

The Book of Jonah:

A Systematic Bible Study

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Jonah Bible Study

Jonah 1:1-3

"To many it sounds inefficient or even foolish to send missionaries. It is as foolish as sending one prophet from Israel to preach in the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, or as sending a baby to occupied Palestine to bring good news to the world. It is the foolishness of the cross (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)." – James Bruckner¹

I. Introduction

A. Genre

1. Found within the Minor Prophets section of the Old Testament
2. Contains a variety of literary styles
 - i. Contains very little actual prophecy.
 - ii. A Narrative (like the Historical books)
 - iii. Often a dialog like Job in the Wisdom section of the Old Testament
 - iv. A parable or teaching story

B. Authorship and Date of Writing

1. The author is not known. Although Jonah is the main character, it is probable that he did not write this book himself, although it is not impossible. If Jonah wrote the book, it was probably written in the mid to early 700s BC.
2. Most likely, this book was written down during the exile period in order to preserve the oral account of the story for future generations. If this is the case, the book was written down between 400 – 200 BC.

C. Major Theme: The nature and character of God.

D. Danger in Reading Jonah: Familiarity

1. Don't rely on your past knowledge of thoughts of the book. As you study, try to forget (or at least put aside) your past conclusions, visual images, or understandings of the book.
2. We are often hindered in learning more about Scripture because we think we have covered it well or too many times.

II. Jonah

A. Sources of Information

1. The Book of Jonah
2. 2 Kings 14:23-25

B. Family

1. Son of Amittai – Nothing is known of the Father
2. No other family is mentioned.

C. Hometown

1. From Gath Hepher - about 7 kilometers from Nazareth, the future hometown of Jesus.
2. In the region of Galilee, the Northern Kingdom of Israel

D. A Servant and Prophet of God

1. Most likely worked during the reign of King Jeroboam who ruled Israel (the Northern Kingdom) from 793 BC to 753 BC.
2. Prophesied of national restoration. This happened during a time of temporary weakness for the Assyrian Empire. This allowed Israel to reclaim lost land from its enemies. We see Jonah as a very nationalistic prophet, he loved Israel and its restoration.

¹ James Bruckner, *The NIV Application Commentary: Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 61.

E. Where did Jonah live?

1. The Bible does not tell us exactly where Jonah lived or served in the ministry.
2. He was possibly in Samaria or Jerusalem when he heard the call of God to go to Nineveh.

F. Name means “Dove”

1. It is not always appropriate to read too much into this. However, there are some interesting thoughts that arise from this.
 - i. In Genesis, it was the dove that confirmed God’s message of salvation to Noah and all those on the Ark. Since then, the dove has been known as a symbol of peace.
 - ii. In the Law, the dove was a sacrificial animal capable to temporarily covering the sins of the unrighteous.
 - iii. Psalm 55 gives us an interesting parallel between the dove David envisioned and Jonah.
2. If God sent a “dove” to Nineveh, it could be reminiscent of the dove going to the Ark with a message of salvation or a dove being sacrificed for the forgiveness of sins.

III. Nineveh

A. Location

1. Near the current city of Mosul in northern Iraq.
2. 1200 kilometers northeast of Jerusalem.

B. History

1. Nineveh rose to be a large, prominent city around 740 BC and became the official capital of the Assyrian Empire about 40 years later.
2. The Assyrian Empire was the dominant force in the region until the Babylonians overthrew them along with the city of Nineveh in 612 BC.
3. The Assyrians were known to be a brutal military force who conquered its neighbors and plundered their nations or cities.
 - i. Assyria had begun to attack and plunder Israel in Jonah’s younger days and earlier. They would become known as Israel’s worst enemy.
 - ii. Assyrian battle tactics were designed to terrorize and frighten people into submission. Some were recorded in the writing of the Assyrians themselves and include:
 - a. Live dismemberment
 - b. Head parades (marching through the streets carrying the heads of their victims on poles.)
 - c. Skinning people alive
 - d. Burning people alive
 - e. Gouging out eyes
 - f. Building tower of bodies while mixing dead and live people.

C. Size

1. At its height, the city was 7.5 miles long.
2. During Jonah’s time, it had at least a population of 120,000 people.

IV. Tarshish

- A. A Phoenician city in Southern Spain
- B. A supply city for much of the Mediterranean Sea, thus it has a lot of ship traffic.
- C. Near Gibraltar in the western most part of the Mediterranean world, over 5,000 kilometers from Israel in the southwest.

V. The Difficult Calling of God

- A. Jonah was called by God to do both something he enjoyed and something he loathed.

1. The easy call of God: Prophecy about the expansion and restoration of Israel.
 2. The difficult call of God: Prophecy to the enemies of Israel who were responsible for the Israel's loss of property, land, and life.
- B. God often calls people into places they are not immediately excited to go:
1. God called Abraham away from his home and into an unknown land.
 2. God called Moses into Pharaoh's court where he was reluctant to go.
 3. God called Peter into the home of Gentiles when he was content to ministry only to Jews.
 4. God called Paul to go into Europe when he wanted to remain in Asia.
 5. God called Jesus into the flesh of humanity and the cross of death.
 6. Each calling, however, was for the purpose of salvation. Ultimately, obedience was followed by blessing.

VI. Why Run Away?

- A. James Bruckner writes that, "Jonah is not interested in participating in the redemption of this particular enemy."²
- B. Perhaps Jonah feared death in the city.
- C. Perhaps Jonah was filled with hate or contempt for the people.
- D. Perhaps Jonah thought they deserved to die. He did not want to interfere with their destruction by introducing them to the compassionate God who was angry with them but willing to save them.
- E. Jonah will explain this himself in Jonah 4.

VII. Running from the Call of God.

- A. James Bruckner writes, "God is not surprised (as we are) that those whom he calls struggle with that call. If we [reexamine] Jonah, we may also find ourselves and our own hidden protests against God. . . We may find hope for our struggles against the persistence and longevity of violent persons and nations who inflict terror on civilian populations."³
- B. Running away from God's call is sometimes a natural reaction. We are all called to pick up the cross and no one is immediately excited at the prospect of pain and death. Nevertheless, as we will see with Jonah, to walk with God into difficulties is far easier than running away from God into difficulties.

² Ibid, 42.

³ Ibid, 25

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Jonah 1:4-16

Jonah was “a man in whom the spirit of humanity had been almost killed out by patriotism. . . Doubtless he would have gone to Nineveh had he been sure that God would really destroy the city. But being a narrow patriot, jealous and vindictive, he could not see why God should wish him to preach to a people who stood eager to devour Israel.”– George L. Robinson⁴

I. The downward progression of Jonah

- A. The author of this book uses the illustration of downward movement to illustrate the state of Jonah. As he moves away from God he sinks deeper and deeper into a slump or, as we see in chapter 2, a grave.
- B. This illustration begins in chapter 1 and culminates in chapter 2 with a description of Jonah’s lowest point and then his gradual rise.

