

MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGMENT -- COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF JONAH

by Paul G. Apple, September 2005

(Revised September 2007 – Added Notes from Pastor Leake – Hope Bible Church in Columbia MD; Revised November 2025)

THE SOVEREIGN DISPOSITION OF GOD’S MERCY AND GRACE EXPOSES THE PRIDE AND JEALOUSY OF JUDGMENTAL BELIEVERS

“I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.”
(Jonah 4:2)

For each section in the Book of Jonah:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

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OVERVIEW OF BOOK OF JONAH

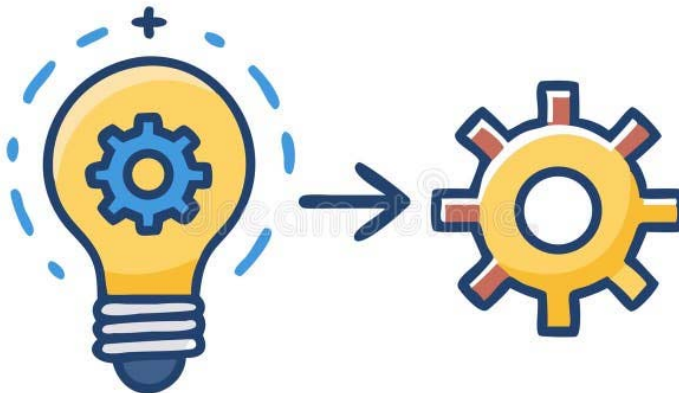
INTRODUCTION

My fear in delivering a message on the book of Jonah is that the story is so familiar to most of us that we will end up tuning out and miss the important **Life Lessons** that God wants to teach us. Jonah is by far the most familiar of the Minor Prophets. The four chapters are simple to outline and the plot of the story is easy to follow.

As we work our way through the book this morning, my focus will be on the Life Lessons that we should take away from our study. Focus on these at the end of each chapter.



But I don't just want the light bulb to go off as we understand the **Practical Application** . . . that is not enough. We must implement God's truth and put it into action in our daily lives. So please try to put aside your familiarity with Jonah's story and be open to the Life Lessons that God wants you to adopt and integrate into your journey of Christian discipleship. How can we become more like our Lord Jesus Christ? How can God enlarge our heart so that it mirrors His?



Structure of the Book:

- | | | |
|-----|------------------|----------------------------|
| I. | Chaps 1-2 | First Commission of Jonah |
| II. | Chaps 3-4 | Second Commission of Jonah |

Outlines:

J. Sidlow Baxter

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| Chap 1 | Jonah and the Storm - Disobedience
Commanded to go preach message of judgment to Nineveh;
Tried to flee to Tarshish instead
Lord sent a great storm and Jonah ended up being tossed overboard
Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah |
| Chap 2 | Jonah and the Fish - Deliverance
Prayer of thanksgiving, submission and expectation of deliverance
Fish vomits Jonah up onto dry land |
| Chap 3 | Jonah and the City - Declaration -- Proclamation
Second commission; this time Jonah obeys right away
Message: Yet 40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown
King declares a national fast
God relents and withdraws His promised judgment |
| Chap 4 | Jonah and the Lord - Disputation -- Correction to the Prophet
Jonah is greatly displeased
Sat outside the city under the shelter of a plant from the Lord
God sent a worm to destroy the plant and expose Jonah to heat
God sent a scorching east wind so that Jonah wanted to die
Lord teaches Jonah the key lesson about mercy and compassion |

[John MacArthur:

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| Chap 1 | Running from God's Will |
| Chap 2 | Submitting to God's Will |
| Chap 3 | Fulfilling God's Will |
| Chap 4 | Questioning God's Will |

Another Option:

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Chap 1 | Running from God - | Prophet's Rebellion |
| Chap 2 | Returning to God - | Prophet's Repentance |
| Chap 3 | Responding to God - | Prophet's Restoration |
| Chap 4 | Resisting God's Mercy - | Prophet's Resentment] |

