

Jonah: The Rebellious Prophet

5. Jonah: Called to preach again



Understanding Jonah helps us understand the heart and nature of the God of Israel. God has compassion not only on Jonah but also on the people of Nineveh. Once Jonah repents and cries out to the Lord, the Lord is ready to use him again. Jonah was called to reach the cruel pagan Assyrians in the city of Nineveh, Jonah rebelled against God's command. He thought his ideas were better, trusting in his own thinking he fled to Tarshish.

Jonah's hardness was towards God's love and compassion on Nineveh. The extent of his hardness is demonstrated by the level of "affliction" before Jonah would turn. Not even the ship being cast in the waves to point of breaking changed his heart. Only after he was thrown into the sea and was at the point of death, did Jonah change his heart. At this point, he prayed, and God listened to his prayer and delivered him from death by sending a "fish" to swallow him from sure death.

God's desire and compassion toward Jonah despite his rebellion can give us all heart. God is willing to use us, even if we did not want to be used. God can use us once we are willing to turn from our rebellion and humble ourselves. This is the message we can personally take from Jonah; we like Jonah can be used by God once we are willing to turn to the calling, we have.

God's desire to reach Nineveh through his rebellious prophet is a picture of the heart of God. God loves the lost; God loves those made in his image. Jesus was God who incarnated

Himself into our world to "Redeem" (us) lost humanity through His death on the cross. Jonah's ministry was a "type" or model of Jesus ministry, Christ like Jonah after being in the "heart of the earth" for three days and three nights was sent to the Gentiles to offer them redemption.

39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

40 "For 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 in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. Matthew 12:39-41

Jonah was given a message to preach to Nineveh, the message was of God's coming judgment. The people understood Jonah's message of judgment, the fear of God's wrath caused them to repent. They cried out to God for mercy, fearing the wrath to come. Jesus like Jonah warned the world of the wrath to come and God's mercy and redemption. The warning of hell in the Gospels is two times the promise of Heaven. Hell is a reality of God's judgment on fallen humanity, for this reason Jesus came to rescue us from our fallen nature.

Jonah Restored

Jonah 3

- 1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying,
- 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."

Word of the Lord: The term "Word of the Lord" is used both in the Old and New Testaments. The term is used 249 times in the Old Testament, while in the New Testament the term is used 14-times. Jesus is the Word of God, which became flesh.

- 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- 2 He was in the beginning with God.
- 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.
- 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:1-3,14

The "Word" Jonah offered was salvation and redemption from the coming judgment on the city. In Matthew 12:41, Jesus proclaims the men of Nineveh will testify against the men of Judah because they rejected the salvation offered by the "Word" who became flesh. As believers we have been entrusted with the Word of the Lord to deliver to the lost and dying world.

Second time: The first time was in Jonah 1:1, God gives Jonah a "Second chance" to deliver his message to Nineveh. The God of Jonah is a God of "Second chances", he gives Israel second chances, and He gives us second chances.

Arise: Jonah had just been deposited by the fish on the shore, Jonah had a 30-day journey to the city of Nineveh. The circumstances of the city were prepared for message of Jonah. Even his being delivered from a fish might have enhanced and prepared the delivery of his message and he left for the city. Maybe people witnessed a huge fish vomit a man on shore, now Jonah being inside the fish for 3 days and nights, might not have looked the same giving more immediacy of his message. News could have spread ahead of Jonah as he travelled to Assyria, prepping the people for his message.

Go to Nineveh: The city would have been a 30-day journey from the shore of Mediterranean Sea, or about 550 miles from Jonah's home.

great city: The city of Nineveh is specifically called a great city four times in the book of Jonah. Some background to the city of Nineveh, the city is one of the oldest cities in the Bible, it was founded by Nimrod, after the flood (Gen. 10:8-10). During the reign of Sennacherib, it became the capital of the Assyrian Kingdom, prior to that it was one of the major cities.

Preach: The Hebrew word means *to call, to recite, to utter a loud sound, to proclaim*. This is same word used in Arabic for the word "Quran" the book that records the message of

Mohammad. Mohammad claimed to be the final prophet sent to the non-Jewish world. The same area today, where Jonah preached is now mostly Muslim.





Artist's interpretation of Assyrian palaces from 'The Monuments of Nineveh' by Sir Austen Henry Layard. 1853. After James Fergusson (1808 - 1886)

Jonah was told to preach the message revealed by the Lord to the city. Jesus has given us the same calling of Jonah, to preach or proclaim the "Good News" to the nations.

