



Jonah

The book of Jonah can feel so foreign to us. A prophet long ago sent to a faraway land was swallowed up by a whale. What could this have to do with us? Everything. Just as Jonah was, we are called to go where God calls us to, wrestle with our own sinful motives, and love difficult and even hurtful people. In this series, we will both see ourselves in Jonah's life and learn from his mistakes.

WEEK ONE

DOING WHAT GOD WANTS US TO DO

Message Passage: Jonah 1:1-16

Small Group Passage: Luke 15:11-16

TEACHING AND VIDEO NOTES

"One day during the eighth century BC, God reached down into the school of the prophets—which included Jonah, Amos, and Hosea in the northern kingdom of Israel—and told Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because of their evil."¹

Jonah 1:1-2

Ninevah (Assyrian) Wickedness: "Assyrian history is "as gory and bloodcurdling a history as we know." They forced family members to parade with the decapitated heads of their loved ones elevated on poles. They pulled out prisoners' tongues and stretched their bodies with ropes so they could be flayed alive and their skins displayed on city walls. They burned adolescents alive. Those who survived the destruction of their cities were fated to endure cruel and violent forms of slavery. The Assyrians have been called a "terrorist state."... The empire had begun exacting heavy tribute from Israel during the reign of King Jehu (842–815 BC) and continued to threaten the Jewish northern kingdom throughout the lifetime of Jonah."²

¹ Tony Evans, *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019), 812.

² Keller, Timothy. *The Prodigal Prophet: Jonah and the Mystery of God's Mercy* (pp. 10-11). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Jonah 1:3

Rebellion via geography: “In a deliberate parody of God’s call to “arise, go to Nineveh,” Jonah “arose” to go in the opposite direction (verse 3). Tarshish, it is believed, lay on the outermost western rim of the world known to Israelites of the time. **In short, Jonah did the exact opposite of what God told him to do.** Called to go east, he went west. Directed to travel overland, he went to sea. Sent to the big city, he bought a one-way ticket to the end of the world.”³

The question is, why would he do something like this? “There are a couple of reasons why Jonah didn’t want to obey God. First, the Ninevites were a wicked, violent people who showed their enemies no mercy. “I’m not going to Nineveh. They slaughter people there,” may have seemed the practical choice from Jonah’s perspective (see the book of Nahum). The second reason Jonah disobeyed God is made clear in 4:1–2. He didn’t want to preach to these people because he was afraid they might actually repent and be forgiven! Nineveh was a major city of the Assyrian Empire, and if its citizens were to escape God’s judgment, they could eventually conquer Israel. So Jonah preferred to let God rain fiery wrath on them. He wanted them destroyed.”⁴

The Heart of the issue: Jonah’s deliberate rebellion against God begs the question that we all must ask. Do we truly desire to submit to God’s will fully? The easy answer is yes when his will sounds convenient. But what if God’s will runs against what your plans were? If God had asked Jonah to go and preach repentance to his people (the 10 northern tribes), he would have said yes right away. That is who he wanted to be sent to.

Jonah 1:4-5 A

These men were seasoned fishermen who would not have responded this way unless it was truly life or death...

Jonah 1:5b-9

Knowledge is no guarantee of obedience: Jonah knew what God’s will was for him, it was crystal clear. Yet knowing God’s will and obeying God’s will are not the same thing! Jonah even acknowledged that his God (Yahweh) was the God of heaven and the seas. Yet he went and ran from this very God who was the creator and sustainer

³ Keller, Timothy. *The Prodigal Prophet: Jonah and the Mystery of God’s Mercy* (p. 13). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Tony Evans, *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019), 812.

of all the earth. Likewise, your knowledge is no guarantee of obedience. You can easily know much of sound doctrine and scripture, and still be walking in disobedience. Spiritual maturity and depth must be measured in obedience, not knowledge.

Jonah 1:10-12

Disobedience always brings storms: I am not trying to allegorize the account. In Jonah's case, the storms were quite literal. But make no mistake, disobedience to God's will always brings about storms. This does not mean that every crisis is due to our disobedience; the book of Job disproves that.