My Outline:

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Chap 1 | <u>Jonah's Flight</u>
Running Away from God Never Works –
It Only Exposes a Heart Opposed to God's Sovereign Agenda |
| Chap 2 | <u>Jonah's Focus (Fervency / Faith)</u>
The God of the Second Chance Hears Our Desperate Cries
Despite the Depths of Our Distress |

Chap 3

Jonah's Faithfulness

The Preaching of God's Prophetic Message of Imminent Judgment Can Change Men's Hearts and Turn Away God's Impending Wrath

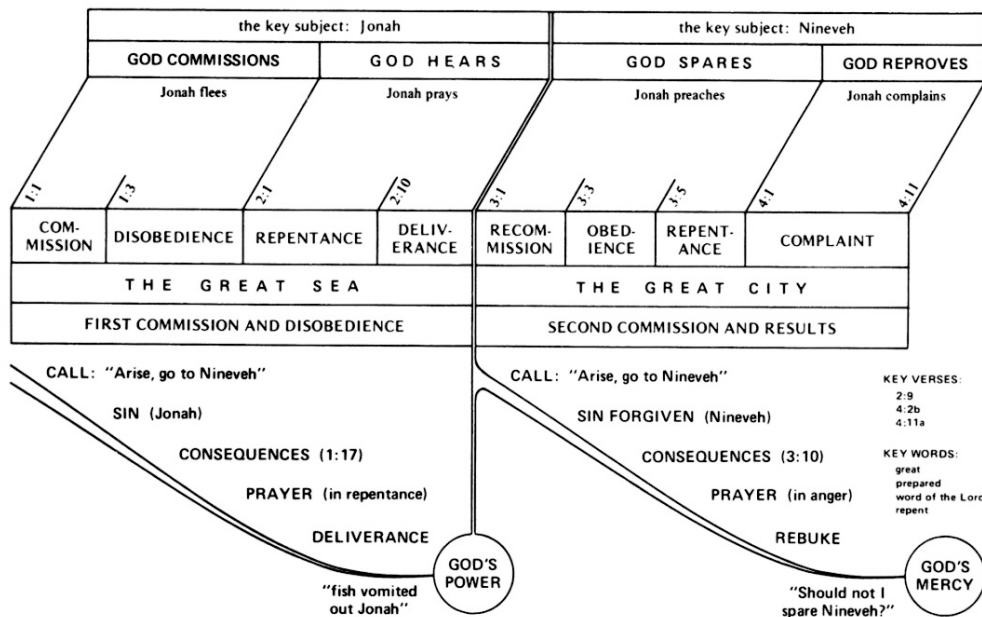
Chap 4

Jonah's Failure (Frustration)

Those Who Benefit from God's Compassion Have No Right to Complain Against the Sovereign Extension of Mercy to Others (No Matter How Undeserving)

Summary of the 4 chapters: I won't go / I will go / I am here / I shouldn't have come

PreceptAustin.org – Graphical Outline



OVERVIEW

The Book of Jonah calls us to examine the motivation of our hearts in serving God. Are we truly sold out to God's sovereign will or trying to push our own agenda? Does our heart mirror the compassionate heart of God – overflowing with mercy and grace; or do we evidence a judgmental spirit? Do we love the world without prejudice and without reservation or do we withhold our love from certain groups?

Jonah struggled with the tension between fulfilling his calling as God's prophet and remaining loyal to his nationalistic pride and natural sense of fair judgment. He hated the wicked Ninevites. He appreciated God's deliverance in giving him a second chance to carry out his mission, but wanted to dictate the results rather than rejoice in God's sovereign disposition of mercy.

Big Idea:

The Sovereign Disposition of God's Mercy and Grace Exposes the Pride And Prejudice of Judgmental Believers

CHAP 1: JONAH'S FLIGHT -- RUNNING AWAY FROM GOD --
WHERE CAN I HIDE FROM HIS PRESENCE?

