

Jonah

*A Different Kind of Life:
Sovereignty, Providence, Judgement, Mercy,
Ships, Storms, Fish, Land, Dislike,
Disobedience, Obedience and Us*

An Introduction

Every child knows the story of Jonah. It is one of the most well-known stories in the Old Testament, perhaps because of its fantastical fish. On its surface and first reading, it is

- the story of a rebellious prophet who is swallowed by a big fish, most often referred to as a whale.

(IMP: What you believe about that story of Jonah and the whale reveals what you believe about the Bible and God. If God exists as he is revealed in the Bible and if Jesus rose from the dead as is told by the Bible, the story of Jonah and the whale is not difficult to believe.

But you should also know that, even skepticism is a belief system that can't be empirically proven.

ILL – Children, if a person says “*I don't believe in God.*” You can say, “*Prove that God doesn't exist.*” They have to say, “*I can't.*” This means they only *believe* there is no God. This makes agnosticism and atheism is a belief system just like Christianity.

- There is no textual evidence the story is made up to add a supernatural element that would attract the attention of the readers
- The fish is mentioned only in two verses and there are no descriptive details
- It is reported more as a matter of fact).

On the surface and by its first reading, it can also be a story about

- Race and nationalism illustrated by a prophet more concerned for the military safety of his own nation than the eternal salvation of another nation
- God's call to missionary service and Jonah's resistance to obedience, symbolic of our own struggles with God's will

There is a kaleidoscope of messages/lessons found within the book:

- a) God's mercy to Gentile nations
- b) God's judgement on Israel
- c) God's sanctification of Jonah
- d) Jonah's representation of Jesus

- e) God's fulfilment of his Gen 12 promise to Abraham

This also means that any number of titles for the book would be appropriate:

- a) The Reluctant Prophet
- b) God's Amazing Grace
- c) Against the Wind
- d) The Perfect Storm

Even though there are only 48 verses in this book, there are a multitude of ways to view, study and preach it. It is a minor prophet with a major message.

We know that Scripture serves at least four purposes:

2 Timothy 3:16 - All Scripture is breathed out by God and

- a) *profitable for teaching – What is right*
- b) *for reproof – What is wrong*
- c) *for correction – How to make wrong, right*
- d) *and for training in righteousness – How to keep right, right*

First: A Word about Jonah. 1:1

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai...

The way Jonah is introduced means that Jonah was a well-known figure during the time the book was written.

2 Kings 14:23-27 – Jonah was a prophet who ministered under the evil king, Jeroboam, the first king of the north after Israel divided into two nations (800s bc). (Jeroboam built the large altar in the hills of northern Israel that we visit on trips there).

FYI: He was from Gath-hepher, a northern border town in ancient Israel, approximately 3 miles from Nazareth where Jesus was born and less than one mile from Canna where Jesus performed his first miracle, turning water into wine. It means "wine-press of the digging" and is mentioned twice in the Bible at Joshua 19:13 and 2 Kings 14:25.

We learn two things about Jonah in the 2 Kings passage:

- a) He was a servant 25

Amos 3:7 - For the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.

OT 'servant' = set apart / Obedience is job one of the job description

b) He was a prophet 25

Amos 3:8 - *The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who can but prophesy?"*

If God speaks, "*Who can but prophesy?*" Evidently, Jonah thought he could not! That's who. In spite of his past success, privilege and calling, Jonah is a reluctant, even defiant prophet.

Second: A Word about His Circumstance. v 2

"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city..."

Assyria was a neighboring, superpower threat against Israel and had already, for four kings, received tribute from Israel in its protection racket against smaller countries.

Hosea and Amos both predicted imminent invasion from Assyria. After a 3-year siege, he northern kingdom fell to Assyria in 722 b.c.

The book of Jonah has been placed about 40 years before that invasion, so everything Jonah thought about Assyria was true.

Why would God save the nation who would soon destroy Israel?

Why is Jonah, a prophet of God, called to preach the gospel to a Gentile nation when

- most of the Israel's prophets center their messages on God's people and
- are warning Israel about Assyria's ungodliness and imminent invasion

Israel is God's *segullah*; *treasure*.

God loves all of his creation and rules over the whole earth but God *loves* Israel.

The rest of the world is referred to as *shedim* = *no gods* (Deut 32:17; Ps 106:37 - The word may derive from the "Sedim = Assyrian guard spirits").

