- What do we learn about God’s character from his dealings with Jonah and the Ninevites?
- Where are the modern day ‘Ninevehs’ around you and your church?
- What has God called you to do? What has he called your church to do?



## The Parish of Wellow

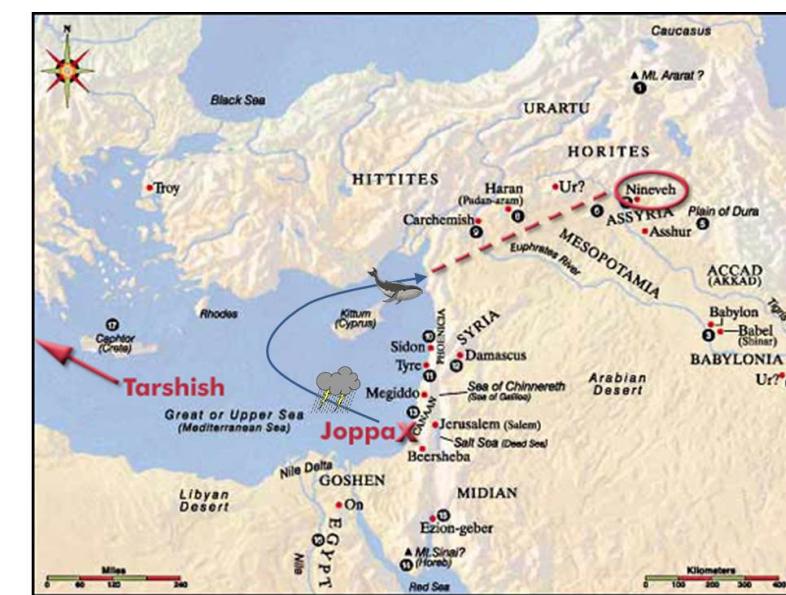
### Jonah 1:1-17 - Don't call on me Passage, Talk Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these talk notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during this week to consider the questions below.

#### 1. Talk Passage – Jonah 1:1-17

[1:1] *The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amitai: [2] “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”* [3] 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. [4] Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. [5] All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.

[6] The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish.” [7] Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. [8] So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do?”



Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?” [9] He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.” [10] This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.) [11] The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?” [12] “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.” [13] Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. [14] Then they cried to the LORD, “O LORD, please do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O LORD, have done as you pleased.” [15] Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. [16] At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him. [17] But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.

## 2. Talk Notes

### 2.1 Introduction

- “Don’t call on me.” How often have we said or thought that about something we have been asked to do? What have been the reasons for our refusal? Often it is because we are too busy. Sometimes it can be because we are worried or concerned that we do not have the capabilities to perform the task that we have been asked to do and finally on other occasions it can be because we do not think that the task needs to be performed.
- God calls Jonah to a specific task: “*Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.*” (Jonah 1:2). There is no question that this is a bizarre request from God that will require Jonah to operate outside of his comfort zone and to trust God.
- Jonah’s response to this calling is to run away as far he can from God to ‘*Tarshish*’ (Jonah 1:3)
- Are we likewise running away from a calling from God because we too, like Jonah are:
  - i) Confused by the novelty of the task that God has asked us to perform.
  - ii) Frightened by the enormity of what God is asking us to do.
  - iii) Concerned by the severity of the message that God is asking us to share.
  - iv) Upset with the task God has asked to perform.