BIG IDEA: RUNNING AWAY FROM GOD NEVER WORKS –
IT ONLY EXPOSES A HEART THAT IS OPPOSED TO GOD'S SOVEREIGN
AGENDA

INTRODUCTION:

People try to run away from God for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1) Run away from His Presence – | Desire to Hide from God |
| 2) Run away from His Calling or His Mission – | Desire to Do Your Own Thing |
| 3) Run away from His Accountability over you – | Desire to Escape Judgment |

But there is no escaping God. That doesn't change the reality that in their desperation and panic, people's first impulse is to try to flee and escape.

I. (:1-3) A JUDGMENTAL SPIRIT AVOIDS MISSIONS OF COMPASSION AND MERCY

[Why?

- thinking people don't deserve to be helped
- thinking it's not my job or responsibility to get involved]

A. (:1-2) Jonah's Calling – The Compassion of God for a Lost World Cannot be Reconciled with a Judgmental Spirit

1. The Prophet of God Should Always Welcome the Word of God
“The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying”

Who is this Jonah?

Name means “Dove” – some scholars joke that he is more like a hawk ... or maybe a chicken ...

But perhaps the name is intended for **irony**:

- A dove should fly toward its task, but Jonah flees
- A dove is a messenger of hope, while Jonah wishes against Nineveh's repentance
- A dove's message typically signals mercy, while Jonah prefers judgment

Other reference to Jonah: **2 Kings 14:25** – mentions Jonah –

“[Jeroboam II] restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.”

he predicted the extent of the conquests of **Jeroboam II** who reigned from **793-753 BC**; very patriotic person – came from a city of the tribe of Zebulun in **northern Israel**; located about one hour's walk from Nazareth –What person of renown has ever come out of Nazareth? Jonah did!

Elijah and Elisha were the two prophets who preceded him in speaking to Israel; Amos and Hosea came right after Jonah

Should always be an exciting experience to receive new revelation from God.

God's commands are not burdensome ... should not be distasteful; we should desire what God desires

2. Jonah's Commission Was Clear But Distasteful

“Arise, go to Nineveh the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.”

Reputation of wicked Nineveh well-known – especially their cruelty and violence. No surprise that Jonah found this mission unsettling.

Tremendous **cruelty** of the Assyrians – **Baxter, p. 160** – ripped out tongues; cut off limbs; flayed captives alive and hung their skins for all to see; impaled them on poles, etc.

Proclamation was one of **Judgment** – “cry against it”

But Heart of God is one of Compassion and Mercy – even towards these Gentile pagans
Heart of Jonah was one of Bitterness and Condemnation and Prejudice

B. (:3) Jonah's Rebellion – Substituting His Judgmental Agenda for the Lord's Mission of Mercy -- “But” – not a great word to see after God issues a command

“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.” Instead of 500 miles NE. Headed 2000 miles west – the opposite direction



Called the reluctant prophet ... but we could use much stronger terminology ... direct rebellion here – **Why did he disobey? We will see the reason in 4:1-3**

II. (:4-9) OPEN REBELLION FLIES IN THE FACE OF OUR PROFESSED FEAR OF GOD

A. (:4) Terrifying Situation – The Perfect Storm

“And 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.”

Lot of hurling going on in this book:

- The Lord hurling the great wind to cause the terrifying storm
- The sailors hurling their cargo overboard to try to stay afloat
- The great fish hurling Jonah back to dry ground

We are going to see how the Lord controls everything – His sovereignty extends over all and He performs all sorts of miracles in this book

B. (:5a) Appropriate Fear Motivates Pagans to Take Desperate Measures

1. Reality of Their Fear

“Then the sailors became afraid”

These were hard core sailors, in their element, but recognizing they were up against unusually powerful forces of nature

2. Renewal of Their Religious Commitments

“and every man cried to his god”

There are no atheists in the foxhole of battle – When you are desperate, wherever you turn for help defines your god or your idol

3. Resourcefulness of Their Desperate Tactics – did everything humanly possible

“and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them.”

