

Jonah 1 - Jonah's Disobedience; The Storm at Sea; Jonah Thrown into the Sea

I. Jonah disobeys his divine commission to preach to Nineveh (Jonah 1:1—2:10)

(1) Running prophet (1:1-17)

(A) Jonah's commission (1:1-2)

(B) Jonah flees to Tarshish (1:3)

(C) Jonah and his shipmates are caught in a storm (1:4-6)

(D) Jonah exposed as the culprit (1:7-9)

(E) Jonah is thrown overboard (1:10-16)

(F) Jonah is swallowed by a giant fish (1:17)

Jonah 1

I. Jonah disobeys his divine commission to preach to Nineveh (Jonah 1:1—2:10)

(1) Running prophet (1:1-17)

(A) Jonah's commission (1:1-2)

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- "The word of the LORD came to" - occurs over 100x in the OT; here, the writer did not record how Jonah received this word from the Lord, nor the timing of this revelation

— Neither are necessarily relevant to the interpretation and application of the story: God's actions are the most important feature in this prophecy

- "...Jonah" - "dove"

2 "Arise, go to **Nineveh**, the great city, and **cry out against it**, because their wickedness has come up before Me."

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2 "Get up and go to Nineveh, that great city! Then cry out in protest against it, because their evil has come to my attention."

2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

- "...Nineveh" - capital of the Assyrian Empire, under Sennacherib; dominated the ancient world from 930-612 BC
- Originally built by Nimrod, along with Babylon and several other cities of Mesopotamia
- Nineveh covered about 1800 acres and stood on the east bank of the Tigris River, across from the modern Iraqi city of Mosul
- "...cry out against it" - inform its inhabitants that God had taken note of their wickedness
- Jonah was not out to announce or list their sins as much as he was to announce that judgment was imminent
- The substance of Jonah's "cry" was recorded later, but God told Jonah now what message he was to speak to Nineveh
- Jonah later relates (4:2) how he expressed strong disapproval with God because God was so merciful that He would not fulfill the judgment that He threatened

(B) Jonah flees to Tarshish (1:3)

3 But Jonah got up to flee to **Tarshish** from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to **Joppa**, found a ship that was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and boarded it to go with them to Tarshish **away from the presence of the LORD**.

3 But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

3 But Jonah got up and fled from the LORD to Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, secured passage on a ship bound for Tarshish, paid the fare, and boarded, intending to go with the mariners to Tarshish to escape from the LORD.

3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

- "...Tarshish" - a distant port from which silver, iron, tin, lead, ivory, monkeys and peacocks were brought to Israel (1 Kings 10:22; Jer 10:9; Ezek 27:12)

— We learn from Heroditus' writings [Heroditus 4:152] that Tarshish was "beyond the Pillars of Hercules" (the region we associate with Gibraltar, or outside the Mediterranean Sea)

— It is impossible today to locate the exact location that Jonah proposed to visit

- "...Joppa" -

- "...away from the presence of the LORD" - *millipne*, refers to an official audience with a king (Cf. Gen 41:46; 2 Kings 6:32); a different phrase (*mippene*) would have indicated that Jonah was simply running away from the Lord.

— Jonah ran away because he concluded that God would select another prophet rather than track him down and make him go to Nineveh

- By going in the opposite direction from Nineveh—as far from Nineveh as was then possible—Jonah was trying to avoid having any part in the Ninevites' repentance (Cf. 4:2)
- In short, he seems to have been trying to run away from the sovereign LORD's formal commission
- This is the only instance in Scripture of a prophet disobeying God's call (Cf. Amos 3:8 for the typical response), though others resisted it (i.e., Moses, Jeremiah)
- Isaiah had previously prophesied that the Assyrians would invade Israel (Is 7:17—8:28), and Hosea, a contemporary of Jonah's, wrote the same thing (Hosea 9:3; 10:6; 11:5)
- However, it was "the presence of the LORD" localized in the Promised Land—mentioned twice in this verse for emphasis—that Jonah sought to escape from more than anything (Cf. v10; Gen 4:16; Ps 139:7,9-10). Specifically, it was God's influence over him. He probably knew that he could not remove himself from the literal presence of the omnipresent Yahweh.

(C) Jonah and his shipmates are caught in a storm (1:4-6)

4 However, the LORD hurled a great wind on the **sea** and there was a great storm on the sea, so that the ship was about to break up.

4 The LORD hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up.

4 Then the LORD sent a great wind over the sea, and a severe storm broke out. It seemed as if the ship were about to break up.