Jonah Received the Word and Call of God but Refuses (Jonah 1:1-3)

Jonah went down to Joppa (1:4)

Jonah went down below deck (1:5)

Jonah went down into a deep sleep (1:5)

Jonah went down into the water (1:15)

Jonah went down into the belly of the fish (1:17)

Jonah went down into the depths of the ocean or grace (2:2)

II. Jonah’s Death-wish

- A. Although Jonah does not explicitly state his wish to die until Jonah 4:3, we see many times in chapter 1 where Jonah demonstrates that he would rather die than prophecy to the people of Nineveh:

1. Running away from God’s presence is a life-risking venture. God is the creator and source of life. To run away from him is to run away from the life-giver. Yet Jonah chose to do this.
2. Sailing was a dangerous, life-risking venture. Sailing was very risky in the ancient world with no reliable navigation system or weather prediction system. Shipwrecks and death at sea were common. Long journeys by ship were especially treacherous as seen in Paul’s journey to Rome in the book of Acts. Jonah was going on the longest sea journey possible by his own choice.
3. Being thrown into the sea was a life-risking venture. Jonah knew he would most likely die. He was willing to do this to save the lives of the sailors and the ship knowing it would cost him his life. Yet Jonah chose to do this.
4. Later, Jonah will decide to go to Nineveh. As we saw in last week’s study, Nineveh was filled with wicked, murderous people. Preaching in Nineveh could certainly lead to a brutal death. Yet Jonah chose to do this.

- B. Jonah was willing to risk his life. However, the purpose for which he is willing to risk his life shifts in chapter 1.

1. The decision to risk his life by running from God’s presence and taking to sea were made for selfish reasons. He was willing to die for his own selfish will.
2. However, his decision to risk his life by being thrown into the sea and then going to Nineveh were made for selfless reasons. He was willing to die so that the pagans on the boat and the pagans in Nineveh could be saved (or at least hear the Word of God).

⁴ George L. Robinson, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965), 75.

3. Ultimately, Jonah was willing to give his life for the will of God even after risking his life in rejection of the will of God.
 4. Jonah is an early foreshadowing of Jesus who was willing to give his life for the salvation of pagan, wicked people (Romans 5:8).
- C. Ultimately, everyone will lay down his or her life. Perhaps we are not rushing to do that as Jonah was but it is inevitable. Either we will lay down our life for our self and lose it for eternity or we will lay down our life for God and gain it for eternity. (Luke 9:23-25; John 15:13; 1 John 3:16)

III. Jonah at Sea – See Comparison Chart

IV. Holding the Wrong View of God

- A. This ship was full of people who held to distorted views of God.
1. The sailors held a polytheistic view of God that was common among the Mediterranean people groups outside of Israel.
 2. Jonah held a view of God that was tied more to his culture than to reality. This view included the following ideas:
 - i. God is primarily concerned with our nation and people (Israel) and we should be saved.
 - ii. The pagans outside our culture are the enemies of God and deserve punishment.
 - iii. God wants to bless us (our culture) and anything perceived as not a blessing must not be from God.
- B. Those distorted images of God required a confrontation with the true God in order for correction to come.
1. The sailors encountered the true God in the storm and in the word of Jonah.
 2. Jonah encountered the true God in the fish.

V. The Results of Running Away from God

- A. Exhaustion – In constant movement with little accomplishment.
- B. Endangering Self – Jonah ran into a storm.
- C. Endangering Others – Jonah endangered both those he neglect to serve (in Nineveh) and those around him (on the ship).
- D. Diminished Prayer – Although Jonah could have called on God at any point, he seems hesitant or unwilling to do so.

VI. The Benefits of Obeying God

- A. God's compassionate and gracious forgiveness and salvation for self (as seen in the rest of the book).
- B. God's compassionate and gracious forgiveness and salvation towards others (as seen

Comparing Jonah and Jesus in the Storm

Jonah in the Storm at Sea (Jonah 1)	Jesus in the Storm at Sea (Mark 4:35-41)	Notes:
Boarded the ship in order to run away from the call of God.	Boarded the ship in order to follow the call of God	
Jonah fell asleep in the boat (Jonah 1:3)	Jesus fell asleep in the boat (Mark 4:38)	Johan was exhausted from fleeing God's presence. Jesus was resting in God's presence.
A storm arose so strong that the sailors feared for their lives (Jonah 1:5-6)	A storm arose so strong that the disciples feared for their lives (Mark 4:38)	Some of the disciples were also experienced sailors and fishermen.
Awoken by frantic sailors asking, "how can you sleep?" and "don't you care if we die?" (Jonah 1:6)	Awoken by frantic disciples asking, "don't you care if we drown?" (Mark 4:38)	
God (Yahweh) is seen as the creator of the natural world and sovereign over the storm (Jonah 1:9)	God (Jesus) is seen as the creator of the natural world and sovereign over the storm (Mark 4:41)	
Jonah knew how to calm the storm.	Jesus knew how to calm the storm.	Jesus could calm the storm with his words but Jonah could only calm the storm by being consumed by it.
When Jonah sank, the storm was immediately calmed (Jonah 1:15)	When Jesus spoke, the storm was immediately calmed (Mark 4:39)	
Jonah and the sailors has reason to fear the storm.	Jesus and the disciples had no reason to fear the storm (Mark 4:40)	When storms arise in the lives of people who are doing the will of God, they are empowered to endure and overcome. When storms arise in the lives of people who reject the will of God, they will often be consumed by the storm. We need not fear the storm when we live in God's presence. When we run from that presence, however, the storms are indeed fearful.
The storm was used by God to bring Jonah to repentance. (Jonah 2)	The storm was used by God to bring glory to God. (Mark 4:41)	Storms do arise in the lives of both faithful and unfaithful people. However, there is a stark difference in the storm's results. In the lives of unfaithful people, God may use storms to bring them back to himself. In the lives of faithful people, God may use storms to bring glory to himself.

Jonah Bible Study

Jonah 1:17 – 2:9

"The book of Jonah continues the biblical story of the Creator and Redeemer God who shows compassion not only for his own but also for all whom he has created; the God of Scripture loves his enemies – and ours." – Gordon Fee⁵

I. The Great Fish

- A. According to Warren Baker, the Hebrew word used for the fish throughout Jonah (dag or dagah) is the same word "used in the collective sense" to refer to fish in general and not one particular type of fish.⁶
1. Dag is the masculine form of the noun and dagah is the feminine form of the noun.
 2. This is the word used to describe God's creation of "fish" in general in Genesis 1:26-28. The Hebrew text offers no indication of the type of fish except that it was "great."
 3. This fish is only mentioned once in the New Testament in Matthew 12:40 and there it is called by Jesus a κητος (ketos) which is translated by the KJV as "whale" but in most other English translations including NKJV and NIV as great or huge fish. However, the use of κητος indicates that this was an unusual fish as the literal translation of the Greek is "sea monster."
- B. Masculine or Feminine? (the transgender fish)
1. The author uses the masculine form of the word for fish in 1:17 and 2:10. However, the author switches to the feminine form in 2:1.
 2. While it is difficult to understand the ultimate intent of the author in this situation, some have been this as a play on words to describe the dual function of the fish:
 - i. In the masculine sense, this fish is carrying out the order of God as a soldier would carry out the orders of his commander. He is at work capturing and target and holding him hostage.
 - ii. In the feminine sense, this fish is acting as a mother. She is protecting the life of Jonah and even serving as a second womb for him. After all, he is in the belly of the fish. Here is protected from the harsh outside world until he is ready to be released. Some see the description of Jonah here as a foreshadowing of the New Testament concept of being "born again" – see below.
 - iii. Thus the fish is an example of both God's judgement and God's mercy. The fish swallows Jonah as a soldier would capture an enemy but the fish also sustains Jonah as a mother would her unborn child.
 3. Thus, we can say that the usage of masculine and feminine nouns here refers more to the function of the fish rather than the gender of the fish.
- C. Born Again
1. The imagery of Jonah, the rebellious person running from God in a downward spiral until he hits rock bottom in the belly of the fish is seen by some to be an illustration of humanity. Humanity is lost without God and lives in rebellion to God until a point in time when man surrenders to God.
 2. Jonah decision to finally give up his life so the ship and sailors can be saved is seen as an early picture of one laying down his life (or being crucified as Paul would say in Galatians 2:20) in order to find life.
 3. Once Jonah laid down his life he was placed in the belly of the fish where, after a time of prayer and repentance, he was vomited up alive. The belly of a fish should be

⁵ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 234.

