

Jonah in Biblical Perspective  
A Prodigal Prophet & A Pursuing God  
Jonah 1:1-16  
By: Dr. Harry Reeder  
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This wonderful adventure and study this summer on Sunday evenings is a life story, history recorded for us, with the lessons of God's grace embedded within it from the book of Jonah. I would like to give you two words that I would like for you to keep off to the side as we walk through this first chapter of Jonah. Remember the word "fear" because I want to talk about it and give some attention to it. The second word I want you to remember is the word "hurl." Your translation of the Bible may have that word as "throw" because you have not yet bought the ESV but they have done a wonderful job in translating this first chapter of Jonah. The Holy Spirit inspiring our author has given us an unbelievable account that has for us these marvelous lessons and part of the lessons are emphasized in the way that certain words are chosen and certain words are placed in the context of this book. There are four chapters in the book of Jonah.

We are in our second study of the book of Jonah and the first chapter is looking at the prodigal Prophet and the pursuing God. In the second chapter we will see the praying Prophet and the preserving God. In the third chapter we will see the preaching Prophet and the powerful work of God in the evangelization and the work in Nineveh. In the fourth chapter we will see the pouting Prophet and what God does to teach him. Our whole study has been cast under this frame of the reluctant Prophet and the redeeming God – redeeming Jonah, redeeming ministry, redeeming His purposes to reach the nations and even redeeming sailors and redeeming Nineveh itself. We are going to work our way through this first chapter.

To recap the last study, the book of Jonah is from the Old Testament a bridge. In Genesis 12 what did God tell Abraham? He said, "In you I'm going to bless the nations." This is the first time God has *commanded* one of His people to take the message of repentance and the Gospel message to a Gentile, these pagan enemies of Israel in Nineveh. It's very germane for us because that same area houses nations today and there is enmity there between present day Israel and these nations Iran and Iraq. This is where Nineveh was located. The Assyrian and Babylonian empires would be established that God would use to bring judgment upon His people. So this is the bridge where God commands the first time what He had promised He would do through Abraham. It is interesting that they are actually going back to the area where their father Abraham had come from to preach now to those in Nineveh.

The second thing we learned is not only that Jonah is important because it's a bridge in the Old Testament but its importance in the New Testament because Matthew 12 identifies Jonah as an historical event but as a type of Christ as Jonah is sacrificed and in the belly of the great fish or more precisely the belly of the sea monster that God has appointed. Jonah is in the belly three days and three nights and here is a type of looking at the sacrifice of Christ and the resurrection on the third day of Jesus Christ.

The third thing we learned is that this book has a lot to tell us theologically because you and I can find out a lot about ourselves in Jonah. In fact, I want to build on that particularly in the matter of how God's sovereignty and the free moral agency of

man works together in the power, hand and wisdom of God. Notice I did not say free will of man because man's will is not free. Man is a free moral agent. He is free to make choices under the hand of God's sovereign appointment but our will isn't free. Why? It is because we are born as sinners and we are under the bondage of our sin so we will choose what our nature directs us to choose. So our will is in the bondage of sin even though we function as free moral agents.

At the beginning I asked you to write down the words "fear" and "hurl." I want to make a couple of comments about fear before we walk through the text. How many times have you heard sermons on the fear of God? We don't really preach it, do we? We will give lip service to it by saying, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." I want to give you a couple of things concerning this. The first one is that no one will ever know the grace of God without the fear of God and anyone who knows the grace of God will never lose the fear of God. I have a holy, majestic God with whom I have to do and how can I, a sinful man, be right with Him? It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the Living God. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. The grace of God grants you wisdom and once you're saved you don't lose the fear of God. The reverence and awe of your God is if anything heightened. Many times we seem to think to help people embrace grace we have to diminish reverence for God. So we sing our songs and write our sermons in which God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, in our effort to establish intimacy we sometimes make them smaller than what they are. The majesty of our intimacy with God is not based upon His smallness but how wonderful His love, and grace that this majestic God has ordained and decreed to work in our lives. That is the glory of grace, not in the diminishing of the majesty of God and what God's grace does is it allows us to know the fear and majesty of the Lord and that much more.

