

**The Touch of YAHWEH**  
**Jonah in the big fish**  
**(Jonah 1-5)**

**(part 4)**

YAHWEH said, Get up! (Jonah) Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because their wickedness has confronted Me (vs.2). Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, was full of violence and cruelty; YAHWEH had called Jonah to preach a message of repentance to that city, because, this great city of Nineveh, “had more than 120,000 people who could not distinguish between their right and their left, as well as many animals” (5:11). Assyria was an Empire that had reached into the modern countries of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran; the center of their civilization was on the upper Tigris River in Northern Iraq. According to the website Nineveh.com, the Assyrians of today are the indigenous Aramaic-speaking descendants of the ancient Assyrian people, one of the earliest civilizations emerging in the Middle East, and have a history spanning over 6750 years. They **are not Arabian, they are not Kurdish, and their religion is not Islam. The Assyrians are Christian**, with their own unique language, culture and heritage. Although the Assyrian empire ended in 612 B.C., history is replete with recorded details of the continuous presence of the Assyrian people till the present time.

This background history gives us an overview of the people, culture and language of Nineveh of yesterday and today. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire in the eighth century B.C when YAHWEH called Jonah to preach there; Jonah was a prophet of Israel who lived in the time of King Jeroboam at the time of YAHWEH’S calling him to preach in Nineveh. Even though Jonah was an established prophet, he lacked the most important thing: obedience. He was indifferent to Nineveh’s great need to hear the message that would bring her forgiveness by ignoring the command of YAHWEH. To the Prophet Ezekiel, YAHWEH gave a solemn warning as a watchman for the nation of Israel: As for you, son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel, when you hear a word from My mouth, give them a warning from Me. If I say to the wicked: Wicked one, you will surely die, but you do not speak out to warn him about his way, that wicked person will die for his iniquity, yet I will hold you responsible for his blood (Ezekiel 33:7). So the fate of Nineveh was upon Jonah!

Jonah went away from the Lord’s presence to a place called, Tarshish. It was a place far from Israel; some biblical commentators read it as Tarsus in ancient Spain. But no one knows for sure. Jonah fled away from the presence of the Lord to Tarshish, where he thought he might hide from his calling; He chose to go down to the lowest part of the ship and there he fell asleep (Vs.5) not aware of the violent wind that YAHWEH had sent to wake him from his indifference to confront the reality and consequences of his disobedience. The Captain and his sailors had done everything they could have to save their lives and the ship, but had not touched the roots of the problem, until he went down where Jonah was. Jonah’s sin of disobedience against his God had caused great damage and fear in the Captain’s life and of the sailors. Jonah was finally confronted with these questions: (1) on whose account has this evil come upon us? (2) What is your occupation? (3) Where did you come from? (4) And what is your country and nationality? With these questions, Jonah had to confess who was, and the God he feared. Then they confronted Jonah with two more questions: what is this that you

have done? And what shall we do to you that the sea may subside and be calm for us (vs.8-11)? Although these mariners served other gods, they had the understanding that the storm was a result of the evil of sin, so they each cried to their god with no results. They understood also that they had to deal with the root of the problem in a hard way after they recognized it.

YAHWEH was behind the storm expressing to Jonah His displeasure. Yes, Jonah had to go for the calm to return; he and only he was the cause for such turmoil. Jonah's life didn't show to have a strong faith to those mariners as he related his testimony to them in view of Whom he feared and worshiped: the Lord God of heaven Who made the sea and the dry land (vs.9). Fearful even more, they had to come to a decision and they put the question before Jonah, What shall we do to you?

There was only one way that would bring the calm back to the sea, Jonah suggested, Pick me up and throw me into the sea so it may quiet down for you, **for I know that I am to blame for this violent storm that is against you** (1:12). Jonah was courageous and resolute in his idea, because conviction had come to him. The sailors, however, prayed against guilt before they threw Jonah into the sea. They cried, O Lord, we beseech You, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood; for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You. So they took up Jonah and cast him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging (vs.14, 15).