⁶ Warren Baker and Gene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary Old Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG, 2003), 325.

the place where a person finds death. Instead, it was the place where Jonah found new life. In the same way, crucifixion should be the end of one's life but for Christians it represents the beginning of eternal life.

- i. The literal crucifixion of Christ made salvation (new, eternal life) possible.
 - ii. The spiritual crucifixion of believers effects salvation (new, eternal life) for those who give themselves to Christ.
4. Jesus described this salvation and new life as being born again in John 3. The imagery of Jonah arising from the fish's belly serves as an illustration of Jesus' comments. Nicodemus thought it was silly for a man to enter his mother's womb a second time and surely that was not what Jesus meant. However, the Old Testament sets the precedence for a man running from God who enters the womb and is born again to new life as he comes into obedience and new life.

D. Resurrection

1. Jonah and the fish also serve as an Old Testament illustration of Jesus entering the grave only to arise again on the third day. Jonah even compares the fish's belly to a grave in 2:2 and 2:6. The fish's belly should have been Jonah's grave. Instead, it was the setting for his resurrection. Likewise, the grave that was given to Jesus was seen by many to be his final resting place yet it was also the setting for his resurrection.
2. Jonah went into the fish's belly a dead man. In all practical sense, Jonah was dead when he was thrown from the boat. There was no chance of survival and he was resigned to die. In the same way, Jesus was a dead man when he entered the tomb. Nevertheless, the power of God was demonstrated when after three days both Jonah and Jesus walked among the living alive and well.
3. The miracle of Jonah is not that he survived in the belly of the fish but that he survived at all. Everything was against him. He was running away from the God of all life. He was thrown into the stormy sea with no chance for survival.
 - i. Everything spiritually and physically was pointing toward Jonah's death. But God was willing to save Jonah for death and bring him into new life even when Jonah's back was turned on God.
 - ii. In the same way, everything spiritually and physically is pointing to mankind's death. Sin has destined us for death but God has prepared a way for us to have new life. It was foretold by the resurrection of Jonah. It was confirmed by the resurrection of Jesus. It will one day be realized by the resurrection of all believers.
4. This is the sign of Jonah that Jesus mentioned in Matthew 12:39-40; 16:4 and Luke 11:29-30. We will talk more of Jesus' comparison of himself to Jonah in chapter 4 but we must consider chapter 2 of Jonah in relation to Jesus' resurrection.
 - i. When Jesus compared his time in the grave to Jonah's time in the fish, he wasn't speaking merely or primarily of the issue of literal time. He was speaking in terms of spiritual significance.
 - ii. Jonah's resurrection signaled new life for him, the rebellious creation of God, and other creation, like the people of Nineveh. In that resurrection, we saw God provide new life for wicked pagan and wayward children for a certain place and certain time. In the same way, the resurrection of Jesus provides new life for the wicked and the wayward in every generation, in every location, for all time.

E. The Science of the Fish

1. George Robinson researched fish stories to prove from science the possibility of a fish swallowing a person whole. He never found proof of a person living for days in a fish (that was definitely a miracle) but he demonstrated that it is possible for naturally occurring fish to swallow humans whole. He found two such incidents:

- i. In 1758, a sailor fell from a ship in the Mediterranean (the same sea from Jonah's story) and was swallowed whole by a shark. When the shark was struck with a cannonball it vomited the sailor whole and unharmed.
 - ii. In the early 1900s an Indian fisherman was swallowed whole by a shark in the Indian Ocean and remained in the fish for some time. When the shark was finally captured later that day, it was cut open and the fisherman was pulled from the animal alive and whole. Unfortunately, he died a short time later.
 - iii. He also found that in 1912, a fish was captured off the coast of Knight's Key in Florida measuring 45 feet (13.7 meters) with a mouth 38 inches (96.5 centimeter) wide. Its stomach was large enough to contain a whole human being, although cramped.⁷
 - 2. Nevertheless, debating the dimensions of Jonah's fish is as useless as measuring the dimensions of Jesus' tomb. Ultimately, the miracle has little to do with the enclosure but much to do with the person being raised from death to life.
- F. The fish was more obedient than Jonah. He did not hesitate to obey the command of God. Jonah could learn a lesson on obedience from the fish.
- G. Why Three Days?
 - 1. Perhaps it was the time needed for the fish to travel to Jonah's exit point.
 - 2. Perhaps it was designed to give time for Jonah to pray and come to his senses. After all, three is seen in the Bible as the number of completion.

II. Jonah's Prayer

- A. The Composition of the Prayer
 - 1. It falls into the genre of poetry, like the psalms.
 - 2. Even though it contains the true thoughts and expressions of Jonah at the time, it was most likely composed by the prophet after the event in a time of reflection and thanksgiving.
- B. The Setting of the Prayer
 - 1. The prayer is prayed in the fish's belly. There Jonah is temporarily saved but has not assurance of lasting salvation. He was saved from a violent drowning but he may still die of digestion or suffocation.
 - 2. Here Jonah is demonstrating a higher level of trust or faith in Yahweh. Previously, he did not trust God to protect in the middle of the pagan city Nineveh. Now he sees that God can protect him in the midst of the violent storm and the hungry fish. Perhaps this gives him some confidence when he walks into Nineveh.
 - 3. This reminds us of the New Testament scene of Paul and Silas praying and singing hymns in the prison of Philippi while in chains (Acts 16). There we see Paul and Silas, rejoicing over their salvation and praising God even though they were still in the belly of the prison.
- C. What does the Prayer Reveal about Jonah and God
 - 1. Jonah fully expected to die after being thrown from the boat. He deserved death and should have received death.
 - i. Physically speaking, he was banished from the boat to the sea.
 - ii. Spiritually speaking, he was banished from the sight of God.
 - iii. Jonah knew that though his physical condition was bad, his spiritual state was even more serious and eternally more meaningful than even his physical state.
 - 2. God's presence is not limited to his temple. Although in the Old Testament, that is the primary place where his presence is seen, God is not confined there. As David

⁷ Robinson, 78-79.

