

Jonah in Biblical Perspective
The Heart Of The Issues Is The Issue Of The Heart
Jonah 1

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Our text for this study is Jonah. Here is the free moral agency of man and here is the sovereign God and we get to see something here pretty quickly. When man's will and God's will meet guess who wins? Yet that doesn't deny the moral agency of man and the accountability of man and the fact that what we do actually counts. You have a fleeing prophet and a pouting prophet but you have a praying prophet and a preaching prophet with not much of a sermon yet it has a great effect. With all that going on you also have the sovereign hand of God. He appoints east winds and scorching winds. He appoints the sun that rises and scorches and a vine that grows up and covers over him. Then there is a great fish that He appoints that probably wasn't a whale and so it is an amazing statement of the supernatural acts of God and intervention in this world. That's just too much for us because that means God is actually acting like God. It's funny how we have these problems with these miracles but miracles are supernatural acts, right? God is supernatural. So if God acts supernatural that shouldn't amaze us and that's why they are called signs, wonders and miracles. They are miracles that create wonder in order for God to establish a sign and point to something. This text is full of that.

What do many people do? They dismiss it as a parable or an allegory. Can we dismiss this as a non-historical event, a parable, an allegory or a nice story that you tell in order to evoke a certain response? Will the Bible allow us to do that or not? Hopefully I can begin to answer that very clearly in this study if at all possible. Let's start by looking at these opening verses in Jonah 1 and cover some details and other passages of Scripture that set Jonah in the context of the Word of God in general as well as its specifics for us. Jonah 1:1-6 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." 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. 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. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. 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."*

Here's an interesting moment. Jonah the prophet is called by God to go to a place called Nineveh. We are told a couple of things about Nineveh. One is it is a great city. Two it is an exceedingly wicked city. Jonah is called to go to them and cry out against them, against their sin and that they are to be called to repentance by this prophet. What we have is a reluctant prophet but an unstoppable redeeming God. So let me start by giving you eight things that we need to have cemented in our minds as we make our way through this study and these four chapters in the book of Jonah.

The first thing is the name Jonah means “dove.” Appropriately this is the symbol for the Holy Spirit as Jonah is called to proclaim the Word of the Lord to a place called Nineveh.

Secondly his father as you have just read is Amittai. His father is not only found in this book of the 39 books of the Old Testament. He is also mentioned or referred to two other times in the Bible but one time mentioned very specifically and that’s in 2 Kings 14. In 2 Kings 14 there is a listing of the kings in the northern and southern kingdoms after the dissolution of the kingdom, after Solomon and here we are in the reign of Jeroboam. We also find out a little bit more concerning Jonah here. Here you also have the kingdom divided into two parts. The southern kingdom has basically remained more faithful and then there is the northern kingdom with the ten tribes that has not only intermarried but has also engaged very quickly has reverted back to pagan worship. Now in that kingdom a man by the name of Jeroboam II begins to reign in Samaria. 2 Kings 14:23-26 says, **23** *In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. 24* *And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. 25* *He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. 26* *For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel.*

In this text we are aware that Jonah ministered during the time of Jeroboam. It names his home town of Gath-hepher. That town is near the Sea of Galilee. It is not far at all from the place of Jesus’ ministry hundreds of years later around a place called Capernaum. It was called the land of the Gentiles because there were two trading routes that passed through the Sea of Galilee from east to west and north to south. Many Gentiles could be found in that area as well as many of the people of Israel. In Jonah there had come a prophecy that God in spite of Jeroboam’s evil that God would use Jeroboam to restore the borders and give a certain amount of safety to His people. So we now have Jonah situated through Jeroboam II and that would be the year 790 to 750 B.C. during the eighth century before Christ. In that time he is now ministering in that area. Jonah is of the tribe of Zebulun. That particular area would belong to the tribe of Zebulun.

