

The One that God Away

Rev. Lex DeLong / General

Major Posts from Minor Prophets: Be an Influencer / Jonah / Jonah

This story's end, leaves you with 2 questions you must answer for yourself.

Will you answer God's call?

Will you show compassion like God?

Notes

02/26 "The One That Got Away" Subtitle: Hatred Avoids/Abhors Compassion, Scripture:

Exodus

34:5-7 (end with, "forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...")

Hatred cannot remain where compassion rules.

Text: Jonah 1-4

Purpose Statement: **General**– Stop turning a blind eye to certain people and truly see yourself and others like God does, all equally wretched and lost without His mercy and compassion. **Specific** – This week approach 4 people you would least like to be friends with, consider how God sees them, tell them why you needed to know God loves you, and leave them with a True-Life card.

Introduction:

Let me take you to the story of Jonah. This is a story so familiar that one might be hard pressed to find anyone who doesn't recognize the name. Of course, the first thing that comes to mind is the fish. You might even have in mind the moral of the story. I mean, doesn't everyone know that the story is about obeying God? What if I told you it's not? What if I told you the fish is not even the climax of the story? Is it hard to believe after all these years of hearing it read and taught?

So, let us take a look at this story. It's the real story of Jonah in the Bible. It carries a practical lesson that is not all that theologically complicated.

This story's end, leaves you with 2 questions you must answer for yourself.

1. ++Will you answer God's call?
2. ++Will you show compassion like God?

Over the noise of your busy life and no matter who you are, please listen to the message of this story. This story is for you.

Exposition/Setting

"In common with a number of other books in the Minor Prophets (e.g. Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk), Jonah contains no precise statement as to when..." [1] or by whom the book was written. Was it written by Jonah, or someone God used to tell the story? The book contains no clear declaration of authorship, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest it was indeed Jonah. Look with me at the first verse of chapter 1. There it says, "The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying..." (Jonah 1:1, NASB). [2] We might not have absolute conclusive evidence of authorship, but we can clearly identify the prophet whom the book places, along with God, as a main character in the narrative. In 2 Kings 14:25, this son of Amittai prophesied to the Northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II (782/81-753 BC). [3] That fact at least gives a glimpse into when the story took place, which is important.

Knowing when it was written helps clarify the history and culture of the people to whom the story was given. That in turn helps communicate what the story sought to teach its original audience. Based on the style of its prophetic content, Jonah's "...writings and prophecy preserved the tensions present in the prophetic community of the eighth century B.C." [4] All of that gives evidence that the book of Jonah seems to have been written not long after the actual events of the story. That would make the original

audience who received the story the Northern tribe of Israel during that 8th century B.C.

Pre-exilic Israel in the 8th century B.C. found itself bordering the rising and falling threatening power of Assyria to its North and East; Assyria's capital city was Nineveh. At the time of Jonah's recorded events, "...Assyria was in a weakened state, making possible the expansion of Jeroboam II in Samaria," [5]that, "...was characterized by peace and prosperity that rivaled the golden age of Solomon." [6]Assyria's internal fighting, epidemics, famines, and enemies to the North oppressed the nation into an era of decline that aided the rise of Israel's national affluence under Jeroboam II. [7]Despite their decline, the Assyrians were legendary brutes, worshipped many gods and goddesses, and "were known to impale their enemies on stakes in front of their towns and hang their heads from trees in the king's gardens." [8]Although the final rise of Assyrian power that would lead to the eventual destruction of Samaria and dominance over Israel in 722 B.C. had not yet been realized, the disdain of Israel towards this powerful people to the north ran deep and for good reason. They tortured, dismembered, burned at the stake, use the skin of their victims to cover city walls, and made piles of skulls from their victims as warnings for their enemies. [9]Against that backdrop, affluent Israel found itself as rising in power and superiority, something that clearly comes to bear in the life of the prophet Jonah.