- writes in Psalm 139 (and the New Testament testifies) God is omnipresent. You can run away from your calling but you cannot run away from the God of your calling.
3. Jonah's salvation was not immediate. He had to sink and struggle for a while. When all hope was gone, then he called out to God and God responded.
 4. God responded to the desperate cry of this rebellious man. As Jonah will describe in chapter 4, God is loving and compassionate. He relents from sending calamity.
 5. Jonah knew God saved him.
 - i. It was not the work of man but the work of Yahweh that Jonah survived.
 - ii. Even when Jonah did not deserve it (when my life was ebbing away) God delivered him. In fact, even when Jonah was "banished" God was preparing for his salvation (as seen in God preparing and providing the fish in 1:17).
 6. Jonah was truly thankful to God for his salvation and committed to sacrifice to God. Perhaps Jonah was planning to sacrifice an animal but God desired a personal sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22).
 7. Jonah still had a problem ministering to idol worshippers (2:8)
 - i. Even though Jonah saw the salvation of the idolatrous sailors when they turned to Yahweh, he was still not an advocate for idolaters like the Ninevites.
 - ii. Jonah saw idol worshippers as unqualified to receive God's grace. Thus, God still has more to teach Jonah as we will see in chapters 3 and 4.
 8. Ultimately, this prayer in Chapter 2 reveals that Jonah indeed loves Yahweh because of what Yahweh has done from him individually. Jonah has not yet, however, come to a place where he loves Yahweh for who he is universally.
 - i. Jonah mentions "I" or "my" seven times in 8 verses. He only mentions others once and does so in a derogatory way.
 - ii. Jonah loves Yahweh for what he has done but not for who he is. When confronted with a full picture of who Yahweh is and what that means for the world (not only Jonah) Jonah again rebels against God.
 - iii. Loving God for what he has done is a great starting point but not a suitable dwelling place. We must develop a love for God based on who he is. Then, when we are asked to do the difficult or see a work of God that does not immediately benefit us, we are not thrown into crisis.

III. Jonah in Conflict with God

- A. James Bruckner writes, "The tension of Jonah's life is that he loves Yahweh but has taken serious action against God's intention to offer forgiveness to the violent."⁸
- B. Bruckner writes again, "Faith in Yahweh is never as simple as pure obedience versus pure rebellion. Jonah helps us to see the complexity of faith. He returns to his piety and worship of the true God of heaven, sea, and dry land. At the same time he maintains his reservations of protest against God's intended way in the world."⁹
- C. Thus, Jonah's life reflects the lives of many who serve God. There is a loving relationship and ongoing conflict happening simultaneously. Faith helps us to see the truth and value of God's word in spite of our disagreements or disobedience. Conflicts serve us well when viewed as growing or teaching moments. Conflicts harm us when we refuse to sacrifice our will for God's will.

⁸ Bruckner, 83.

⁹ Ibid, 87.

Jonah Bible Study

Jonah 2:10 – 3:10

"God's call cannot be ignored by those who pray that his kingdom will not pass them by. God calls a second time because he wants the lost delivered and he wants human participation" – James Bruckner¹⁰

I. Jonah Reaches Nineveh

- A. That God was determined to send Jonah to Nineveh indicated the extent of God's mercy. If God was solely focused on judgement, the refusal of Jonah to go would have been of little consequence. God would have poured out his wrath no matter the prophet's action. Yet God sent Jonah not to taunt the city with a proclamation of its looming doom but to warn the city in hopes of repentance. Jonah's work was to be an act of grace.
- B. Nineveh was a large city. The walled portion of the city had a perimeter of 7.5 miles or 12 kilometers. For Jonah to preach throughout the city would take days (possibly the three days mentioned in Jonah 3:3). It is unclear if Jonah does this. Perhaps Jonah's message spreads faster by word of mouth than by preaching of prophet.

II. Jonah's Message

A. Short

1. Eight words in the English but only five in the Hebrew
2. This is probably not the message in its entirety but it represents the theme of the message.

B. 40 Days

1. The number 40 is often seen in the Bible as a number God uses when dealing with humanity in issues of judgement, repentance, and teaching:
 - i. Noah's Flood lasted 40 days and nights (Genesis 7-8).
 - ii. Moses spend 40 days and nights on Mt. Sinai receiving the law of God (Exodus 24, 34).
 - iii. Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years while awaiting entrance into the promised land (Numbers 14).
 - iv. Jesus spend 40 days in the wilderness fasting at the beginning of his incarnational ministry (Matthew 4:2).
 - v. Jesus also spent 40 days with his disciples between his resurrection and his ascension (Acts 1).
2. 40 days was not only symbolic but also gracious as it gave the people of Nineveh time to repent. God could have withheld any mercy and brought about immediate destruction but he ultimately wanted Nineveh to be saved.

C. Overturned

1. The word translated here as "overturned" in the NIV comes from the Hebrew word *hapak*.
 - i. *Hapak* appears only 94 times in the entire Old Testament and is a difficult word to translate. It does not simply mean "destroy" or "overturn." The exact meaning is often dependent on the context.
 - ii. Here are some other places where the word is used in the Old Testament to demonstrate its variety of meaning:
 - a. 2 Kings 21:13 – "destroy"
 - b. Hosea 7:8 – "turn over"
 - c. Psalm 78:9 – "turn back"
 - d. Haggai 2:22 – "overturn"
 - e. 2 Samuel 10:3 – "overthrow"

¹⁰ Ibid, 107.

- f. 1 Samuel 10:6 – “changed”
- g. Jeremiah 31:13 – “turn”
- iii. As seen above, this word can have both positive and a negative implications.
 - a. The negative side is seen in the use of this word to speak of destruction.
 - b. The positive side is seen in the use of this word to speak of redemption.
- iv. Jonah may have favored this word because it was used by the writer of Genesis to describe what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah. In the mind of Jonah, Nineveh was very similar to these wicked cities that God destroyed during the time of Abraham. Jonah was expecting Nineveh to meet the same fate.
- v. Nineveh, however, may have seen this use of “hapak” a proclamation that even in God’s judgement there is opportunity for redemption or turning. Warren Baker writes that at the heart of this word is the idea that something can “change by turning.”¹¹ Perhaps Jonah used this word to emphasize the negative but Nineveh understood the positive, that this was a chance to change or repent (repent literally means to turn around and go a different direction).
- 2. James Bruckner writes, “Everyone in the text understands, however, that this word of destruction contains the possibility of Yahweh’s mercy if they repent. . . The double meaning of “overturned” is not lost on Jonah. He knows that Yahweh’s message implies that the people may repent and God will forgive. Such a possibility is exactly why Jonah initially fled to Tarshish. The Ninevites also seem to understand this when they immediately repent.”¹²
- 3. Again, Bruckner writes, “God sends Jonah to Nineveh in hope that the Ninevites will be overturned through their repentance. Jonah . . . hopes that ‘overturned’ means the annihilation of the Ninevites.”¹³

III. The City’s Response

- A. See Comparison Chart
- B. According to both Biblical and historical records, the city of Nineveh and the Assyrian Kingdom as a whole was experiencing a bit of decline during this time. Perhaps the decline provided the perfect context for this mass and immediate response and repentance.
- C. The Response was Immediate:
 - 1. The city, like the sailors, saw disaster on the horizon unless extreme action was taken.
 - 2. Unlike Jonah, they did not hesitate to hear and obey the Word of the Lord.
- D. The Response was Authentic (not a show or by force):
 - 1. The response started with the common people and then reached the king. When the king saw his people praying and mourning he discovered the reason and joined them. Only after all this did he make an official decree that all should participate at an extreme level.
 - 2. Most successful movements are bottom up in progression. Even Jesus did not go first or primarily to the kings and rulers but to the common people.
- E. The Response was Total:
 - 1. This was not a half-hearted or reluctant response like Jonah. It was serious and complete.

¹¹ Baker, 428.

¹² Bruckner, 94.