This particular prophet is mentioned three times in the New Testament. We are not going to look at all three because two of them are somewhat repetitive but I do want to look at two of them in the Gospel of Matthew. In Matthew 16 we have a brief statement concerning Jonah. Matthew 16:1-4 says, **1** *And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. 2* *He answered them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ 3* *And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. 4* *An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” So he left them and departed.* What is the sign of Jonah? It is something from Jonah in his life and his book which has been declared a sign that points to Christ that Christ established for this evil generation in which He ministered and they

rejected Him. So let's look in the second passage in Matthew to see what the sign of Jonah is.

Matthew 12:38-41 says, **38** *Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you."* **39** *But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. (Notice the sign is Jonah. How?)* **40** *For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.* **41** *The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.* For our purposes right now what clearly has Jesus done? Jesus does not allow us to treat the book of Jonah as a parable. He clearly establishes it as an historical fact. He not only establishes the book of Jonah as an historical fact but establishes Jonah as a preacher to Nineveh as an historical fact. In addition He also establishes the response of the people of Nineveh with repentance to his message as an historical fact. In other words what may have been the greatest revival in the history of humanity is substantiated by Jesus as an historical fact.

Nineveh was a vast city so numerous that they even used infants in the book of Jonah to count it. It was so large including its suburbs that it takes three days to walk across it. That city is impacted by a revival through a prophet named Jonah who preached to that city and the revival is also established as an historical fact. Furthermore, the great fish appointed by the Lord, Jesus establishes has an historical fact. Furthermore Jesus' death and resurrection with the evenings and mornings giving us the circumference of the three days and the three nights has been established by the historical fact of Jonah having been in the belly of the great fish and preserved by the hand of God and then expelled as an historical fact. So the trajectory of the book of Jonah goes all the way to Matthew. This is also repeated in the Gospel of Luke 11 as well.

In Matthew 16:4 as this event is ultimately pointing to not only the grace of God in reaching the Gentiles and the grace of God in giving the reception of faith and repentance to a pagan, wicked city but it is also used as a trajectory to point to Calvary and the tomb. And that it would be emptied by the resurrection power that would raise Christ from the grave. That book is here to guide us in these coming studies.

So what is the theme verse of this book? It does not take a great theologian to find this one. This theme verse is given to us from the belly of the great fish as Jonah is crying out and praying to the Lord in the belly of the fish. It is Jonah 2:9 which says, *"But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!"* Salvation does not belong to Jonah or to God's people. Salvation belongs to a sovereign God who will give that salvation to whom ever He wills through whom ever He calls; even a reluctant prophet will be an instrument in the hand of a redeeming God. Let's go a step further.

What is the covenantal purpose of Jonah? In other words, let's take a look at Jonah in terms of the Old Testament itself. I'm going to give you three purposes in this study of the book of Jonah and one of them is the covenantal purpose of Jonah in the unfolding of God's covenant of grace. In your Bible you have a covenant of creation or works with Adam. Adam fell into sin and because of his sin all of his posterity is born with a sin record and a sin nature which is you and me. But God being rich in mercy gave us a second Adam, a new Head and that One is Jesus Christ. The coming of that

Christ is prophesied and promised from Genesis 3:15 all the way to incarnation. In Genesis 1 and 2 we have creation and in Genesis 3 we have our fall into sin and then in Genesis 4 through Revelation 22 you have the unfolding of God's covenant of grace as it comes through Adam, then Noah, then Abraham, then Moses, then through David and then in its fulfillment in the new covenant with Jesus Christ. In God's covenantal purpose Jonah is found in the context of the Davidic kingdom where God is about to do what He promised that He would do in the days of Moses.

What did God say in the days of Moses, in the covenant with Moses? He said, "My people when they leave Me, I will take nations that are not My nations to bring a judgment (disciplinary hand) on My covenant people" and He was referring to Assyria whose capital is Nineveh to bring judgment on the ten northern tribes and the empire of Babylon which includes the great city Babylon will become the antithesis of God's redeeming work in the Holy City of Jerusalem. So the great whore Babylon He will use to bring judgment on the two southern tribes in their Babylonian captivity.