What does the Apostle Paul say, "Work out Christian..." Notice he is not saying work for your salvation. Jesus did that for us. But he is saying "Now that you're saved work out your salvation for it is the sovereign God who is at work in you both to will and to do His good pleasure." Some of you know that I left something out, didn't I? Philippians 2:12, 13 says, **12...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.** Why the fear and trembling? It is because if I don't do my work well I'll lose my salvation. No, it is because what I am working out is telling people something about the God who is working in me. Therefore I in the fear of the Lord, with reverence to the Lord want to live out my life that people would get accurate pictures of His holiness, His grace, His justice, His mercy, His kindness, His righteousness, His transcendence, and His imminence. So I now being saved by grace don't dismiss the fear of the Lord, on the contrary it's heightened in my life.

The second thing is that those who abolish the fear of God from their lives will consign themselves to the fears of men. You will not only be consigned to the fear of death if you don't have a God who is grand enough to conquer it. You'll have the fear of sin, the fear of judgment, the fear of death, the fear of men, the fear of people, the fear of what people will say, the fear of the future but we will be phobia driven by the fears of men if we abolish the fear of God. But when God alone captures our adoration, worship and reverence, it is this God who sets me free from the fears and enslavement of the fears of men. Let's see if that is true in Jonah 1.

Jonah 1:1, 2 says, *1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."* Now with Sodom and Gomorrah whose evil had come before the Lord, He decided to send judgment but in Nineveh their evil comes up but now God's grace and mercy has called Jonah to go. Here is the call of God to Jonah. What is Jonah's response to that call? It is in Jonah 1:3; *3 But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.* Where is Nineveh? It is east of Israel. Where is Tarshish? It is due west from Israel. It is all the way on the coast of Spain beyond Gibraltar. Jonah is going the absolute opposite direction. Jonah does three things. He pays the fare. He gets on board and he goes with them to Tarshish. Why? He is fleeing the presence of the Lord. The One who called him, he is fleeing and he is willing to pay the fare, get on board the ship with pagan sailors and go with the pagans away from the presence of the Lord in the opposite direction. That's obviously not going to stop God.

Then comes my favorite word in the Bible, "but." Jonah 1:4, 5 says, *4 But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. 5 Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god.* What does this tell you about their ship? We have mariners or sea men and this would not be unusual in the Mediterranean that have a metropolitan ship. It is very much like the metropolitan area of Nineveh. It has many ethnic people on it and the reason we know this is because they have the representation of many gods. These different people from different cultures have different gods and so some are calling on this god and some on that god etc. The text continues in Jonah 1:5, *"And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them."* So God hurls the wind, the ship begins to creak and groan and its about to break up, this conglomerate of pagan sailors call upon their various deities and they do two things.

These sailors actually do something very Christian which is they pray and they work. They call out to their gods and then they start hurling cargo over board. They are doing the right thing by praying but they are just not praying to the right god. Don't misunderstand me. I'm all for granting room for prayer in courts, schools and everything else but prayer is not my hope for this world. Jesus is my hope for this world. He is the One we pray to. I'm looking to Jesus and not prayer. I won't mention who this politician is but this politician was having a town meeting because he was going to run for president. His office called me and said, "Would you open the town meeting in prayer?" I said, "Are you sure you want me?" They said, "Yes." I said, "I heard this was going to be on television." They said, "Yes." I said, "Go check with him because if I pray it's going to be in Jesus' Name. I don't do generic prayers. So if you're just looking for someone to baptize the moment in prayer I'm not you're guy." To his credit he called back he said, "We asked you and you pray as God leads you because that's our rights. You be sure and exercise that. That's fine." I stood to pray that night and I said, "A lot of people died for us to have freedom to do this so let's spend a few moments in prayer. You pray as you want to and then I'm going to pray as God has now granted me the privilege." Then I had the opportunity to pray. The reason I don't do generic prayers is I don't think prayer changes anything. I think God changes things through praying people. So the sailors are praying but to the wrong gods that are no gods.