Jonah occurs during a time when the Temple has been built in Jerusalem and God's very presence from heaven visits his people. The glory of God rests in Israel.

Exodus 19:3-6 – ... *you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine*

The fact that, "all the earth is mine" makes "you shall be my treasured possession among all the peoples" even more

Even though Israel is God's possession and treasure and he never commanded them to war as other nations in pursuit of global domination. Why? Because their God dominates the world.

He was Israel's God and they were to be satisfied in him, just as they were to be satisfied with that little strip of land, he gave them to live in as his people.

In response, Israel, unlike the other nations, must worship only one God, the true God and they must worship in the place and in the way he has defined. Other nations may practice idolatry and live perversely but Israel must be marked by holiness; otherwise, the land will vomit them out (Lev 18:24-30).

During this same time period, God has already blessed the Gentiles at least twice.

- Elijah twice cared for the Gentile widow in Zarephath (jar of meal & resurrected son) – 1 Kings 17
- Elisha ministered to Naaman, the Syrian General, cured of leprosy – 2 Kings 5

At the same time God is blessing the Gentiles, Jonah and the other prophets are warning of God's judgement on Israel.

Jonah's message of mercy and grace does not stand alone in God's kindness to Gentiles or in his use of foreign nations to discipline Israel.

T - **2 Kings 8:7-13 & 13:22** – ⁷ Now Elisha came to Damascus. Ben-hadad the king of Syria was sick. And when it was told him, “The man of God has come here,” ⁸ the king said to Hazael, “Take a present with you and go to meet the man of God, and inquire of the LORD through him, saying, ‘Shall I recover from this sickness?’” ⁹ So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, all kinds of goods of Damascus, forty camels' loads. When he came and stood before him, he said, “Your son Ben-hadad king of Syria has sent me to you, saying, ‘Shall I recover from this sickness?’” ¹⁰ And Elisha said to him, “Go, say to him, ‘You shall certainly recover,’ but the LORD has shown me that he shall certainly die.” ¹¹ And he fixed his gaze and stared at him, until he was embarrassed. And the man of God wept. ¹² And Hazael said, “Why does my lord weep?” He answered, “Because I know the evil that you will do to the people of Israel. You will set on fire their fortresses, and you will kill their young men with the sword and dash in pieces their little ones and rip open their pregnant women.” ¹³ And Hazael said, “What is your servant, who is but a dog, that he should do this great thing?” Elisha answered, “The LORD has shown me that you are to be king over Syria.” ¹⁴ Then he departed from Elisha and came to his master, who said to him, “What did Elisha say to you?” And he answered, “He told me that you would certainly recover.” ¹⁵ But the next day he took the bed cloth and dipped it in water and spread it over his face, till he died. And Hazael became king in his place. 13:22 - Now Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz.

Yet, just as with Jonah, in the midst of that judgement, God showed mercy to Israel, who, in this book, are represented by Jonah.

- *God pursued Jonah who was sleeping on the ship
- * God rescued Jonah from the whale
- * God cared for Jonah in Nineveh

God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) to bless the nations through him comes to pass in Jonah.

Eventually, Nineveh becomes a symbol of rebuke against Israel.

Matthew 12:41 - The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Christianity is not as easy as outsiders think. God is not as simple as people make him out to be. God's grace, mercy and judgement can be very confusing.

- Jonah is God's servant
- Even with that privilege, Jonah is a reluctant prophet
- God shows mercy to Nineveh
- Nineveh is happy with God
- Jonah is unhappy with God

Third: A Word about Us

The last thing the book of Jonah is about is the fish. And most people fail to read beyond Jonah's expulsion from the whale. But there is an entire second half of this book and it is equally as important as the part about Jonah and the fish. The book ends on what amounts to a cliffhanger with Jonah no longer a rebellious but still a very unhappy prophet.

Jonah is going to learn in the most profound way, what all the Bible teaches us

Jonah 2:10 – Salvation belongs to God!

Since the Bible teaches that salvation is not an event but a lifetime of God's grace, the salvation God speaks of in the Bible is lifelong obedience to God.

When Jonah says, "*Salvation belongs to God,*" he means, "*My life belongs to God.*"

1 – See Us in Jonah

Although written in the 3rd person, Jonah is probably autobiographical. He tells on himself in this book. Jonah will eventually see himself reflected in the Ninevites and we will see ourselves reflected in Jonah.