Where does this Nineveh come from? Let's go back and see this in the context of the Old Testament. In Genesis 10 we have the account of the beginning of Nineveh. It's in the area today of what we call Iraq and Iran. In that particular area of the Middle East where the Tigris and Euphrates River are, there it was established. We find the cities and the nations established through the sons of Noah after the flood. Genesis 10:6-12 says, **6** *The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. 7 The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan. 8 Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. (What we would call a giant or mythological hero, an heroic man of the world, not of God but of the world.) 9 He was a mighty hunter before the LORD. Therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." 10 The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. 11 From that land he went into Assyria and **built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and 12 Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.** So it was a city that was established under this mighty man called Nimrod that would eventually blossom into this pagan wicked kingdom that would be used in the hands of the Lord.*

Now let's look at God's work of redemption. Let's set this further in the books of the Old Covenant. In Genesis 12, out of that land, the area of Shinar, near Cush, God is going to call a Gentile to make him the beginning of His covenant people. That man's name is Abram. Genesis 12:1-3 says, **1** *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* God says to Abraham, "I am calling you to be Mine. You're going to leave this country and you will go to a land that I will give you. I will make you My people, not that you will be simply separated but that you will belong to Me and then through you I will reach the nations of the earth."

In other words, He is giving him the promise of which you and I love to anticipate and sing of in the book of Revelation. Babylon thrown down, the heavenly city Jerusalem come down to a new heavens and a new earth and I heard a praise of glory to the living God from a people who are His who have been gathered from every tribe and every nation and all of these peoples shall give Him praise. That promise day in the book

of Revelation is secured the day He calls Abram out and says, "I've called you out that I might reach all of the nations of the earth" and that's us. Praise His Name! That's all the nations of the earth.

Now in the book of Jonah is the very first time God sends one of His covenant people, descended from Abram out to one of those nations, a pagan Gentile nation. In fact it is a nation that occupies the very area where Abram had originally come. It is that place that God is sending Jonah. This is the first time that God by direction sent one of His people to the Gentiles to point out what His purpose was in calling a people, not that they would be a reservoir of His grace but that they would be a river of His grace to all of the families of the earth. We see that gloriously at the day of Pentecost. We see that unfolding in the book of Acts. They turned the whole world upside down. We see it declared in the book of Revelation but here is the first step of a son from the loins of Abram who is now called to do what God promised He would do through Abram. "I will send you to the nations of the earth." That first prophet so chosen to do it said, "Here am I, send me." No, he didn't say that because he went the other direction.

So where is Tarshish? It is right of the coast of Spain, beyond Gibraltar. In other words, it is the opposite direction. God was sending him east and he went west. He paid his own fare. Now God has another means of conveyance that He was about to use and it wasn't going to be a comfortable cabin to get a ride back east but here he flees the call of God. More than that Jonah attempts to flee the presence of God but you're already ahead of me, aren't you? You have already jumped to the Psalms which says, "Where shall I flee from thy presence?" He cannot flee the presence of the Lord but this reluctant prophet is determined to go the other direction and not go to that wicked city in which this old covenant where Jonah is God's first plank in the bridge He is building from His covenant people to the nations of the world from which He will develop His new covenant people in Christ to the Jews and the Gentiles. Here is the very first step that God has given but Jonah says he is going the other way.

By the way, this is not the first time God has saved a Gentile. There is also Rahab. You know what God does in these matters. God does a work of grace continually. God has already reached Gentiles. He has done it on an individual basis but this is the first time He has sent a prophet on an evangelistic call of repentance to a pagan nation to call them to Himself as He promised to do in Genesis 12 and that He will do. Jonah therefore becomes this type of Christ who will secure that for us at the cross and in the resurrection from which the Gospel will go to the ends of the earth. Don't you just love the Bible and how exciting this is? This gets me so excited that I can hardly stand it.

I want to say to Jonah, "You have to go because if you don't then people like me don't get saved because that's what my people were – pagan barbarians. You don't want to know what our people were doing in Europe years ago. These barbarians are pretty frightening." But God sends a people to a wicked city, a great city, a big city whose outcry of wickedness had risen. He didn't have to do that. Have you ever heard of Sodom and Gomorrah? He didn't send a prophet to call them to repentance. He sent judgment yet here God sovereignly chooses not to send them what they deserved which was judgment but a prophet, even a reluctant prophet to call them to repentance. So that is the covenantal purpose as the Scriptures unfolded that unfolds to the New Testament.