Jonah 1:13-16

The Irony Hurts: The great irony is that Jonah did not want to preach to pagans and Gentiles. Yet, that is exactly what he did. This should serve as a lesson to us. If our agenda is to thwart God's sovereign will, it will fail every time. God's will is immutable. Therefore, it will come to fruition, one way or the other. The question is, are we submitting to it or not?

Gospel Connection: In Matthew 12:39-41, Jesus compares himself to Jonah. There are multiple layers to this comparison. We will dive into each throughout this series. The first layer of the comparison is obvious in this scene. Jonah sacrificed himself to save others. He did so begrudgingly, unlike Jesus, who did so freely. Jonah's sacrifice calmed the storm. But Jesus' sacrifice dealt with the wrath of God, as our propitiation (Rom 3:25, Heb 2:1-7, & 1 John 2:2). We see in the account of Jonah a typology, a type of Christ. Jesus was the better Jonah because he was the perfect sacrifice and atonement for our sins, once and for all.

Segway to Small Group: But what does this have to do with me? God has never come to me and asked me to go to a foreign land and proclaim God's judgment. That may be true. But rebellion against God's will takes on many forms. Tonight, in small group, we are going to take a look at what it looks like to live in full submission to the will of God (Mk 10:45).

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How should Jonah's rebellion serve as a warning to us? In other words, what does it look like for us to make a similar mistake?

Leader Note: Here are a couple of thoughts.

- Anytime we choose our plans over God's will, we are making the same mistake as Jonah.
- Anytime we view someone, or even a group of people, as beyond God's ability to redeem, we are making the same mistake as Jonah.
- If we downplay our sins of omission, we are making the same mistake as Jonah. Sins of commission are when we do something God commanded us not to do (murder, lying, etc). Sins of omission are when we fail to do what God has commanded us to do (love our neighbor, show mercy, etc). While sins of Omission may seem less serious to us, God does not take them lightly.

READ: Luke 15:11-16

2. Vs 11-12: The younger son asked for his share of the inheritance before his father had died. This was unheard of at this time and would have been extremely disrespectful to the father. How did this young son view his Father? How did he view the inheritance?

Leader Note (Commentary): the younger of whom wanted his share of his father's estate (inheritance). This would have been one-third of the total estate, with the older son receiving two-thirds, a double portion of the other as prescribed by the law (Deuteronomy 21:17). In most cases, the son would have received this at his father's death, although fathers sometimes chose to divide up their inheritance early and retire from managing their estates. What is unusual is that the younger son initiated the division of the estate. This showed arrogant disregard for his father's authority as head of the family.⁵

3. Is it possible for us to view and interact with God in a similar way as this young prodigal son?

Leader Note: Do we love God, or do we simply want God to give us what we want? It is easy for us to view God like the young son viewed the father, as a means to an end. How do we know if this is us? Wait until God tells you no or lays out a plan for you that you don't like. In those moments, our actions review the motives of our hearts.

4. The son's plan was to feed what he hoped would fulfill him, in his case, wild living. In the end, sin does what it always does; it promises much and delivers none of it. What

⁵ Bruce Barton et al., Life Application New Testament Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 320.

are some specific sin patterns that appeal to us because they seem to promise joy, yet in the end, they leave us broken?

5. Is there any comparison between the mistake that Jonah made and the prodigal son?

Leader Note: Simply put, both men chose rebellion. They both chose to run from God. Jonah rebelled against God's command to go and preach repentance to Nineveh. The prodigal son rebelled against God's command to honor your mother and father (Exodus 20:12). Both men did not believe that full obedience to God was in their best interest. Many of us have been in the same situation. But does it have to be this way? What if instead we trusted that God's will and provision were enough? What if we trusted that fully submitting to God's will was for our good?

6. Sin has consequences. Both eternal and temporal (here and now). The prodigal son found himself in shameful financial ruin. Jonah nearly lost his life before God spared his life via a whale swallowing him whole. What have the consequences of rebellion against God taught you in your faith?
7. Have you ever had a point in your own life where you came to the end of yourself? What did you do? How did God use that season of your life?
8. What are the lessons that we should learn from the rebellion of Jonah and the Prodigal Son?

PRAYER TIME

Today's passages provide two very clear prayer prompts. 1) That we would pray for our own faith and that we would fully submit our will to God's. 2) To pray for those in our lives who have wandered far from God.

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