**Jonah**

**The Naughty Prophet**

**What you need to REMEMBER:**

The main storyline of the Bible describes God’s love for the world and His efforts to bring about its redemption. Much of His redemptive work happened through agents of change known as “prophets.” Prophets were specially called and empowered individuals who were given clear assignments by God Himself. Usually, the instructions specifically delineate to whom they should go and what they were to say and do. Their words and actions were designed to clearly communicate The Lord’s thoughts, intentions and instructions.

Embedded within the narrative is the dysfunctional relationship between God’s people and their Maker. God’s people were consistently faithless, yet, God remained faithful. God was persistent in His attempts to get His people back into alignment with His passions and purposes. The Lord’s relationship with His people followed a see-saw pattern of blessing, rebellion, punishment and restoration. What was true for the ancients remains true today.

**What you need to KNOW:**

The account of Jonah’s adventure to Nineveh typifies both God’s love for all people and the waywardness of His people.

The story starts with God instructing Jonah to deliver a message of doom to the people living in Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian Empire. Jonah tries to run away from the assignment and from God Himself because of his hatred of the Assyrians. Jonah’s disdain for the Assyrians was born from their brutal regional dominance, including attacks on Jonah’s homeland in the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Jonah’s story is one of the strangest accounts in the Bible. It includes a wayward, self-willed prophet who is much less open to God than the pagans with whom he interacts. God’s prophet was hopelessly disobedient, angry and filled with seething hatred. He complained, sulked and was in a pissy-mood throughout the whole episode. He was a staunch believer, but his crankiness revealed contempt for anyone who was racially and religiously different than him. Throughout the story, this ‘faith leader’ had a way worse attitude toward God and his fellow human beings than the unbelieving people around him.

This story includes a ship and a great storm that only ceases when the knuckleheaded prophet is tossed overboard, by a group of people who didn’t want to do it. But, remarkably, through the experience, the prophet’s shipmates end up becoming worshipers of Jonah’s God.

There was ‘the swallowing’ of the prophet, and his desperate prayers from the digestive tract of the whale, and the stinky barf he was covered with after he survived his ride on ‘Neptune’s Regurgitron!’ Then, there was the prophet’s uninspiring, half-hearted message in a large pagan city that surprisingly results in the repentance of not only all the people – but, even their livestock!

The book of Jonah describes how God wanted to use this irritable, uncooperative prophet to save the unbelievers he interacted with but it becomes clear that the story is also about how God wanted to save the prophet. In fact, the two groups of pagans the prophet interacts with do get ‘saved’ from their false beliefs and wicked behavior, but the story abruptly ends with the fate of the prophet unresolved.

Perhaps some hope of Jonah’s redemption can be found in the fact that the account is written in the third person. From this perspective, it’s possible to read the book as a humble confession of how messed up his heart and thinking really were during this season of his life. It’s possible that Jonah recorded his story as a lasting testimony of his eventual conversion into a caring and spiritually sensitive person. Maybe Jonah eventually figured it out and repented as sincerely as the Ninevites, but we don’t know for sure.

Jonah’s story provides us with an honest, unvarnished negative example from which positive lessons can be drawn. After all, there’s a little Jonah in all of us, but thank God that His love and power can transform both shameful sinners and screwed-up saints.

**GET GOING!**

**Take a leisurely journey through this densely packed four-chapter book.**