These sailors are working but they are not doing the right work yet. They are hurling but they just haven't hurled the right thing yet. They are hurling the cargo which says literally in the original, the receptacles over board but they haven't got to the right thing to hurl yet. So the Lord hurls a great wind. The sailors pray and hurl things over into the sea. So what is Jonah doing? We pick up in Jonah 1:5; *"But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep."* This behavior is so bizarre that Jonah in the midst of the storm where the ship is about to break up, in everyone's confusion with people crying out to these pagan deities and people throwing things over board that Jonah is down in the bottom of the ship just sleeping. It is so bizarre that the captain hears about it says to Jonah in Jonah 1:6; *"So the captain came and said to him, 'What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.'"* He is asking Jonah, "What are you doing here sleeping? Why don't you start praying to your god?" In other words, the captain isn't converted yet. He is just trying to cover all the basis. So what happens after that?

Jonah 1:7 says, *"And they said to one another, 'Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.' So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah."* God used the wind and now God used lots, cast by pagans out of superstition. God takes it, not to give us an argument for lots, but to tell us when God wants to put His finger on somebody He'll put His finger on somebody. So God uses the lots to put His finger on Jonah. They cast lots. The lot fell on Jonah. Jonah 1:8 says, *"Then they said to him, 'Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?'"* Five questions right in a row.

Question number one is why is this happening to us? This is based on the statement in Jonah 1:7 where they say tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. It is interesting that even in the midst of paganism, the witness of God, us being made in the image of God, we know that we're accountable and when things like this are happening the first thing we say is why is this happening. There must be a reason, a purpose and they then say why is this happening to us. Their second question is what is your occupation? What are you doing, sleeper? The third question is where do you come from? The fourth is what is your country and the fifth is of what people are you?

Jonah answers them. He gives a two fold answer to their five questions. He is really just answering these last couple of questions. In Jonah 1:9 Jonah says, "I am a Hebrew." That's not a statement of his submission to the Lord, he's just answering "I'm from Israel and ethnically I'm a Hebrew." Now he will then confess his relationship with the Lord. Jonah 1:9 says, **9** *And he said to them, 'I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.'* He defines the One whom he fears. I fear not one of many gods I fear the Lord who is the God of heaven. This God of heaven made the sea that you're in and dry land where you want to get to. Their big concern was not that their boat was in the sea because the sea was about to get in the boat. He is the Creator of all. I believe in God the Father Almighty maker of heaven and earth.

Jonah 1:10 says, *"Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, 'What is this that you have done!'"* For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them." So we know Jonah told them more about God that

is not given in the text and they basically said it is because of your rebellion from your God that we are now in this situation. Jonah 1:11, 12 says, **11** *Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous.* **12** *He said to them, "Pick me up and **hurl** me (not the receptacles) into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you."* It's interesting that these pagans had some mercy upon him because they decided not to do that immediately.

Jonah 1:13 says, *Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.* They tried to answer this in their own way but the Lord kept hurling the sea in a way that they couldn't get to the land. Jonah 1:14 says, *Therefore they called out to the LORD, "O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you."* In other words, they all became Calvinists right then. God You are sovereign and not only that You're holy so will you deliver us and not let us perish on account of him? Jonah 1:15, 16 says, **15** *So they picked up Jonah and **hurled** him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.* **16** *Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.* These men were now delivered. Now their fear was not of the storm, not of their demise, not of the tempest, but their fear was of the Lord. This wasn't just any fear. They feared Him exceedingly.

I want to give you three takeaways from this. What are some things that we can learn here? Remember Matthew 12 says that Jonah is a type of Christ. The first takeaway is here the typology of Jonah goes in three directions. The first direction is that Jonah is a type of sin in that he is showing us what it means to rebel against God, to flee from God and the consequences that come and that God brings not the judgment of condemnation upon him, but the judgment of discipline. For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines and all discipline is not enjoyment for the moment. So here Jonah becomes an example of the Lord dealing with the issue on sin. Jonah as a type of sin must be removed that the hand of God's judgment would be removed. So Jonah is hurled out of the boat into the sea.