What about the Christological purpose that is Jonah in the New Testament? Jonah is pointing us to Christ, the glory and majesty of Christ. Jonah is a sign, a

historical reality that God does not only to save these people in Nineveh, not only to affect the king of Nineveh who will call for a fast and for people to come to repentance, not only to show us how the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man so intertwined that you have Jonah fleeing and God pursuing. You have Jonah pouting and God getting a hold of him by the nap of the neck as it were. You have God saving pagan sailors. Jonah is getting in this boat because he doesn't want these pagans to be saved in Nineveh and lo and behold not only are the pagans in Nineveh going to get saved but pagans on that boat are going to get saved through this.

It's amazing what God will sovereignly do as we see man as a real person, made in the image of God, as a free moral agent and notice I didn't say "freewill" because will is under the bondage to my sin. I will do my will which is sin. That is what I will choose to do. A man said to me the other day, "Harry don't you believe that good people are going to go to heaven?" I said, "Absolutely, I believe every good person is going to heaven" and then I took him to Romans 3 which says there is none good, no not one. So who's going to heaven? It is those whom God's good grace has called to Himself. God's good grace won't let Jonah go. God says, "Jonah you want to flee from My presence, there's no where you can go to flee from Me. I'll find you in the hole of a ship. I'll find you through the casting of lots. I'll find you overboard in the ocean. I'll find you with a great fish I've designed to swallow you up. I will keep you there and I will deliver you in another manner on the dry land. Then you'll go to Nineveh. Now you won't exactly get excited about your sermon."

Here is a man we are studying as a prophet. We take all this time and everybody knows about Jonah and yet a prophet is supposed to prophesy which means he's to preach. We only have one sermon that he preached and it's summed up in one line. I don't know if that was all he preached or if it was a summation of what he preached but basically his sermon is "yet 40 days and Nineveh is going to be overthrown." I don't sense his heart is in this great evangelistic outreach but God is going to redeem a city for the power is in His hands. There is no excuse for us not to deliver with passion and that's no excuse for us not to work on our sermons but the power is in the hands of the Lord. God's hand will even be seen through this prophet. This prophet no becomes a sign post pointing us to Christ in whom the families of the earth shall be blessed and the family of God will be called not from just Ninevites but from every tribe and nation. They shall be called.

This is why at Briarwood we are going to stay right on that Great Commission. We are going to keep sending those missionaries out around the world. We will not be a recalcitrant people. We won't go the other direction. We will go where the lost are. Harry do you know how wicked these people are? Yes. We will go where the great cities of wickedness are with the Gospel of Jesus Christ because someone God sent for us. So we will go. So the purpose is to see Christ and ultimately the resurrection power of Christ who will go as Jonah went to the belly of the great fish, Jesus will go to the belly of the earth and be raised as He said on the third day.

Now I'd like to cover one more thing which is the theological purpose in Jonah. Theologically we are going to see God weaving together the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man throughout this entire text of Scripture. We are going to see it time and time again. The four chapters in Jonah are excellently laid out for us. We are going to see the responsibility of man in the life of Jonah, his free moral agency at work

underneath the influence of his rebellion against God's call in his life. By the way, he's a saved man. There's no doubt about that. If you ever want to see that saved men can get out of sorts with God here you are. Here's a man who is saved who is out of sorts with God and because his way is more important than God's way then he is going in the opposite way but God does things on purpose and God will accomplish His purpose.

Here we are going to see man's will and God's will. Guess who wins? The sovereign hand of God will triumph and even the recalcitrant hand, mouth, heart and feet of a prophet will be used. We are going to see the supernatural all over this. We are going to see a great storm that God raises up. We're going to see the casting of lots. We're going to see a great fish best prepared. We're going to see a vine that grows up. We're going to see a son that comes that is preserved and expelled from the great fish. We're going to see an east wind, the Sirocco wind that is going to come and torment Jonah to continue to discipline him and deal with him. We're going to see the hand of a sovereign supernatural intervening God saving His people, keeping His prophet, sending His people even when they won't go in order to save a people that He has promised to save to accomplish His purposes for His own glory.