Scene 1 (Jonah 1)

No matter who we are or what we have done, God sees us in our sin and wants us to hear and heed His call (Jonah 1)

This brings us to the beginning of the story where we find Jonah hearing the word of the LORD. God told Jonah to carry His message of compassion to the people of Nineveh (1:2), "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me." Jonah's first

impulse was to flee to Tarshish, the opposite direction God told him to go. Really though, isn't it easy to understand why Jonah would do that? Think about it. God was telling him to go to these worthless brutes. I mean, he's a prophet of God to God's prospering people Israel and God wants him to go to these looser barbarians. You can almost sense his frustration thinking, "God, are you kidding me? You can't be serious. No way am I going to go and proclaim your message to those scum. They aren't worthy of my time or attention, after all, I am a prophet of your chosen people. Look how great we are and how insignificant and repulsive they are." Jonah's decision to flee wasn't a simple case of disobedience, it seems he couldn't stand the thought of going to those people. The people of Israel would have clearly understood Jonah's contempt for the Assyrian people. They would not have been shocked by Jonah running away from what God was asking him to do and they might have even taken Jonah's side at this point of the narrative. Think about it. If their prophet from God felt this way, how much more would the people of Israel sympathize with him.

Notice vs. 3 says two times that Jonah's fleeing to Tarshish was "...from the presence of the LORD." Have you ever been so angry at what someone was telling you to do that you just wanted to get away from them? That was Jonah. Not only did Jonah have reason to despise the people God was sending him to, he almost seems angry at God for even asking him to go to them. This repetition in vs. 3 suggests he was so angry at God that he just wanted to get away from His presence. So, Jonah left "the presence of the LORD," so he thought, and joined a group of Gentile sailors on a ship from Joppa, heading to Tarshish instead of Nineveh.

Scene 2 (Jonah 2)

**No matter who we are, where we are,
or what we have done, God hears and
responds to us when we cry for help
(Jonah 2)**

Verse 4 picks up the narrative with Jonah feeling at peace that he has gotten away from the LORD with these Gentiles, laying down in the hold of the ship, as vs. 5 says, "sound asleep" while God hurls a great storm on the sea. So significant was the storm that we are told the ship was about to break up (v. 4). Notice in v. 6 how shocked the captain is at Jonah's apathy. The captain says there, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish." The captain recognized that Jonah might not care about them because of his indifference, but maybe Jonah's god would. It seems **ironic** that this Gentile has at least some hope that a god he doesn't even know might care about them when the prophet of God doesn't. Please note that the Jonah narrative introduces God's concern for a group of Gentiles at the beginning of the story. By the end of v. 6, there is now a second hint in the story from a Gentile that Jonah's god might also care about them. The suggestion to the people of Israel through this story would be clear. Not only does God care about people other than just His chosen people, He even cares for them as barbarians and rugged, nobody-type sailors.

Verse 7 then tells of the sailors' concern. They were sure the storm was due to some god's wrath toward one of them on the ship who has offended him. That way of thinking was an "an old belief, cf. Jos. 7:10 ff.; 1 S. 14:41 ff., shared by many peoples of antiquity." [10] Again, the **irony builds** as Gentiles are first to recognize the likelihood of a displeased god over the Prophet of God. As a method of determining the will of the gods, such as the practice of the Jews with the Urim and Tummim, they cast lots which identified Jonah as the one whom God's wrath was directed toward. Believing it was Jonah's god, in v. 8 they asked, "Tell us now! On whose account has this calamity struck us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" Jonah's answer in v. 9 was, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land." Finally, the Prophet **ironically** testifies to the Gentiles that his god is "the LORD God." The **irony** is that he is already forced to witness to people that he didn't care about. Gentiles that weren't part of God's initial plan, are now hearing testimony of the power and presence of the God of creation. According to v. 10, the knowledge of the power of Jonah's God being the one responsible, frightened them even more in light of the fact that he had told them in the beginning that he was running away from his God's presence. It was clear from the next few verses that Jonah clearly knew the storm was his fault

and when asked, told the sailors to throw him overboard (vv. 11-12). The next few verses talk about how the sailors did everything in their power to avoid doing such a thing, showing more concern for Jonah than he had for them. The sailors recognized they were no match for the LORD, they cried out to him for mercy as they decided to do what Jonah suggested and threw him overboard (vv. 13-16). Immediately v. 15 says, "...the sea stopped its raging." The scene ends with the sailors fearing God and offering sacrifices to Him while Jonah is carried away from them in the stomach of a great fish for 3 days and nights. The **irony** in Ch. 1 is so prevalent it feels like the thumping beat of a drum. Everything the Prophet of God should be the Gentile sailors are instead. Everything the Prophet of God should do the sailors clearly do instead. Listening to this narrative being read to them, Israel couldn't help but begin to hear the message, the Jew is not honoring the LORD while these pagans are. It would also be clear to them the LORD's appointing is what brings this scene to a close by sending the fish (v. 17). Jonah's destiny is clearly determined by God rather than his own shrewd and cunning devices and so the second scene ends.