Can I ask you a question? Do you and I have sin in our life? Absolutely. Does it have consequences in God's loving discipline upon us? Absolutely. Does sin itself bring consequences in our life? Absolutely. What do you and I need to do with it? It is called repentance. Hurl it away. Jesus said our hatred of sin ought to be as such that we are willing to cut off hands and pluck out right eyes rather than offend the Lord with our hand, or our eye or our foot. Jesus is not giving you a road map to sanctification. Pluck out your eye and cut off your hand. He is telling you how much you and I ought to hate sin. We should be willing and desirous even to part with right eyes and right hands rather than to keep sin in our life. Hurl it away. Send it away. Put off the old man. Cast it from us. A lot of us are hurling a lot of things out of our life but what we need to hurl is our sin. Harry, do I have to do that to be saved? No, you have to do that because you're saved. When you repented of your sin and came to Jesus you repented of sin generally. Now that you're a Christian you get the opportunity to grow in grace by repenting of particular sins particularly and hurling them out of our lives.

The second direction is not only is Jonah a type of sin but Jonah becomes a type of Christ for us. In order to deal with our sin and to deliver us from judgment Jonah points us to Christ who was hurled and sent out of heaven to a cross and to a grave and

descended unto the judgment of hell for us that we would not have the tempest of God's judgment but that we would have peace. In the world you have tribulation; in Me you have peace why? It is because I have come and have overcome world. It is Christ who has been hurled to the cross, embraced it, drank the last of that cup of judgment and He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf. Then the Father hurled hell upon Him. The Father crushed Him and the Father poured out His wrath upon our sin upon our Savior that we would be delivered.

The third direction is Jonah is a type of us in that we as believers can become hardened against the Lord's call in our life. Some of us God has called to lead small groups and we have gone to Tarshish. God has called us to share the Gospel with lost people but we've gone to Tarshish. Are we saved? Absolutely we are saved. Jonah is saved. I know Jonah is saved because God is not letting him go. Saved men and women can become disobedient and even callous. It's right here. Praise the Lord for conscience because you are made in the image of God but your conscience is not your guide. How is Jonah's conscience? He is so hardened against the Lord he is sleeping while God's bringing judgment. He is fast asleep in the hull of a ship. Our conscience can become seared, calloused and misdirected. It's God's Word that is our guide. It's the living God that uses His Word by His Spirit to direct us and we can become just like Jonah. We can not only become disobedient, calloused in our disobedience but we can become more enamored with what we want in life rather than what God calls us to do in this life, to worship Him, to proclaim the Gospel, to love one another, to reach the lost, to be faithful to stand for Christ against all forms of evils, sin, oppression, injustice and all the isms. We are to do so in a way that shows the grace and truth of the Lord Jesus and not with arrogance or triumphalism but walking in the triumph of Christ with compassion, grace and confidence yet we can so easily flee to what we want away from the presence of the Lord. Yet Jonah is a type of us to remind us that the Lord will not let the wandering sheep go. He will move heaven, seas, storms and lots. He is able to pursue us so our conscience is not our guide. God's Word is our guide. God's Spirit is that which guides us and directs us in all of the areas of our life because we by the grace of God know the fear of the Lord. If you don't know the fear of the Lord then all the fears of storms, demise and this world will ultimately control us and enslave us.

I try to share this with people when they say, "I don't know if I really want to surrender to the Lord." I will say, "You would rather surrender to sin? Because you and I will surrender to something." We will either surrender to sin and the world or we will surrender to the Lord. You and I will fear something. We will either fear the Lord by His grace giving us wisdom in reverence and majesty to Him or we will fear the things of this world. I may lose my job or my house or this or that. Yes that can happen. We plan. We are made in the image of God. We live with purpose. We live with cares but we cast all our cares upon Him who is big enough to care for us and who does all things well. God Himself has given you a promise. Romans 8:28 says, "*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*" I want to fill in a word here for Jonah's sake. God **hurls** anything and everything so that all things work together for good, not that all things are good but God hurls, throws, directs, causes them and is engaged and everything stands at His disposal to accomplish His glory and caring for us His people.