To lay this out I'm going to put man's responsibility with the prophet and the sovereignty of God and what we will see in Jonah 1 in the next study is the prodigal prophet and the pursuing God. Then we will look at the praying prophet in Jonah 2 and a preserving God. Then we will look at the preaching prophet in Jonah 3 and the pardoning God. Then we will look at a pouting prophet and a persuading God in Jonah 4. Its here I know I have to look and realize that any heart desire that I have for lost people to come to Christ comes from the Lord not from myself. When I get to Jonah 4 I have a hard time with a whole pagan city repenting. Can you realize the newsletter you could send back home when that happened? "Guess what happened?!" But Jonah goes up on a hill, sits down and starts to pout and says, "I can't believe all these pagans came to God and repented! I cannot believe that!" He will go pouting and God will do His perfecting work in Jonah.

By the way, you do know what we are learning here, right? My first takeaway is God has a way of securing His way in us and through us and upon us. The lesson with Jonah is not lost. Jonah is a product of his nation. Israel did not want the pagans to be saved. Israel wanted to be a reservoir of God's blessing not a channel of God's blessing. Jonah is the product of his people as well as his own self righteousness as well as his own arrogance. Could that be us? Could God's way not be going through us because of vestiges that we think we are where we are by what we have done instead of what God has done for us? I don't know about you but when we sang the song about God raising up the weak and lifting up the needy, I knew that was me. There is no good thing that dwells within me. If I am left up to my own end there is no way I would have sought the Lord. God has sought me. God has pursued me. God has kept me. I am saved by grace.

I know how easy it happens, the arrogance and self righteousness that comes into our life where we think we are what we are because of what we have done instead of what God has done for us, to us and through us and most of the time in spite of us. We have been saved by grace. Should we not readily want to be instruments of grace and not be a people saying, "God look who we are and what we have done but God look at who You are and what You have done to us and for us. So God do it through us. Here are a people all around us."

This leads me to my second takeaway about Nineveh a wicked city. Have you looked at the statistics of abortions? Do you realize the vulgarity, the profanity, the degradation of women, the family, the marriage that we produce out of the bowels of our rebellion against God in this nation? Would God send us as a saved people by grace that cry out “repent” to the wicked cities and nations, there is a God who loves you whose Son died on the cross to forgive you, will you not come? Will we smugly look at our newscast in self righteousness and arrogance or will we with broken hearts go in the midst of those whom we would be were it not for God’s grace? There is wickedness all around but our God who did it in Nineveh can do it again and may He do it through us. My hope is not where we are or where we want to be in the nation I serve, my hope is where God can bring us to be by His grace. God has set us aside to do it.

Thirdly and finally the question becomes what about us? Will we flee from the presence of the Lord or will we come into His presence with worship and praise and then will we walk in His presence and take the Gospel of Jesus Christ and see the work of the Gospel by His grace and mercy bringing many to repentance? I am anticipating it. We keep waiting for an edict. Jonah sent the edict when he heard what God’s grace had done with the people. It was the movement of grace that called the city of Nineveh to repentance and when the king heard it then he made the edict. Let’s go to the highways and byways and by God’s grace and mercy may He do such a work through this glorious message that’s worked in us through us that those in power will hear. Whether they believe or not we pray they’ll get on board with what God is doing from the bottom up by His grace and mercy, extraordinary things through ordinary people in ordinary places for His own glory. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be in Your Word as we begin to look at this marvelous statement of a historical event that points back to what You promised to Abram, that points forward to what You will do in Christ that will actually establish a miraculous historical sign that will point to the miraculous redeeming work of Christ. Father, will You walk us through this text and teach us that we will not flee to Tarshish away from Your presence but we will seek Your presence and we will go to Nineveh and proclaim, “Repent and believe for the God of grace will forgive, redeem and renew.” I pray this in Jesus’ Name, Amen.