We see, not just his actions but also his heart; its fears and motivations.

Jonah's problem is our problem. We too, want to be our own god. We, like Jonah, want to direct our lives. We want to say who can and who cannot be saved.

In the first half of the book, Jonah plays the part of the younger prodigal (Luke 15:11-24). In the latter half of the book, Jonah plays the part of the older prodigal (Luke 15:25-32) who begrudgingly obeys the father but berates him for his kindness to repentant sinners.

That parable ends with a question to the Pharisaical son. Jonah ends with a question to the Pharisaical prophet.

2 – See God

In the book of Jonah, God is an enigma. He's not easy to understand or follow. Jonah, like us, finds it difficult to reconcile God's mercy and justice. How can God be both just and merciful?

How can he save a foreign people and how can he judge his own people?

But most of all, we are going to see God over, behind, in and through each of our lives.

Sometimes he is a voice who calls us
 Sometimes he is a ship who carries us
 Sometimes he is a storm who scares us
 Sometimes he is a fish who swallows us
 Sometimes he is a people who are unlike us
 Sometimes he is a plant who covers us

Jonah is a book about God's global sovereignty and his personal providence.

His name means 'dove,' a symbol of peace in Scripture and even in the modern world. And it is to that peace, divine shalom, that God is directing all things.

My hope is that you won't run away from your life, the life God has interrupted and reshaped but that you will have peace in it. And not just any peace but a peace that honors the God who can sometimes be so difficult to understand.

My point in the series: Like Jonah, our lives often reflect a different kind of life than we planned.

God chooses to interrupt and redirect our lives, sometimes on a small, only, one-day occurrence but other times in ways that radically changes our lives for the rest of our lives.

Or perhaps we didn't have a plan. But through choices and circumstances, our lives are different than we thought they would be –

There are innumerable things that have shaped our lives –

- We planned to be independent at a certain date
- We hoped to be married by a particular time or still be married
- We intended to have this or that job (we don't or were fired)
- We wanted to have children, or this many children (and we never thought they would die)
- We expected to always be healthy
- We thought our spouse would live longer

If you were given a blank, what would you write in it? How are you living a different kind of life?

And how are *you*, in this life, you are living?

My hope is that our study of the book will bring the dove of peace, the Holy Spirit, to your heart in the midst of a life that may or may not be the one you imagined or the one you didn't expect.

Conclusion:

One final note. Jesus saw himself in Jonah and that point must be emphasized.

Matthew 12:40 - For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Ultimately, we believe the story about Jonah and the great fish because we believe Jesus.

- No Jonah in the fish.
- No Jesus in the tomb.

And in believing Jesus, our lives are saved – now and forever.

An Outline for Jonah

First: Jonah and God's Word

1:1 – God's Word Comes to Jonah
 1:2 – The message to be conveyed
 1:3 – Jonah's response

3:1 – God's Word comes to Jonah
 3:2 – The message to be conveyed
 3:3 – Jonah's response

Second: Jonah and God's World

1:4 – The word of warning
 1:5 – The pagan response
 1:6 – The pagan leader response
 1:7 – The pagan vs Jonah's response

3:4 – The word of warning
 3:5 – The pagan response
 3:6 – The pagan leader response
 3:7 – The pagan vs Jonah's response

Third: Jonah and God's Grace

2:-1-10 – God's grace in a fish

4:1-10 – God's Grace in a plant

Community Groups:

- 1 – Recount the story of Jonah in your own words.
- 2 – Why is it so hard for people to believe the part about Jonah and the great fish?
- 3 – What was Jonah's relationship to God and what did it mean? 2 Kings 14:25
- 4 – What was Israel's relationship to God and what did it mean?
- 5 – Why did Jonah refuse to obey God?
- 6 – What is our relationship to God and what does it mean?
- 7 – What life plans of yours has God interrupted?
- 7 – Have you ever disobeyed God?
- 8 – How do you feel when your day, plans, etc are interrupted?
- 9 – Have you ever thought about your greatest plan, highest goal, being obedience to God?
- 10 – How would that mental switch affect your life and potential interruptions?
- 11 – What comforts might have encouraged Jonah's disobedience?
- 12 – What fears might have encouraged Jonah's disobedience?
- 13 – What comforts or fears might encourage our disobedience?
- 14 – How is Jesus the obedient servant in place of Jonah, the disobedient servant?
- 15 – What does the obedience of Jesus do for us?