Not only is Jonah a type of sin, of Christ, of us and it's not our conscience but the Word of God that gives us the fear of the Lord, by the grace of God and the Spirit of the Lord but finally God is unstoppable and His providence even multiplies beyond our anticipation. What do I mean by this? This is what I mean. Does it surprise you that God is fulfilling Romans 8:28 in going after Jonah? It doesn't surprise me. Does it surprise you that ultimately God wins the day and Jonah gets hurled overboard? By the way, hurling is not over yet in our study of Jonah. God has a big sea monster prepared and you'll hear about it in the next study. That sea monster isn't prepared to bring judgment upon him but to deliver him and teach him. Jonah will get hurled one more time. So Jonah is hurled overboard and he'll be hurled back on dry land so it doesn't surprise us that God is doing this.

Do you know one of the reasons why Jonah doesn't want to go to Nineveh? It is because in his arrogance and self righteousness he does not want salvation to go to those Gentiles from which his father Abraham was brought by grace. What Jonah wants is not preaching of faith, repentance and a call to grace but he wants judgment. He wants them to experience what Sodom and Gomorrah did. That's his desire. He doesn't want these pagans from all of these pagan deities to be delivered. So he goes to Tarshish and he gets on a ship. God chases him down and eventually all those pagans will get converted in chapter 3 but on the way pagans got converted on that ship Jonah was on. Out of Jonah's disobedience because he didn't want pagans converted, even more pagans were converted. Isn't that just like God drawing straight lines with crooked sticks? He takes what we would prefer which is ashes and He turns them into roses.

One may be thinking that these sailors really didn't get converted but I believe by in large that they did. Jonah 1:14 says, "*Therefore they called out to the LORD, 'O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.'*" First they acknowledged the sovereignty of God. Secondly, they obeyed by picking up Jonah and hurling him into the sea just like we are supposed to hurl our sins away from us. Three, the sea ceased its raging and the men feared the Lord in Jonah 1:16. These were the same men who were paralyzed by fear in the storm and now they fear the Lord. That is another word for worship and reverence. They didn't just do it to check off the box. They did it exceedingly. Fourthly, they offered sacrifices. Romans 12:1 says, "*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*" They gave sacrifices.

The word sacrifices in that verse is the word from the Old Testament that points to what we would call a thank offering. So what does this tell me? This tells me if they are bringing thank offerings to the Lord this is one of those statements that is taking something that has taken place over a period of time and reducing it into a simple statement. They feared the Lord. They hurled Jonah into the sea. The sea became calm and then what did they do? They worshiped the Lord and by the time they get to dry land they were ready to continue that worship to bring thank offerings to Him. It didn't stop there. It also says in Jonah 1:16 that they made vows or commitments to Him who had delivered them, to Him who had saved them, to Him who had redeemed them. This wasn't a momentary act to God like they would any other deity. This is transforming and it's lasting and it's showing up with God centered worship that is taking place. Out of

this God has save more pagans and now more worshipers are giving praise to Him through a fleeing prophet whom God pursues.

You are probably thinking it's just like me. Okay God the way I'm going to get a lot of people saved is I will flee Your call to share the Gospel with people and that way a lot of other people will get saved. I know that's the way you and I work. No, this is simply making the point. God will have His way even when we think we are standing in His way. How much more glorious and joyful, instead of fleeing the presence of the Lord, it is to walk with the Lord and serve the Lord and to delight in what delights Him. Those who are lost that are saved delights Him. The Lord takes no delight in the death of the wicked therefore turn, why will you die.

I'd like to close with this thought. I know that even we who are saved by grace have within us a constant inclination to turn away and that's why I love the fact that God refuses to quit working on us and in us. I love Psalm 110:3 which says, "*Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power.*" What is it that allows us to volunteer freely for the Lord? It is the power of God at work in us by His grace. Praise His Name who freed us that we might not flee His presence but volunteer freely. Lord, here we are, send us. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You so much for this act of history that You have recorded for us from which we can learn that salvation, even as Jonah is about to pray from the belly of a great fish, is of the Lord. Father You not only pursue those whom You save like Jonah but through us You will use us to see many converted – pagan sailors, Ninevites. Father we will stand in reverence to You in the day of Your great power upon us. Father, do Your work and thank You for teaching us. Here we are Lord, purchased by Christ. Keep us ready to serve Christ, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.