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.
19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen Matthew 28:18-20

The purpose of everyone who trusts the Lord is summarized in these verses. What are we to do with our salvation in Jesus Christ through the Gospel? Now that we know the Lord, what do we do? From this verse the marching orders are the following.

1. *Make disciples of all nations*
2. *Baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit*
3. *Teaching them to observe all things Jesus has commanded*

Like Jonah, we are told to reach the Gentiles those who are without knowledge of God. Jesus modeled his ministry after Jonah, therefore our ministry to reach a lost world is also modeled after the ministry of Jonah. Was Jonah fearful of going to the kingdom of Assyria to Nineveh, to confront the king of the most powerful kingdom in the east? Though he was a prophet, he was only human, fear probably paid a role in his running in the opposite direction. Like Jonah, confronting people with the "Gospel" can be a fearful thing.

When Jonah was picked up in the sea by the fish, he learned that God was in control of the circumstances. Not one thing was going to happen to Jonah that God did not know about. If God was sending Jonah, God was in control of the Assyrian Kingdom. Jesus also instructs us to not be afraid to preach the Gospel, why? Because of two reasons:

1. *All authority has been given to Jesus in Heaven and on earth*
2. *Jesus is with us always, even to the end of this age*

Like Jonah, we must comprehend what that means, God sent Jonah to the city because God had purpose beyond Jonah's understanding. So in like manner, we have purpose and meaning beyond our understanding. Jesus instructs us of this abiding relationship we have with Him that transcends this world in John chapters 15 to 17.

1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.
2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.....
7 "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.....
26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.
27 "And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.
John 15:1-2,7-8,26-27

13 "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.
14 "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. John 16:13-14

Message: God had given Jonah a message to deliver to the people of Nineveh. Jonah was God's mouthpiece. Again, looking at the model of Jonah, we are also called to deliver the message to the nations. What is the message Jonah was called to deliver? In verse Jonah 3:4, the essence of the message was *"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"*. Jonah was delivering a message of God's coming wrath and judgment on a disobedient and wicked people. Jonah more than likely spoke more than these words.

What is the "Message" we are called to deliver? Jesus has given us the Gospel to deliver to the nations. The word Gospel is from the Greek word, *Euangelion*, meaning "Good tidings" or Good News. The Good News was the Kingdom of God was at hand and available to lost people. The Good News was that the Messiah, promised by the prophets was at hand. Jesus presented the Good News of the Kingdom to Israel, but Israel failed to accept Him.

23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. Matthew 4:23

Jesus was the focus of the Kingdom of God both in the Old and New Testaments. The coming Messiah would be God Himself, (Isaiah 9:6-7). Israel rejected Jesus, therefore Jesus made Himself available to the nations, through His church. We are called to deliver the Good News of salvation to the nations. The Good News is that faith in Jesus brings reconciliation with God.

15 "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:15-16

Paul summarizes the Gospel, the Message, we are called to deliver to the nations, in Romans chapter 5. Jesus Christ died in our place so we can have eternal life, fulfilling the words of the prophet Isaiah.

14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

15 But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.

16 And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification.

17 For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

18 Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.

19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. Romans 5:14-19

I tell you: The message is from God; God reveals the words to His servants. Just like Jonah, the message we have is directly from the Lord. The prophets of God delivered the message they received. In the same light, our message put us in the same light as the prophets in the Old Testament. We are called to the same mission as the prophets.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Matthew 5:10-14

Journey to Nineveh

3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent.

Jonah arose: Jonah is on the shore at this point, vomited up by the fish. The details of the journey between the shore and the city of Nineveh are not spelled out. From verse 3 to verse 4 is about 30-days of travel time.

Three-day Journey: Most commentators put this at 60-miles based on a travel range of 20-miles a day. This would include the outlying suburbs and surrounding cities. Someone living in Medina, Strongsville or Chagrin would refer to their city as Cleveland, because Cleveland is the larger more well known city.

Jonah preaches

4 And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

Jonah began: Jonah did not know anyone in the city, he just began and committed his words to those who would listen.

He cried: Jonah was a preacher. If we put ourselves in Jonah's place we know he was not in comfort. His ministry was one of confrontation. He probably was fluent in Assyrian, since the area of Israel he was in would have direct contacts with Assyria in times past. So he was fluent enough in the language to go the capital and deliver the message.

Forty days: Nineveh was prepared for the message of Jonah by the events which took place before he arrived. From history we know the city had experienced a full solar eclipse sandwiched by two plagues. If the people were proud they could have been incensed at Jonah's message, but they were humbled by the events.

How do you think people in America would respond to the message of Jonah? Would people laugh at him as a crack pot?

Jon 3:5 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

Nineveh believes

6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes.

7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water.

8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

9 Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.