### 2.2 Who was Jonah? (Jonah 1:1)

- ‘*The word of the LORD came to Jonah*’ (Jonah 1:1) Jonah was a prophet. His job was to hear God’s word and deliver it.
- We do not know when Jonah’s ministry began but he was certainly active during the reign of Jeroboam II, who ruled Israel from 784 to 753 B.C. - about one hundred and fifty years after the death of King Solomon.
- Jeroboam was a wicked king in God’s eyes, but in order to demonstrate his mercy to Israel, God gave Israel a period of unparalleled prosperity under this vigorous and capable monarch: *Jeroboam was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amitai, the prophet from Gath Hepher. The LORD had seen how bitterly everyone in Israel, whether slave or free, was suffering; there was no one to help them. And since the LORD had not said he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Jehoash.* (2 Kings 14:25-27)
- Jonah was therefore well established as a prophet in Israel before God called him to go to preach in Nineveh. Jonah was no novice. He was no amateur, called, as it were, from the plough. He was a seasoned prophet of God.
- Jonah’s role in the expansion of Israel, under Jeroboam II would have become well known at home and would not have been missed by the Assyrians, who were the superpower of the day.
- At that time Assyria was going through a period of internal instability because of dynastic struggles. And it is at this point in the history of these two nations that God chooses to send Jonah to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria and the greatest city in the world at that time.
- God’s timing is highly significant. Israel is a minor power becoming strong and Assyria is the superpower in turmoil.

### 2.3 God calls Jonah to a ‘Mission Impossible’? (Jonah 1:2)

- God calls Jonah to a specific task: “*Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.*” (Jonah 1:2).
- Jonah’s calling, like all calling, will require him to:
  - Embark on a ‘Mission Impossible’ - Jonah’s calling was as a prophet. His job was to

deliver God’s messages. 99 times out of 100 these messages were for God’s people. But God now instructs Jonah to take a message to the people of Nineveh who are Gentiles and not Jews.

- Operate outside of his comfort zone. The Assyrians were known far and wide for their violence, showing no mercy to their enemies. They impaled live victims on sharp poles, leaving them to toast to death in the desert sun; they beheaded people by the thousand and stacked their skulls up in piles by the city gates; and they even skinned people alive.
- Rely on God’s power and not on his own skills and resources and to trust God
- So what task is God calling us to do? God will be calling each and everyone of us to a task. This task might be large or it might be small.
- What we can know for certain is that this task will very likely involve us in a ‘Mission Impossible’ something that will seem outrageous to us, that will stretch us beyond our comfort zones and will require us to rely on God’s power and not our own.

### 2.4 Jonah runs away from his calling? (Jonah 1:3-17)

- Whenever God calls us to a task, we all have a choice to make. Will we accept his call and trust him or will we, like Jonah, run away: ‘*But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish.*’ (Jonah 1:3)
- Jonah probably runs away from his calling, as we often do, because:
  - i) Confused by the novelty of the task that God has asked him to perform.
  - ii) Frightened by the enormity of what God was asking him to do.
  - iii) Concerned by the severity of the message that God was asking him to share.
  - iv) Upset with the task God had asked him to perform.

#### 2.4.1 Confused by the novelty of the task that God has asked him to perform.

- God may well ask us to do something that does not at first sight make sense to us. But if Jonah had stopped to think for a moment instead of running away from God then he may well have come to realise what God was up to.
- We can see, with the benefit of hindsight that:
  - i) God wanted to stir up the people of Israel and to encourage them to turn from their wickedness.
  - ii) God wanted to demonstrate that his grace was not solely for his chosen people.
  - iii) Jonah was a foreshadowing of the ministry of Jesus

#### 2.4.1.1 God wanted to stir up the people of Israel and to encourage them to turn from their wickedness.

- God planned to bless God’s enemies, the Assyrians, in such a way as to put his own people to shame! Let Israel realise, in shame, how careless she had been of her blessings and privileges! Let Israel repent and turn again to her God! This is a theme that recurs again and again in the history of God’s people.
- Does this not happen today in the Lord’s dealings with his church? Does he not shame our spiritual lethargy by raising up people of deep devotion and fresh and fiery zeal in our midst? Many a congregation has been awakened from its sleep by one or two people - converts from the ‘world’ - coming into the fellowship. Then they see that God really does save sinners! Hope is reborn. Goals are re-established and a new liveliness begins to infect the whole body of Christ in that place.

#### 2.4.1.2 God wanted to demonstrate that his grace was not solely for his chosen people.

- God wanted the Israelites then and us today to be exemplars of what is was like to know God and live in relationship with him.

#### 2.4.1.3 Jonah was a foreshadowing of the ministry of Jesus