



Jonah: God of Mercy

Memory Verse: Jonah 2:7-9 "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the Lord.'"

Background

Jonah is the 32nd book of the Bible and the 5th book of the minor prophets in the Old Testament. The prophet Jonah (whose name means "dove") was the son of Amittai (1:1) and came from the town of Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14:25), just a few miles north of Nazareth in the northern kingdom of Israel. While the book of Jonah is written in the third person and does not name its author, there is little reason to doubt its divine inspiration or historical accuracy. Indeed, Jesus Christ Himself supported the authenticity and accuracy of the book of Jonah (Matthew 12:39-41). Jonah, one of the few prophets from the northern kingdom of Israel, was commissioned by God to go to Nineveh, capital of Assyria, and call them to repentance. Assyria was a world power for about 300 years (900-607 BC). Jonah prophesied in Nineveh sometime between 773-755 BC, a few decades before the fall of Israel to Assyria in 722 BC. By the time Jonah preached to Nineveh, the cruelty of Assyria towards their captives was legendary. However, Nineveh, more than God's own people in Israel or Judah, responded to the message of the prophet sent to them. The Ninevites repented and the king called for the people to fast and cover themselves in sack-cloths so that God would have mercy on them (Jonah 3). When God saw their repentance, He relented and spared their city from destruction.

The Short Story

Jonah, commissioned by God to preach to the wicked Ninevites, runs away and gets swallowed by a giant fish before finally obeying God's call.

What's the Big Idea?

The book of Jonah focuses more on the prophet than on his message. In fact, only one line is recorded of Jonah's prophecy to the Assyrians: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). The Assyrians responded immediately; their repentance possibly inspired by recent events of a solar eclipse, plagues, or even by the sight of Jonah whose skin was likely bleached from his time in the fish. When God first called Jonah to go to Nineveh (northeast of Israel), he disobeyed and headed to Tarshish (located in modern-day Spain), the western-most part of the known world at that time. The cruel Assyrians were the enemies of Israel and Jonah did not want to preach a message of repentance to them. Jonah's efforts to stop God's plans were futile and he needed to learn a lesson about the mercy of God. The Lord sent a storm and a huge fish to save Jonah. After three days in the fish, Jonah had a better understanding of God's sovereignty and mercy, proclaiming that "salvation comes from the Lord" (2:9). Jonah then obeys the Lord, goes to Nineveh, preaches his message, but pouts when they repent. In the final chapter, the Lord uses a plant, a worm, and the wind to continue teaching Jonah about His love and compassion on all people, even the Ninevites.

So What? Why is this book so important? What was God's purpose for the book?

God is the God of mercy. God had mercy on Jonah even in his disobedience, providing a great fish to save him from the stormy sea. Jonah's three days and three nights in the fish foreshadow Christ's death and resurrection (Matthew 12:40). God had mercy on Israel as the Assyrians, as a result of Jonah's message, probably delayed their captivity of Israel and certainly softened their treatment of the Israelite captives. In the book of Jonah, we also see God's mercy for other nations. The mercy offered to the Ninevites represents God's desire for all nations to receive His gift of salvation and mercy in Jesus Christ. How interesting that Joppa, where Jonah got on a ship to avoid preaching to a foreign nation is the same place that 800 years later, God chose to tell Peter to receive men of other gentile nations (Acts 10). Just as Jonah said, 'Salvation comes from the Lord' (2:9). May we be willing to share God's grace and salvation with others, even our enemies.

**Material taken from various sources.*

Teaching Text

Jonah 4:1-2 “But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. ² He prayed 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.**”

Sermon-Based Discussion Questions

- Please form groups of 5-6 people. Take three minutes and meet everyone in your group.
- Two people from the group answer the question: **What do you know to be true about God?**
- Two people from the group answer the question: **Why is it so hard to love our enemies?**
- Two people from the group answer the question: **Where have you been touched by the extravagant love of God?**

Practical Application

- **Where do you struggle with spiritual tunnel vision? How do you handle a spiritual blind spot?**
- **What upsets you about God? How does it make you feel? What do you do with that emotion?**
- **Who is your enemy? What are you going to do with them? How long will it take to make them a friend? How do you apply Matthew 5:43-48?**
- **Where do you need to apply the Gracious Compassion and Abundant Love of God to your life?**

Hitting the Highpoints

- **1:1-4** “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it...But Jonah ran away from the LORD ...”
- **1:14** “Then they cried out to the Lord, “Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man’s life.”
- **2:7-9** “When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, & my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.”
- **3:3** “Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh.”
- **4:4** “Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live ...”
- **4:10** “The LORD said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow...”

Bonus Features: Where is Jesus?

In Luke 11:29-32 Jesus laments, ““This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. ...The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here.” The problem for mankind remains the same, sin and rebellion against a holy, but merciful God. Likewise the solution remains the same, faith in God through His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Personal Takeaways and Notes