4 But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

- This wasn't a normal storm...the professional seamen were terrified

- "...sea" - the embodiment of chaotic forces that humans cannot control (Cf. Ps 24:2; 33:7; 65:7; 74:13; 77:19; 89:9; 114:3,5; Is 27:1; 51:10; 63:11; Jer 5:22; 31:35, et al)

5 Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried out to his god, and they hurled the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten *it* for them. But Jonah had gone below into the stern of the ship, had lain down, and fallen sound asleep.

5 Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten *it* for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down and fallen sound asleep.

5 At this point the mariners became terrified, and each man cried out to his gods. They began to throw the cargo into the sea in order to lighten the vessel. But Jonah had gone down into the vessel's hold, had lain down, and was fast asleep.

5 Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down

into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.

- There is panic in the storm; they are disposing of their merchandise that they were paid to deliver in order to save their lives. The sailors' willingness to throw their cargo into the sea illustrates the extreme danger they faced (Cf. Acts 27:18-20).

6 So the captain approached him and said, "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."

6 So the captain approached him and said, "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."

6 So the captain approached him, and told him, "What are you doing asleep? Get up! Call on your gods! Maybe your god will think about us so we won't die!"

6 So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

- The mariners see this as a life and death issue, but Jonah is sleeping

— He should have been praying instead of sleeping, in view of the imminent danger

— The normal reaction to danger, even among pagans, is to seek divine intervention, but this is exactly what Jonah wanted to avoid. Jonah did not care if he died (v12).

— How sad that a prophet of God had to be called to prayer by a heathen...

(D) Jonah exposed as the culprit (1:7-9)

7 And each man said to his mate, "Come, let's **cast lots** so that we may find out on whose account this **catastrophe** *has struck* us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.

7 Each man said to his mate, "Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity *has struck* us." So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

7 Meanwhile, each crewman told another, "Come on! Let's cast lots to find out whose fault it is that we're in this trouble." So they cast lots, and the lot indicated Jonah!

7 And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

- "...cast lots" - it appears to have been common among the heathen to cast lots to determine who was responsible for some catastrophe

— Saul resorted to this when he could not get a direct response from God (1 Sam 14:36-42)

— Casting lots was the divinely prescribed method for learning God's will in Israel (Cf. Lev 16:8-10; Num 26:55-56; 33:54; 34:13; 36:2-3; Joshua 14:2; 15:1, 16:1, et al)

— However, as practiced by pagans, it was a superstitious practice designed to produce favorable results. In this case, God overruled and gave the sailors the correct answer to their request (Cf. Prov 16:33).

- "...catastrophe" - *ra'a*, translated as wickedness in v2; God had commissioned Jonah to denounce the moral "wickedness" of Ninevites, but he had instead become a source of "catastrophe" to the pagan sailors.

8 Then they said to him, "Tell us, now! On whose account *has* this catastrophe *struck* us? What is your occupation, and where do you come from? What is your country, and from what people are you?"

8 Then they said to him, "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?"

8 So they interrogated him: "Tell us, why has this trouble come upon us? What's your occupation? Where'd you come from? What's your home country? What's your nationality?"

8 Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?

- The sailors proceeded to interrogate Jonah when they believed they had identified the culprit responsible for their calamity

9 So he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."

9 He said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."

9 "I'm a Hebrew," he replied, "and I'm afraid of the LORD God of heaven, who made the sea—along with the dry land!"

9 And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.

- It was the fact that this Hebrew God had made "the sea" on which they traveled, as well as "the dry land," that convinced the sailors that Jonah had done something very serious — It was obvious to them that Jonah's God was after him, and had sent the storm to put him in His hands. Ironically, what was so clear to these pagans was obscure to the runaway prophet.

(E) Jonah is thrown overboard (1:10-16)

10 Then the men became extremely afraid, and they said to him, "**How could you do this?**" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

10 Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, "How could you do this?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

10 In mounting terror, the men asked him, "What have you done?" The men were aware that he was fleeing from the LORD, because he had admitted this to them.

10 Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

- "...How could you do this?" - not an inquiry, but an expression of terror

— The sailors' exclamation expressed their incredulity at Jonah's naiveté in trying to run away from the God who created the sea—by taking a sea voyage!

— Before, the sailors had feared the storm, but now they feared the LORD, recognizing the Creator above the creation

11 So they said to him, "What should we do to you so that the sea will become calm for us?"—for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy.

11 So they said to him, "What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?"—for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy.

11 Because the sea was growing more and more stormy, they asked him, "What do we have to do to you so the sea will calm down for us?"

11 Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.