C. (:5b-6) Rebellion Associated with Exhaustion and Prayerlessness

“But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down, and fallen sound asleep. 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.’”

If he didn’t care about his own safety, at least he should be praying for the safety of the others

D. (:7-8) Exposure of Jonah as the Cause of the Calamity

1. (:7) The Inquiry – Who is to Blame?

“And 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.”

2. (:8) The Inquisition – Who are You really and What did you do?

“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?" – answered this question first

E. (:9) Empty Profession of Faith – not really practicing the fear of the Lord

"And he said to them, 'I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land.'"

Jonah did not serve some limited, local deity – look at all of the important applications that flow from maintaining the doctrine of Creationism – we cannot continue to give ground on that front

III. (:10-16) PACIFYING THE LORD REQUIRES THE PAYING OF THE APPROPRIATE PRICE

In this instance, Jonah had to be tossed into the sea to quiet the storm

A. (:10-12) Figuring Out the Price that Needs to be Paid –

Only One Price Will Satisfy

1. (:10) Indignation at Jonah's Foolishness to Put Them All in Jeopardy

"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."

Even the pagans understood that you cannot flee from an all-present Sovereign

2. (:11) Pursuit of Justice

"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."

- How to punish the transgressor in appropriate fashion

- How to spare the victims further damage

3. (:12) Only One Solution

"And 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.'"

Cf. how salvation attacked as exclusivistic – there is only one price God will accept

B. (:13-14) Last Ditch Effort at Mercy

(Jonah unwilling for people of Nineveh to be shown mercy; but here the pagans are willing to extend mercy to Jonah if at all possible)

1. (:13) Self Effort can seem Magnanimous, but actually is Counter Productive

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

2. (:14) Plea for Absolution / Accepting the Inevitable

"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 Thou, O Lord, hast done as Thou hast pleased.'"

C. (:15) Paying the Price Demanded

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

D. (:16) Genuine Conversion Results in Genuine Fear of the Lord and Obedient Commitment

*“Then the men feared the Lord greatly,
and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord
and made vows.”*

(:17) CONCLUSION: SOLITARY CONFINEMENT FOR THE REBELLIOUS RUNAWAY

A. Divine Appointment – This was the instrument of God’s gracious deliverance for the rebellious prophet

“And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah”

Here is where many people have trouble believing this really happened.

- Talking with an administrator of a seminary – inquiring about possible teaching courses – he seemed proud of the fact that his faculty was so tolerant that it included professors who viewed the book of Jonah as just a myth – I wasn’t impressed -- shocked
- Other Historical examples -- **Baxter, p. 153** -- But that is not why I believe the story is true; Jonah was probably a strange looking fellow when he was vomited up – bleached look from the acid of the stomach
- Problem is whether you are predisposed to doubt that God performs **miracles**

B. Death and Resurrection Experience

“and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.”

So Jonah is clearly a **historical figure** – we will see that Christ did not treat this story as an allegory or a parable or a myth – but as real history – **Mat 12:38-41**

“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’³⁹ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;⁴⁰ for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.⁴¹ The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.’” Lot of **Christology** in this type of Christ; don’t skip the burial of Christ – part of the gospel summary in **1 Cor. 15:4**

Chap. 1 Life Lessons:

- You can’t hide from God or run away from God

Psalm 139:7-12

“Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. ⁹ If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, ¹⁰ Even there Thy hand will lead me, And Thy right hand will lay hold of me. ¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness will

overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night," ¹² Even the darkness is not dark to Thee, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to Thee."