Scene 3 (Jonah 3)

No matter who we are, where we are, or what we have done, God will save us when we turn from evil and accept Him as our LORD (Jonah 3)

Jonah now found himself back in the presence of the LORD with no way out. There is much speculation about Jonah's intent for being thrown overboard, but it is clear from his psalm (Ch. 2) of praise or thanksgiving (v. 9), that he is grateful for God showing him mercy by rescuing him from certain death. Although some see Ch. 2 as evidence of Jonah's repentance, its content stops short of it. **(Read 2:1-9)** Twice in v. 2 Jonah called out to or cried for God's help. He described how despondent things seemed until God reached into the depth to save him. Verses 8-9 return attention back to

Jonah's disdain for, "Those who regard vain idols" and how pious he thought himself to be. It suggests Jonah believed God saved him because of his proclamation of devotion and importance as a Jew/prophet. The last phrase of his psalm in v. 9 is significant. He acknowledges, in the context of God's rescue of him, that God has fulfilled His promise as written by king David in Psalm 3:8 by quoting it word for word, "Salvation is from the LORD." Of course, his focus is on his own salvation, promised for God's people by the great King David. The scene ended once again by the sovereign decree of the LORD, commanding the fish to vomit Jonah up onto the dry land. The imagery is poignant and prophetic. Literally, this fish couldn't stomach Jonah. He was so abominable that God told the fish to vomit him out. The Hebrew word *yā-qē* used here is also used, "fig. of land casting out inhab. Lv 18:25, 28(x2)." [11] There in Lev. 18, Israel is reminded that God is "vomiting" out the Gentile people of the land due to their nauseating abominations and warns Israel that the same thing will happen to them if they partake in the same abominations. The connection of the Hebrew term to Leviticus for the original readers in Israel is credible, if they were willing to pay attention to the graphic picture. So, the scene ends with Jonah as vomit "in the land."

Scene 4 (Jonah 4:1-8)

No matter who we are, where we are, or what we have done, God is always at work in and around us (Jonah 4:1-8)

Notice now the LORD's word returns to Jonah as it did in 1:1-3. Again, in the narrative the word *arise* appears. It is seen in Ch. 1 verses 2 and 6 and in Ch. 3 verses 2, 3, +6. The term is often used of getting up from sleep. Although it doesn't always mean that, in the context of 1:6, it is clearly used by the author that way, so it is reasonable to suggest the meaning of "up from sleep" is what is meant for the other occurrences the author chose to

use it in this short narrative. This is the second time the word of the LORD comes to Jonah when it seems like he is asleep. He is told to wake up and go to Nineveh (3:2), "...the great city." There is an interesting contrast to note, Jonah thinks he and Israel are great, but this is the second time God speaks of the significant size of the city and the author also used the same term to communicate the size of the fish. Jonah has been painted in this narrative as less honoring to God than the Gentile sailors, so abominably noxious to a fish that he became vomit in the land, and now he almost begins to seem small and insignificant in comparison to the size of the city and the fish. The picture for Israel is one of decaying pride in the wake of growing perspective. The scene ends with Jonah again going, but this time to where God told him to go, Nineveh (3:3).