¹³ Ibid.

2. Even the animals were made to participate in both the fasting and wearing of sackcloth. James Bruckner writes, “Not feeding the animals will jeopardize the city’s economy, especially if the fast lasts forty days. The animals join in ‘crying out’ because they are hungry. Even after one day without food the protests [of the animals] would have been cacophonous.”¹⁴

F. The Response was Appropriate

1. The response was individual. Even the king’s decree asked people to repent of personal evils.
2. The illustration of the king in Jonah 3:6 demonstrates the nature of this response.
 - i. The king went from sitting on a throne to sitting in dust.
 - ii. The king went from wearing royal robes to wearing sackcloth.
 - iii. The king’s visual and outward demonstration of a spiritual and inward repentance and humility was exactly what God was after.
3. The Assyrians were described in both the Biblical and historical record as being self-worshippers. Although they had various gods in their religious system that they worshipped, ultimately they worshipped themselves.
 - i. When the king of Nineveh heard the Word of God, he responded by getting off his throne and into the dust and sackcloth of repentance and humility. The king threw himself down while Jonah carried himself up onto a hill in arrogance and bitterness as we will see in chapter 4.
 - ii. A true response to God is not about merely making room for him in our life. It’s about abdicating the throne of our life so that God can reign in us. Clinging to the throne produces arrogance and bitterness. Giving the throne to God brings about redemption and salvation.
4. True Fasting
 - i. The fasting of Nineveh was not merely a show or ritual. If so, God would have not accept it. It was a genuine act of repentance and sorrow for evils committed.
 - ii. This fasting met the criteria set forth in Isaiah 58 for the type of fasting that God accepts.
5. Jonah 3:10 demonstrates that God accepted their action (both the act of repenting and fasting) and had compassion on them.

IV. A City “Overturned”

- A. Even though the city was not overturned as Jonah hoped, it was overturned to some extent:
 1. The king has come off the throne.
 2. The people suffered with hunger and thirst
 3. The old, false Gods were abandoned.
 4. The animals (wealth) of the city suffered.
 5. Yet all this was not good enough for Jonah, he wanted total destruction.
- B. The city was overturned in the eyes of God in terms of being turned upside down in relation to God.

V. God Changes His Mind?

- A. That God relented here is often used by some to question the foreknowledge of God. A branch of theology known as Open Theism describes God as being fully knowledgeable about the knowable but not knowledgeable about the future (because it is unknowable). Essentially, they say that even though God is guiding human history and events towards his planned outcome, he does not know from eternity past the outcome of every human decision. Open theists use stories like Jonah from Scripture to point to instances where God changed

¹⁶ Ibid, 99.

his mind based on a future event that was unknowable when God first determined a course of action.

- B. It is true that the Old Testament does describe instances where God relented or changed even though the Old Testament also describes God as unchanging. This, however, does not mean that God is partially bound in terms of knowing the future. Often, prophecies are conditional as described in Jeremiah 18:7-10. God's warning of judgement (as seen in Jonah) are contingent upon a people persisting in evil or sin. This, however, does not preclude the alternative, that the people repent and experience God's judgement. Thus, stories like this from scripture do not describe the deficiency in God's knowledge but the extent of God's grace.
- C. James Bruckner writes that God "changes his mind precisely because his will to change and save the world is unchangeable, and the world is continually turning away from him. If he did not turn in compassion, who would be saved."¹⁵
- D. In Jonah, we see a prophet who was unwilling to forgive when he himself has been forgiven. God, who is under no obligation to forgive, chooses to forgive when a wicked city seeks forgiveness. Again, Bruckner writes that the point "is not the greatness of the Ninevites' faith. Rather, the point is the extravagant love of God that welcomes the sincerely repentant. . . It is about the unbelievable true possibility that God would care enough to overthrow their hearts" instead of their city."¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid, 99-100.

¹⁶ Ibid, 99.

Responding to the Word of God

The Pagan Sailors	The Wicked Nineveh	Notes:	The Prophet Jonah
Far from the God of Israel	Far from the God of Israel	God desires to be in relationship with all creation.	Close to the God of Israel.
Heard the Word of the Lord from Jonah (Jonah 1:9)	Heard the Word of the Lord from Jonah (Jonah 3:4)		Heave the Word of the Lord from the Lord (Jonah 1:1; 2:1)
Jonah proclaimed an act of God's judgement against himself (Jonah 1:12)	Jonah proclaimed an act of God's judgement against the city (Jonah 3:4)	Repentance for all was sought in light of God's rightful and impending judgement.	Jonah experienced the judgement of God while the pagans and wicked were saved.
Given a storm by God in order to get their attention (Jonah 1:4)	Given a prophet by God in order to get their attention (Jonah 3:2)	In the midst of God's judgement, God also provided a means and message of salvation.	Given a storm, a fish, a vine, a worm, and a rebuke by God in order to get his attention.
Response to God's Word was immediate (Jonah 1:14-16)	Response to God's Word was immediate (Jonah 3:5)	Reminiscent of the Pharisees and sinners in the Gospels. The Pharisees resisted while the sinners responded.	Response to God's Word was delayed, slow, and reluctant.
Willing to make sacrifices, including the sacrifice of cargo and animals (1:5, 16)	Willing to make sacrifices, including a fast for both humans and animals (3:7)		Was willing to sacrifice for his own agenda but not God's plan.
Concern about the Word of God was a bottom to top movement (beginning with the sailors and going up to the captain) - Jonah 1:5-6	Concern about the Word of God was a bottom to top movement (beginning with the citizens and going up to the king) - Jonah 3:5-6	Even the animals (at the very bottom of the scale) responded to God - fish and worm obeyed and cows fasted.	Concern about the Word of God was suppressed because it conflicted with the will to Jonah.
False gods were forsaken (Jonah 1:16)	False gods were forsaken (Jonah 3:9)		The true God was forsaken (Jonah 1:2-3)
They cried out to God and God responded with compassion (Jonah 1:14)	They cried out to God and God responded with compassion (Jonah 3:8)		He cried out to God and God responded with compassion (Jonah 2)

Jonah Bible Study

Jonah 4

"Radical grace is the hope of all churches that turn in arrogance from the Creator. It is also the hope of the faithful law-keeper who is ignorant that God's grace and mercy undergird every law's intent, every righteous action, every inherited tradition, and every life that is open to its Creator." – James Bruckner¹⁷

I. Jonah's Anger with God

- A. The response of Jonah is not what one might expect. Though his preaching seemed to be successful in our eyes, Jonah was not happy with the results. He was angry that the people were fasting, praying, and turning to God in repentance for salvation.
- B. Here Jonah explains why he was opposed to preaching in Nineveh: He was not primarily concerned with personal failure, fear, or death. He was primarily concerned that he would indeed be successful and that Nineveh would be saved.
- C. Now, the question shifts from "why did Jonah run" to "why did Jonah want to see these people condemned to the extent that he would rather die than preach to them?"
 1. Jonah knew that they were the enemies of his people. Perhaps he also foresaw the eventual fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians/Ninevites.
 - i. This eventually happened in 722 BC.
 - ii. This is described in 2 Kings 17
 2. Jonah also knew that these were pagan idol worshippers. He even expressed his disdain for such people in his prayer in Jonah 2:8. Perhaps he did not appreciate the God of Israel extending his hand in compassion to those outside of Israel and the Saini Covenant.
- D. Whatever the case was (perhaps a combination of both) Jonah was not pleased that God would spare these people. He wanted them to die and he waited in hope that he would see it with his own eyes. James Bruckner writes, "Jonah's anger is a reflection of Yahweh's anger over Nineveh's wickedness. But Jonah's anger also stands in contrast to Yahweh's, for he does not believe that their evil should be forgiven."¹⁸

