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INTO YOUR FAVORITE BIBLE STORIES

3 – I Did it My Way – Jonah and the Big Fish

“But Jonah ran away from the LORD...”

Jonah 1:3 NIV

"Jonah son of Amittai" (*'amittay*,) is the only prophetic name recorded for the North Kingdom of Israel in the nearly 40 years between the death of Elisha and the ministry of Amos.

Jonah was born in the region of Galilee in the little village Gath-hepher, near Nazareth, which is at the eastern border of the territory allotted to the Israeli tribe of Zebulun.

His father is not known except by his relationship to Jonah, the prophet. Amittai in Hebrew translates to “faithful”. Since we know of Jonah’s origin being from the tribe of Zebulun we may assume that Jonah’s upbringing was through a faithful Hebrew father, full of truth.

While later rabbinic tradition claimed that Jonah was the widow's son who was brought back to life by Elijah ([1_Kings 17:17-24](#)) we will leave that solely to speculation.

We also know that Jonah was not a fan of the Assyrians, which is the location of the city of Nineveh.

Assyria was a long-time enemy of the Israelites and Jonah was prophetically instrumental in recovering Israeli property from them during the reign of Jereboam II ([2 Kings 14:25](#)).

Jonah did not want God to save the Ninevites because he knew them to be evil.

Jonah thought, and perhaps out of a sense of jealousy, that God’s compassion only extended to Israel.

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From his spiritual bias and prejudice when Jonah learned that God was calling even the enemies of Israel to Himself, he didn't want any part of it.

1. GOD'S WAYS ARE NOT OUR WAYS

¹The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: ²“Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”

*³But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD. **Jonah 1:1-3 NIV***

Have you ever felt this way?

God's telling you to do something and you want to just turn and run?

I'm not sure how that may have worked out for you, but it sure was *pretty fishy* for Jonah!

2. GOD USES A STORM

⁴Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.

But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. ⁶The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.”

⁷Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us?”

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What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" **Jonah 1:5-6**

The crew were probably Phoenicians, whose language differed only slightly from Jonah's.

Spiritually they were pantheons (worshiping many gods), which is obvious in their reaction to the storm and to Jonah.

The captain's command to Jonah that he pray reflects the heathen concept that the amount of prayer is of importance (Mt 6:7) as well as that polytheists could seldom be sure which god had been displeased.

There are two themes that demand our attention in the book of Jonah.ⁱ

3. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

- God will do whatever it takes to show us his will.
- And we should obey when he calls -
whether or not we understand or agree with his plans.

Frequently God's control of the sea is used to stress his complete lordship over creation (cf. Psalms 24:2; 33:7; 65:7; 74:13; et al.).

Psalm 65:7 NLT

⁷You quieted the raging oceans with their pounding waves and silenced the shouting of the nations.

Jonah was not picked because he was particularly suited to the task.

- When he fled, God could have turned to someone else;

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- but God's sovereignty is the lesson.
- And our obedience is necessary.

1 Corinthians 9:16 (NLT)

*¹⁶ Yet preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. **How terrible for me if I didn't preach the Good News!***

Jonah's obedience was predicated on his desire alone.

He did not think the Ninevites had any right to be forgiven.

- He was defiant.

He knew who he was, and what God wanted him to do.

1:9 *"I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."*

Yet, he refused God's will at all costs.

1:12 *"Pick me up and throw me into the sea, ...and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."*

He was willing to endanger others' physical and emotional well-being because of the principle of the thing.

1:13-16 *"Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. ¹⁴ Then they cried out to the LORD, "Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased." ¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. ¹⁶ At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and*

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made vows to him.”

- **But the Lord Provided – Showing grace to everyone!**

¹⁷ Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

4. **GOD’S MESSAGE OF GRACE** is for all who will believe and repent, regardless of our principles, biases, or prejudices.

Even in our disobedience, God provides a way out!

- A fish for Jonah
- A second chance for Nineveh

Jonah 3:1-5 NIV

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ² “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. ⁴ Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”

⁵The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

Jonah 3:10 *“When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.*

5. **JONAH STILL DID NOT UNDERSTAND** - His anger blocked his relationship with God.

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

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To make a point about who *really* has a right to be angry God gave Jonah a little demonstration:

Jonah 4:6 *“Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant.”*

After God took the shade away, Jonah was livid!

Jonah... *“wanted to die, and said, ‘It would be better for me to die than to live.’*

⁹*But God said to Jonah, ‘Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?’*

‘It is,’ he said. ‘And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.’ **Jonah 4:8-9**

Jonah 4:10-11 NIV

“But the LORD said, ‘You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. ¹¹ And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?’”

6. Consider your pride.

- Are you most concern about others’ lives and their eternity, or
- Are you persistent to guard your own points of view and plans?

Matthew 12:41 (NLT) *“The people of Nineveh will stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for they repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah. Now someone greater than Jonah is here—but you refuse to repent.”*

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Jesus' message: The people of Nineveh repented; but even though the Messiah present now, people are not repenting.

Jesus told them that the Ninevites – the prototype of evil – will rise to bear witness against this generation on the Day of Judgment.

And as for those who do not believe, they will only prove themselves more wicked than the Ninevites.

7. Surrender to God.

Note the words of Jonah while in the belly of the fish:

Jonah 2:7-10 NIV

*⁷“When my life was ebbing away,
I remembered you, LORD,
and my prayer rose to you,
to your holy temple.*

a. *⁸“Those who cling to worthless idols
turn away from God’s love for them.*

*⁹But 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.’”

¹ NASB Charles F. Stanley Life Principles Bible, *Jonah*