Scene 5 (Jonah 4:9-11)

**No matter who we are, where we are,
or what we have done, God is always
ready to save us from perishing if we
accept His message of compassion
(Jonah 4:9-11)**

Once again Jonah found himself with Gentiles, this time instead of sailors it was with the barbaric Assyrians in Nineveh. He again had no choice but to witness to the people he didn't care about (v. 4). The first time with the sailors, their full repentance is not conclusive, although they certainly acknowledged the LORD to be sovereign over them. This time true repentance is clear. Look at Ch. 3 vs. 5. **(Read 3:5-10)** Once again it is clear to any reader that Gentiles responded to the testimony of the LORD God of Israel. They turned in repentance without any guarantee that God would have mercy on them (v. 9). When God saw that they turned to Him from their wicked ways, He, "...relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it." The entire plot

escalated to that very moment when the people of Nineveh were shown and received God's compassion through His mercy. As the climax of the narrative plot, one would expect the original conflict between the LORD and Jonah to be resolved. However, the conflict doesn't end here, and the story takes another turn through the words of its narrator (4:1).

Scene 6

Through the omniscient view of the narrator, the reader is given a clear, undeniable look at the real conflict of the story as the scene shifts back to God and Jonah. You might ask how the conflict can continue when Jonah obeyed, went, and God's desired result for Nineveh was realized. That is a valid question, one fair to ask if the main story's conflict was between God and Nineveh, but that is not this story's main conflict. Jonah is displeased and angry, notably at God (4:1). Furthermore, he complained to God that He would even think to do such a thing as that for people like them. Look at Ch. 4 verse 2. **(Read 4:2-4)** Note Jonah said, "...I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity." You can almost hear the sneer in his voice as he speaks to God. Jonah was saying it was okay for God to show that kind of compassion to Israel and surely it was more than acceptable for Him to show that kind of compassion to him as an important prophet of God, but he was furious that God would show that kind of compassion to those who were so undeserving, so wicked, so...well, not Israel. Look at what happened next. **(Read 4:5-9)** Things are just not working out for Jonah. He gets more and more angry with God as time passes. At this point in the story he was so melodramatic that he said he would be better off dead than alive (v. 8). Jonah's anger has turned to rage. Then God Spoke. **(Read 4:9-11)**

God left Jonah and his readers with a question, all the while knowing that the question to be answered will become undeniably clear to Jonah, the Israelites who would first read the book, and every reader since. God pointed out to Jonah that he had more compassion for a plant that provided him shade and died (anger over what he lost, even though he didn't deserve it), than over the souls of more than 120,000 persons who were lost in their ignorance and would be destroyed by God's wrath. Jonah said to God earlier, in not so many words, "God, what is wrong with you? What were you thinking? Why would you even think of sending me, of all

people, to such people like them? Why would you want them to know your compassion and mercy? I knew that was going to happen!" God ends the conversation with a question of His own (v. 11), "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120.000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand...?" God left a question for Jonah to answer, "End of story...boom! So, what duh ya' think you should do, Jonah?" God left a question for Israel to consider as they read the story in the same context, "End of story... boom! So, what duh ya' think you should do, Israel?"

You are not Israel. You are not a prophet of God. So, what does God through the author of this story want you to understand? What does He want you to do? The question for Jonah was clear, will Jonah hold on to his hate or learn to show mercy and compassion like God? For Israel it was the same question, will they learn to show mercy and compassion to all people, not just Israelites? So, what is the question for you? Please listen to this question, it is for you, right here, right now. Will you let go of your hate or displeasure for the people you struggle with or avoid in your life and be willing to share God's message and mercy and compassion that you have accepted from God with them?

This story's end, leaves you with 2 questions you must answer for yourself.

1. ++Will you answer God's call?
2. ++Will you show compassion like God?

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willing to share God's message and mercy and compassion that you have accepted from God with them?

(Pray)

(Specific) – Choose this week to approach 4 people you would least like to be friends with, consider how God sees them, tell them why you needed to know God loves you, and leave them with a True-Life card. "End of story... boom! So, what duh ya' think you should do?"

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[2] All Bible quotes from this point forward will be taken from the *New American Standard* unless otherwise noted.

[3] *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah: An Introduction and Commentary*, 55.

[4] Billy K. Smith and Franklin S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, vol. 19B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 209.

[5] E. Ray Clendenen, "Jonah, Book Of," ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 941.

[6] Kevin J. Youngblood, *Jonah*, ed. Daniel I. Block, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 32.

[7] Ibid.

[8] E. Ray Clendenen, "Jonah, Book Of," 942.

[9] Ibid.

[10] John Merlin Powis Smith and Julius August Beyer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Jonah*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1912),

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[11] Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 883.