II. Jonah's Faith in God

- A. Jonah as hesitant to preach in Nineveh because, in paraphrase, he thought, "If I speak to them, they will believe my message, turn to God, and be saved. I don't want them to be saved. Perhaps if I can just avoid this mission for 40 days, God will destroy them before they have a chance to repent."
 1. Our approach to evangelism is often the exact opposite for we often say, "If I speak to them, I know they will NOT believe my message, never turn to God, and most likely will not be saved. I shouldn't even try because I will fail."
 2. Thus, in a weird way, Jonah demonstrates more faith in God and in the power of his Word than many believers do today.
 - i. Jonah knew he would succeed before he began. We anticipate our failure before we begin.
 - ii. Jonah was reluctant to speak because he believed it would work. We are reluctant to speak because we believe it will not work.
- B. In this book, Jonah is seen as knowing with certainty what others hoped for with uncertainty. Jonah knew for sure what others hoped to be true:

¹⁷ Ibid, 126.

¹⁸ Ibid, 127.

1. In 1:6, the sailors said, “*Maybe* he [God] will take notice of us, and we will not perish.”
 2. In 3:9, Nineveh (through their king) said, “*Who knows?* God *may* yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”
 3. In 4:2, Jonah said, *I knew* that you are a gracious and compassionate God. . .”
- C. The “mustard seed size” faith of the pagans in Jonah opens the door for their salvation. They responded with great action to their small faith. Even Nineveh is described as spiritually ignorant or blind in Jonah 4:10, unable to tell their left hand from their right. Yet in their blindness, they can see God. Like blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10, though they are blinded by their ignorance, they are able to see their savior with greater clarity than the one who seems to have greater vision. Jonah, being able to see God clearly through covenant relationship and seemingly having great faith in God had a negative or minimal response to God. James speaks of this in James 2:17; 26 as a death faith. Living faith, even if only a speck, is demonstrated in radical action

III. Jonah’s Knowledge of God

- A. Jonah explains why God saved Nineveh in Jonah 4:2, “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”
1. Jonah knew this from Jewish Scripture and Prophecy:
 - i. This statement is found in Exodus 34:6 and Numbers 14:8.
 - a. This information about God was made clear to Israel during the Exodus.
 - b. God often had good reason to forsake Israel in the Exodus and often poured out his judgement but never abandoned or destroyed the people entirely because he was truly in character and nature what the statement confesses.
 - ii. This statement is also found in three of David’s writings: Psalms 86:15; 103:8; 145:8.
 - a. David incorporated this description of God into his worship not only because David knew of the scripture in the Pentateuch but also because David had experienced this reality for himself.
 - b. David did evil in the eyes of God when he slept with Bathsheba and had her husband killed in battle. God had reason to forsake and destroy David yet God had mercy on him when David repented and found God to be abounding in love and slow to anger. God even blessed him further during David’s reign.
 - iii. This statement is also found in prophecy during three critical times in Israel’s history:
 - a. In Jonah 4:2, before the destruction of the Northern Kingdom and the exile of the people of Israel.
 - b. In Joel 2:13, during the exile of God’s people.
 - c. In Nehemiah 9:17, immediately after the exile of God’s people.
 2. Jonah also knew this to be true from personal experience.
 - i. Jonah, like his ancestors in Exodus and King David, deserved death and destruction after his blatant disobedience and abandonment of God and his mission. Yet God spared him in the belly of the fish.
 - ii. Jonah’s anger in Jonah 4 is ironic. He was only able to express anger about God’s compassion towards others because he himself had experienced God’s compassion personally. Jonah denied to others what God had graciously granted to him.

3. C. Hassell Bullock writes, “Jonah knew God well, knew Him too well for his own comfort.”¹⁹
- B. Jonah had a Biblically sound understanding of God but he missed the point. He could quote scripture and prophesy but his heart was very unlike the heart of God.
1. This type of people was condemned in Isaiah 23:13 and Matthew 15:7-9. Even though they seemed holy on the outside, they were corrupt on the inside. They spoke as if they were close to God when in reality, they were far from him.
 2. Paul also mentions this in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. Even if one can prophesy, if they do so without love, they are just making noise.
 3. In the days of Jesus, the Pharisees were like Jonah. They knew much about the God of Israel and the Scriptures yet they completely rejected the work and mission of God in Jesus. Jesus spoke harshly of such people in Matthew 23:23-28.
 4. Having knowledge of God is not the same as knowing God. Memorizing scripture and doctrines is wonderful but being transformed by God’s Word is the ultimate goal of any study.
 5. God not only wants to change our minds but also change our hearts. Jonah’s mind was changed about going to Nineveh but his heart was just as hardened as it was when he ran from the city despite his knowledge of God.
 6. Learning about God is not primarily for the purpose of accumulating knowledge but for becoming more like God. To learn but not be transformed is to miss the point of knowing God.
 7. God’s people have a history of missing the point. As we mentioned in the last lesson, salvation is not about making space for God in our life. Salvation is about making God the Lord of our life. If God only has a segmented space in our lives, we miss the point of salvation. If God is served and/or obeyed only when certain conditions are met, we miss the point of living for God.

IV. Jonah’s Provision from God

- A. In Jonah’s story, we see the phrase God sending or providing something for Jonah five times:
1. Jonah 1:4: “Then the Lord *sent* a great wind on the sea. . .”
 2. Jonah 1:17: “But the Lord *provided* a great fish to swallow Jonah.”
 3. Jonah 4:6: “Then the Lord God *provided* a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head.”
 4. Jonah 4:7: “God *provided* a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered.”
 5. Jonah 4:8: “God *provided* a scorching east wind. . . “
- B. These illustrations show how God can and does use non-human servants to accomplish his will.
1. These things obey without rebellion (unlike Jonah).
 2. These things succeed in their calling and work.
 3. Even the rocks can worship him (Luke 19:40).
- C. However, these things are used by God in order to prepare his human servant for the work to which God has called him.
1. God does not need anyone to accomplish his will. He can use, very successfully, fish, worms, vines, and winds to complete his mission.
 2. Nevertheless, God has chosen to use us (humans) to bring about his will on the earth. He calls us to carry out his mission. We are the chosen portion of God’s creation that he primarily seeks to use to accomplish his will in the world

V. Jonah’s Instruction by God

¹⁹ C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 54.