And then there was a big fish appointed by the Lord YAHWEH to receive Jonah. How big was that fish, the size of a school bus reeling in? And how big was his stomach? Big enough for Jonah to stand and walk about? He spent three days and three nights vacationing in the belly of a fish, not a place of his choice to hide from YAHWEH'S command, but it was a place where Jonah called on the name of the Lord to be saved. This fish had saved Jonah from the fury of the storm; he relates his experience this way: You threw me into the depths, into the heart of the seas, and the current overcame me; Your breakers and Your billows swept over me; the waters engulfed me up to the neck; the watery depth overcame me; seaweed was wrapped around my head; I sank to the foundations of the mountains (2:1-6). Disobedience has a pricy tag; Jonah suffered much physically and emotionally. He suffered that which the people of Nineveh would have suffered eternally in hell, for his refusal to go and warn the people of their sins. But our YAHWEH is compassionate, and does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked people. He saw the many innocent children there and He had compassion on them.

Every new day is a day of opportunities for every Believer to warn this lost and dark world. They come to us in many ways and forms, but many times we don't perceive neither understand the whys of circumstances and fail the YAHWEH'S command by complaining and running away from it; reason why we find ourselves in Jonah's situation: "engulfed by the waters, wrapped by seaweed". Three days and three nights Jonah remained in the belly of the fish, without food or water, without light and air to breath; it was truly a miracle of life. His life could have ended in the bottom of the sea, for it had become useless in his disobedience to YAHWEH. His path of disobedience had lead him to his destruction, but the mercy of our YAHWEH came to him and touched him through a big fish who had provided shelter from the stormy sea, ragging against him. It was in the belly of that fish that Jonah, seemly at the point of death, remembered

YAHWEH and his prayer was heard. The Lord then commanded the fish to rid of Jonah and he was ejected on dry land.

The Lord has His ways to touch the hardness of our heart, be it through a desert, a valley (belly of a fish), or simply by making us to lie down in green pastures through some kind of sickness. It is never His intention to leave us in the belly of a fish or in a desert for as long as we live. He wants to bless us with the abundance of His goodness, if only we would realize His plans for our life; if only we would realize our own disobedience and return to His pastures where He would feed and heal us. Jonah had to do that while in the belly of the fish; there was no other place for him to repent; that was his last chance. The second time the Lord commands him to go to Nineveh, Jonah gets up and goes to Nineveh according to the Lord's command (3:1-3). The message of warning consisted of a period of forty days in which the city of Nineveh had to repent not to be destroyed. The number forty, in the uniformity of its association with a time frame for trial, and testing, was relevant for the city of Nineveh. The Prophet Jonah walked three days, for it was a large city, in a measure of three-day walk, proclaiming, in forty days Nineveh will be overthrown! His effort in proclaiming the message of warning was not in vain; soon the whole Nineveh awakes from its ashes and turns to the LORD. YAHSHUA said that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who don't need repentance (Luke 15:7). If the whole Nineveh repented before YAHWEH, then the whole heaven rejoiced! There was a heavenly celebration for the city of Nineveh, but Jonah could not join in with the angels celebrating Nineveh's salvation; he was angry with YAHWEH, angry enough to desire death! He was against YAHWEH'S compassion for that city of which the LORD responded to him, Should I not care about the great city of Nineveh, which has more than 120,000 people who cannot distinguish between their right and their left, as well as many animals? Jonah had proclaimed the message and later went to wait for the destruction of the city. Either Jonah misunderstood the nature of the message YAHWEH had given him, or he was still angry with his ordeal, or perhaps Jonah's blood sugar was low since he hadn't had a good meal for a while. Whatever the reason, Jonah seemed insensitive to the positive response of Nineveh; he rather see them judged; he was not in agreement with the compassionate; slow to anger, faithful love and forgiving YAHWEH. Jonah could not rejoice with the greatest revival in history! The touch of YAHWEH was tremendous; first in Jonah's life and then in the city of Nineveh.

Many of us have not obeyed the divine calling and have lived an unfulfilled life and wish things were different; at least you didn't end up in the belly of a fish, or in a terrific physical storm. Perhaps you are going through the storm of life because of it; nothing will help you or me by staying remorseful about it; there is, however, a way back to your calling, as there was a way for Jonah, through the belly of a fish. His faithful love will guide you in the right direction when in repentance and humility before Him; it is then that things will change in your favor. The Lord YAHWEH will hear always the beat of a contrite heart.