- The sailors might have known what to do with Jonah, had he been a criminal guilty of some crime, or if he had accidentally transgressed a law of his God

— However, he was guilty of being a servant of his God and directly disobeying the LORD's order to him

— They had no idea what would placate the Creator of the sea in such a case, so they asked Jonah, since he knew his God

12 And he said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, because I know that on account of me this great storm *has come* upon you."

12 He said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm *has come* upon you."

12 Jonah told them, "Pick me up and toss me into the sea. Then the sea will calm down for you, because I know that it's my fault that this mighty storm has come upon you."

12 And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

- Jonah's answer reveals the double-mindedness of the prophet. He could have asked the sailors to sail back to Joppa, if he really intended to obey the LORD and go to Nineveh.

- His repentance surely would have resulted in God withholding judgment from the sailors, just as the Ninevites' repentance later resulted in His withholding judgment from them
- Jonah was not ready to obey God just yet
- Nonetheless, his compassion and concern for the lives of the sailors led him to give them a plan designed to release them from God's punishment. It would also likely result in his death, which he regarded as preferable to obeying God.
- His heart was still as hard as ever toward the plight of the Ninevites, even though he acknowledged that he knew God was disciplining him

13 However, the men rowed *desperately* to return to land, but they could not, because the sea was becoming *even* stormier against them.

13 However, the men rowed *desperately* to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming *even* stormier against them.

13 Even so, the crewmen rowed hard to bring the ship toward dry land, but they were unsuccessful, because the sea was growing more and more stormy.

13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

- The sailors initially rejected Jonah's advice and compassionately chose to drop him off at the nearest landfall. Normally sailors would have avoided the shoreline in a storm, because it would prove dangerous.

— They strained every muscle for Jonah's sake, literally digging their oars into the water. They demonstrated more concern for one man than Jonah had for the thousands of men, women, and children in Nineveh.

— When reaching land became impossible due to the raging sea, they prayed to *Yahweh*, something that we have no record that Jonah had done.

14 Then they cried out to the LORD and said, "We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man's life, and do not put **innocent blood** on us; for You, LORD, have done as You pleased."

14 Then they called on the LORD and said, "We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, O LORD, have done as You have pleased."

14 At last they cried out to the LORD, "Please, LORD, do not let us perish because of this man's life, and do not hold us responsible for innocent blood, because you, LORD, have done what pleased you."

14 Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.

- It's interesting that the sailors' passion for Jonah was greater than Jonah's passion for the Ninevites

— The sailors had voiced belief in God's sovereignty, which Jonah had denied by his behavior

- "...innocent blood" - *naqi*, Jonah was innocent of death because he had not committed any crimes for which that was the sentence; yet nothing less than death is what he deserved for sinning against God

— They requested forgiveness from guilt since they anticipated that Jonah would die because of their act

— These Gentiles, who didn't know God, instinctively understood the value of human life and pleaded for mercy for (apparently) killing an innocent man. They recognized God's sovereignty here.

15 So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging.

15 So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging.

15 So they picked up Jonah and tossed him into the sea, and the sea stopped raging.

15 So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

- The immediate cessation of the storm showed the sailors that Yahweh really did control the sea

16 Then the men became extremely afraid of the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

16 Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

16 Then the men feared the LORD greatly, offered a sacrifice to the LORD, and made vows.

16 Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.

- What a contrast between the mariners, who didn't know the law of God, and Jonah, a prophet of God

— They feared (respected and became afraid of) Him, "offered a sacrifice" to Him (when they reached shore?), and "made vows" (perhaps to venerate Him, Cf. Ps 116:17-18)

(F) Jonah is swallowed by a giant fish (1:17)

17 And the LORD **designated** a **great fish** to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish for **three days and three nights**.

17 And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.

17 Now the LORD had prepared a large sea creature to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the sea creature for three days and three nights.

17 Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

- "...designated" - *manah*, means to appoint or to ordain; it describes God's intervention in natural events to bring about His will

- Here, God controlled what was humanly uncontrollable to spare Jonah's life. The God who is great enough to control the behavior of fish can control anything, and He used His power for a loving purpose.

- "...great fish" - *dag*, fish; describes a variety of aquatic creatures

- Jesus Himself attests to the reality of Jonah inside the "large sea creature" as a prophecy of His own undertaking on our behalf (His death and resurrection) (Matt 12:40)

- Jonah being swallowed by the great fish was not an act of divine punishment, but divine preservation

- "...three days and three nights" - significant because Jonah's deliverance became a precursor for an even greater salvation that also took three days and three nights to accomplish

- God restored Jonah to life so he would be God's instrument in providing salvation to a large Gentile population under God's judgment for their sins