- A. The book ends with God teaching Jonah a lesson.
- B. The Setting of the Lesson:
1. Jonah goes out to the east of the city to watch its destruction.
 2. If Jonah was headed home, he would have traveled towards the west. Instead, he goes east because he is intending to stay and see the city destroyed (not saved). He is not content to just go home. He wants to see Nineveh suffer the same fate as Sodom and Gomorrah. He wants to be there when they are wiped off the face of the earth.
 3. It is in this place (and mindset) that God begins to teach Jonah as lesson.
- C. The Method of the Lesson:
1. God instructs Jonah through an object lesson.
 2. First, God sends a vine which miraculously grows overnight and provides Jonah with shade as he sits in the heat. Jonah notices the vine and is very happy because it gives him comfort. While Jonah remains angry with God he becomes happy with the vine and his sets up Jonah for the second part of God's lesson.
 3. Next, God sends a worm to eat the vine. Jonah begins to feel the heat again. Just to make sure Jonah notices the death of the vine, God accentuates the heat with a scorching east wind to blow on Johan. This heat wave causes Jonah to become uncomfortable and unhappy once again. When Jonah responds with more anger (and a desire to die) God connects the objects he sent to the city of Nineveh. Here, God teaches his lesson.
- D. The Heart of the Lesson:
1. When Jonah responds with anger about the vine, God responds with the point of this exercise.
 2. God points out that Jonah's concern about the vine demonstrates how he is missing the point of what God is doing.
 - i. Jonah had anger over the vine's death and destruction. Yet he has the same burning anger over the city's life and salvation.
 - ii. Although both the vine and the Ninevites were created by God, the vine was here today and gone tomorrow. Nineveh was filled with souls that would endure for eternity.
 - iii. Jonah's concern for the vine and lack of concern for the Ninevites was make perfectly clear. Jonah was more passionate about one, tiny piece of God's creation than he was the thousands of more significant members of God's creation in the city. He would neglect the city but mourn the vine.
 - iv. The vine matters little in terms of eternity. However, the souls of the people in Nineveh have eternal significance.
 - v. Jonah was so concerned about things that did not matter yet failed to be concerned about the issues that mattered most to God. Hopefully, this visual demonstration would help Jonah see his misplaced concern and repent as Nineveh did.
 3. Jonah had just felt compassion for the vine. Now, perhaps, he could feel (to some extent) the compassion that God felt toward Nineveh. Jonah, however, was so concerned and caught up in the wrong things or the insignificant things that he failed to become concerned about that which matters most to God.
 4. Indeed, part of Jonah's concern was for Israel and Israel does matter greatly to God. However, Jonah's concern was selfishly motivated and held to extent that others must be neglected or destroyed in order to protect Israel. Though Jonah was concerned about something precious to God, the nature and implications of his concern were contrary to God. Israel was raised up by God for the purposes of bringing nations to God. Jonah was called to help fulfill that mission. Yet he missed the point of God's election of Israel and saw Israel's enemies not as targets for outreach but as targets for wrath.

E. The Analogy of the Lesson:

1. What did this vine represent:
 - i. Jonah's personal idolatry: Though Jonah hated idolatry and expressed disdain for idolaters, he demonstrates his willingness to "cling to worthless" vines like idolaters "cling to worthless idols" (Jonah 2:8). Jonah was angry with God but happy with the vine. He complained about God's provision of grace but praised (perhaps worshiped) the vine for its provision of relief.
 - ii. Jonah's personal comfort: Jonah was happy under the vine just as he was happy back in Israel. The vine gave him peace and protection. When God called him out of his "comfort-zone" he was not willing to go.
 - iii. Jonah's personal prejudice: Jonah was sitting under the vine because he was waiting to see the people die. He disliked (perhaps hated) these Ninevites not only because they were Gentiles but because they were his enemies. Though he had never met many of Nineveh's citizens, he hoped they would be destroyed, not saved. Jonah was imposing upon God his own personal prejudice; a prejudice that God shared in no way with Jonah.
 - iv. Jonah's personal will: Jonah's desire to see his own nation and his own plans succeed was greater than his desire to see God's plan carried out in the world. When God's plan was harmonious with Jonah's plan, he was happy to serve. Yet when God's plan conflicted with Jonah's plan, he became angry and disobedient. The salvation of Nineveh meant the potential for the future destruction of Israel. This was an offense to Jonah's personal agenda and cause for his reluctance.
2. These were the insignificant matters about which Jonah had such great concern. It was for these issues that Jonah neglected to be concerned about the things that matter to God.
3. These four issues are still major hindrances for believers. These issues keep people from growing in God, obeying God, following God, and even coming to God. Many are still running from God today and clinging to these vines:
 - i. The vine of personal idolatry will limit our worship.
 - ii. The vine of personal comfort will limit our obedience.
 - iii. The vine of personal prejudices will limit our evangelism.
 - iv. The vine of personal agenda will limit our sacrifices.
4. Even if we do have concerns that seem similar to God's concerns, we must examine our motivations and response to God. Do our concerns arise from a heart given to God or from the attempt to maintain norms or lip service?

VI. Jonah's Answer to God:

- A. We do not know how Jonah responded to God's question, "Should I not be concerned about that great city?"
- B. The question is not as easy as it seems. To understand the dilemma that Jonah faced, think of your greatest enemy or the most feared/despised group of people you ever knew. Now, put those people in the blank: Should I not be concerned about _____.
- C. We do not know how Jonah responded but we do know how we are responding.

Jonah Bible Study

Conclusion

"Israel's election as Yahweh's 'special treasure' [Exodus 19] is not an end in itself, but a means to a much greater end. Thus understood, the goal of the Old Covenant is the establishment of a special nation through whom Yahweh can make himself known to all the families of the earth." – Michael Goheen²⁰

VII. The Search for Shelter

- A. James Brucker sees an interesting thread in the book of Jonah. Throughout the story, Jonah keeps looking for shelter outside of God's presence.²¹
 - 1. He looked for shelter in the boat in hope that it would carry him to Tarshish.
 - 2. He looked for shelter in the sea in hope that it would carry him to death.
 - 3. He looked for shelter in the fish in hope that it would carry him to salvation.
 - 4. He looked for shelter under the vine in hope that it would show him Nineveh's destruction.
- B. In each case, however, God upset that place of shelter:
 - 1. God caused a storm to (almost) destroy the boat.
 - 2. God caused the sea to cast him down in misery but not death.
 - 3. God caused the fish to vomit him up in the direction of his calling.
 - 4. God caused the vine to wither and die so that Jonah could see God's mercy.
- C. There is no shelter suitable for or able to save humanity apart from God. Whenever Jonah fled to a shelter away from God and his call, Jonah would get thrown out or thrown down. The only shelter that endures is God and His Word. When we are secure in God:
 - 1. The storm cannot destroy us.
 - 2. The sea cannot consume us.
 - 3. The fish (captivity) cannot contain us.
 - 4. The worm cannot devour us.
- D. Outside of God, however, there is not safety or security regardless of how big we build our shelters.

VIII. The Message of Jonah in the Old Testament

- A. Despite all of Jonah's failures and the return of Nineveh to their wicked and sinful ways, the religious leaders of the Israel included this short book among the great prophetic works of the Jewish scriptures. Thus we see that this book was not primarily a message to Nineveh about Yahweh's wrath but a message to Israel about Yahweh's mercy and mission.
- B. It is true that Israel was Yahweh's chosen nation that the Jewish people (including Jonah) are Yahweh's chosen people. This, however was never intended to mean that other nation were excluded from relationship with God. Even in Exodus 19:6, when God reaffirmed his choice or election of Israel, he describes them as:
 - 1. A Kingdom of Priests
 - 2. A Holy Nation
- C. These designations were not necessarily given to describe the quality of Israel but rather the function of Israel:
 - 1. Priests serve between the people and God. They connect God to his worshippers and worshippers to God. Priests mediate between humanity and deity. Israel had its own priests (the Levites) but they, as a nation, were priests in the earth for the purpose of connecting all the world to God. Their priesthood was not a prize but a calling; not a reward but a mission.

²⁰ Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 38.

²¹ Bruckner, 124-125.

2. The status of “holy nation” was likewise given to Israel since they were to be God’s example to the world. Israel was to live out covenantal obedience as an example to the world of God’s standards and the blessing Israel would receive would reaffirm the message that the world should live as Israel. They lived as a holy nation in order to reach the nations.
 3. Likewise, Israel is also called:
 - i. A light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6)
 - ii. A light to the Nations (Isaiah 51:4)
 - iii. One through whom all nations would be blessed (Genesis 12:3)
- D. Even God’s election of Israel beginning with Abraham was not an issue of merit but of grace. Abraham lived on the edge of Babel which has been condemned in Genesis 11 for their arrogance and self-reliance instead of obedience to God. Abraham’s story (and all of Israel) begins not with obedience to the law but grace from God.
- E. Before Israel received God’s law at Sinai they received God’s grace in Ur of the Chaldees. There God called Abraham out of a condemned nation and into a great nation. Thus the story of God extending his grace to the wicked city of Nineveh is part of God’s pattern and not an exception to his rule or character. Jonah was not completing an unusual task but fulfilling the same calling and mission that had been Israel’s from the beginning.
1. Jonah knew this to be true (as seen in chapter 4) but refused to do it.
 2. Israel, on the other hand, had forgotten or severely misunderstood this calling. Jonah’s inclusion in the Jewish scriptures remind Israel of why they were called out by God in the beginning.
- F. In reality, the miracle found in Jonah is not that God would spare Nineveh but that God would spare anyone. Jonah, the man of God, deserved death as much as the Ninevites, the enemies of God. Yet God spared them both when they repented. Jonah, like Israel, should see their election and salvation not as an indication of their superiority but as an indication of God’s grace and mission in the world.

IX. The message of Jonah for the New Testament

- A. In a way Jonah (as well as many of the prophets) was preparing Israel for the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of the New Covenant
1. What’s Israel’s son Jonah was unable and/or unwilling to do, Israel’s son Jesus was but able and willing to do it.
 2. Just as the Ninevites and the Assyrian Empire threatened Israel during Jonah’s day, the Gentiles and the Roman Empire threatened Israel during Jesus’ day.
 3. The attitude of Jonah was shared by many Jews living in the time of Jesus. The Pharisees were so concerned about keeping the law that they intentionally kept distance between themselves and Gentiles. They, like Jonah, missed the point of what God was doing in the world. The law was not put in place to repel Gentiles but draw them to God. Thus, the Jew’s disdain for and neglect of the Gentile community would have been seen in the eyes of God in the same manner as he saw Jonah’s attitude.
 4. Michael Goheen writes, “It is clear that by the time of Jesus, Israel is eagerly looking forward to the coming of a messiah who will ‘trample’ the gentiles, ‘dash them to pieces like pottery with a rod of iron,’ and not to the salvation of the gentile nations.”²²
- B. Jesus not only did what Jonah refused to do, Jesus commissioned and empowered others to reach the nations as well.

²² Goheen, 71

1. Jesus sent many Jewish people out to do what Jonah was unwilling or reluctant to do. Rather than waiting to see the wicked Gentiles destroyed they went out to tell them the good news that God forgives.
 2. Even among the followers of Jesus, Gentile salvation was difficult to accept and believe (see Acts 11-15) but eventually the church accepted the mission of God.
 3. Michael Goheen writes, “Mission, properly understood, is the role of God’s chosen to live as a contrast people and thus to draw the surrounding nation into covenant with God. Thus, mission begins not in Acts but way back at the beginning of the biblical story.”²³
- C. Even though there is no question in the church today regarding the possibility of Gentile salvation, we can still find ourselves adopting a Jonah attitude.
1. We can withhold our outreach from peoples or communities we dislike.
 2. We desire or pray for God’s judgement without praying for or intervening to show God’s grace.
 3. We deem certain people or communities as unforgivable, unsavable, hopelessly lost, or already condemned.
 4. We forget that we deserved our salvation no more than the worst sinner. We are not saved because we are better. We are saved because in God’s grace he provided a way for “even me.”

X. Jonah and Jesus

- A. In chapter 2, we saw how Jesus and Jonah compared and contrasted with one another in the midst of maritime storms. However, the lives of Jesus and Jonah have many similarities (see chart).
- B. Jesus directly compares himself to Jonah in three passages in the Gospels:
1. Matthew 12:39-41
 2. Matthew 16:4
 3. Luke 11:29-32
- C. These passages contain some common themes:
1. Both Jesus and Jonah ministered in the midst of wicked people. While Jonah and Jesus both condemned their wickedness, Jesus understood that wickedness did not exclude people from the possibility of salvation.
 2. Both Jesus and Jonah are signs from God of both his justice and his mercy. Both Nineveh (in Jonah’s day) and Israel (in Jesus’ day) stood in judgement because of their sin. Yet the very act of sending a prophet to them demonstrates God’s great mercy and desire for reconciliation.
 3. Jesus also shocks Israel by saying that those wicked gentiles who repented after the ministry of Jonah (and received God’s grace) will rise up to condemn the unbelieving Jews who reject Jesus and his message.
 4. The sign of Jonah that Jesus speaks about has three aspects to it:
 - i. The sending of God’s messenger ahead of God’s judgement.
 - ii. The rising up of a messenger after death (or apparent death as seen with Jonah).
 - iii. The extension of God’s grace to wicked unbelievers (whether gentile or Jew).
 5. Israel was asking for signs and wonders but Jesus himself was the miraculous sign of God sent to them. That sign, however, was not good enough. Michael Wilkins writes that the sign of Jonah “is not some kind of sign that Jonah brings. Rather, Jonah is the sign. His appearance was the sign to the people of Nineveh that his message was from God, who has rescued him from death.”

²³ Ibid, 122.

Comparing Jesus and Jonah

Jonah	Jesus	Notes:
Called to go to a land and a people very different from his own.	Called to go to a land and a people very different from his own.	The incarnation of Jesus is described in Isaiah 9:6; John 1, Philippians 2:5-11, Galatians 4:4-5; Hebrews 2:14; Colossians 2:9).
Called to a wicked city.	Called to a wicked generation (Matthew 12:39-41).	Jonah considered the wickedness of Nineveh as a disqualifier from God's grace. Jesus proclaimed, however, that wickedness is no obstacle for God's grace.
Called to minister to his enemies.	Called to minister to his enemies (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:21).	
Reluctantly obeyed.	Faithfully obeyed (Philippians 2:6-7).	
Was willing to die rather than minister to wicked people.	Was willing to die on behalf of wicked people.	
Buried in the fish's belly for three days.	Buried in the tomb for three days.	In Matthew 12:40, Jesus makes this direct comparison. Thus, the issues of three days and three nights is not at the heart of the comparison. Rather, the issue is being buried but raised again.
Miraculously arose in order to fulfil the work given him by God.	Miraculously arose in order to fulfil the work given him by God.	
Was a sign to the people of Nineveh of both God's coming judgement and God's grace.	Was a sign to the world of Nineveh of both God's coming judgement and God's grace.	
Those saved because of his ministry were saved for a season (history tells us that Assyria did not remain loyal to God).	Those saved because of his ministry are saved for eternity.	