- Your rebellion impacts others with negative consequences as well as yourself
 - It's not enough to profess to fear the Lord; your actions must demonstrate that you do
 - The consequences of rebellion can be very severe
-

CHAP 2: JONAH'S FOCUS (FERVENCY / FAITH) -- CRYING OUT TO GOD IN DESPERATE PRAYER – CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

BIG IDEA:

**THE GOD OF THE SECOND CHANCE HEARS OUR DESPERATE CRIES
DESPITE THE DEPTHS OF OUR DISTRESS
(GOD'S DELIVERANCE IS NOT CONSTRAINED BY THE DEPTHS OF OUR
DISTRESS)**

INTRODUCTION:

Do you ever feel that your situation is so hopeless and entangled that God could never bail you out? As long as you can still pray there is still hope.

I. (:1-2) ANSWERED PRAYER REACHES DOWN TO THE DEPTHS OF OUR DISTRESS

"Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, 'I called out of my distress to the Lord, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; Thou didst hear my voice.'"

A. Prayer as the Lifeline Connection to our Personal God

"prayed to the Lord his God"

B. Prayer in the Nick of Time -- Even as the Last Resort

- *Jonah prayed*
- *I called out to the Lord*
- *I cried for help*

Context: running away from God; under God's hand of judgment – yet still able to pray to God for help.

In the belly of the fish for three days and three nights – did he start calling out to God right away . . . or did he sulk for some time?

C. Prayer from the Depths of Distress (Impossible Complications)

- *from the stomach of the fish*
- *my distress*
- *from the depth of Sheol*

D. Prayer that Receives Merciful Response – (The Mercy of Answered Prayer)

- *He answered me*
- *Thou didst hear my voice*

The Lord wants to train us to be merciful instead of judgmental and prideful.
He wants our heart of compassion to be wide like His.

[David Guzik: God can give us a total peace and assurance that our prayers have been answered, even before the actual answer comes]

II. (:3-4) HOPE COMES FROM UNDERSTANDING THE HAND OF THE LORD IN ADMINISTERING DISCIPLINE

“For Thou hadst cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the current engulfed me. All Thy breakers and billows passed over me. So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Thy sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Thy holy temple.’”

[A. Sovereign Discipline – from the hand of the Lord

“Thou hadst cast me”

“Thy breakers and billows”

B. Severe Discipline

“into the deep”

“into the heart of the seas”

C. Surpassing Discipline – beyond measure – looks like I am permanently separated from God

“engulfed me”

“passed over me”

“So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Thy sight.’”

D. Sufficient Discipline – Accomplishes purpose of Restoration and Orientation towards Holiness, Worship and Service

“Nevertheless I will look again toward Thy holy temple.”]

III. (:5-6) THE AWESOMENESS OF THE DELIVERANCE CORRESPONDS TO THE MESSINESS AND HOPELESSNESS OF THE PIT

A. The Messiness and Hopelessness of the Pit -- 5 Images

“Water encompassed me to the point of death”

“The great deep engulfed me.”

“Weeds were wrapped around my head.”

“I descended to the roots of the mountains.”.

“The earth with its bars was around me forever,”

Interesting that the fish did not immediately catch Jonah as he was cast into the deep; instead Jonah sank to the bottom and experienced great despair

B. The Awesomeness of the Deliverance

“But Thou has brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.”

IV. (:7-9) REPENTANCE SPARKS RENEWED COMMITMENT AND THANKSGIVING

A. Turning Back to the Lord with his Last Gasp

“While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to Thee, into Thy holy temple.”

B. Specific Repentance to Return to Faithfulness

“Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness”

C. Renewed Commitment

1. Worship from a Heart of Thanksgiving

“But I will sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving.”

Interesting **Thanksgiving season** application here for us – Certainly our lot has fallen to us in far more pleasant places than the belly of the great fish in the depths of the sea

2. Service in the context of Faithfulness

“That which I have vowed I will pay.”

3. Dependence Upon God’s Grace and Mercy

“Salvation is from the Lord.”

Nothing that Jonah could contribute to his deliverance.

Note: But we can tell from the events of Chapter 4 and Jonah’s attitude there that he had not fully repented or grasped the lessons yet that the Lord had for him.

V. (:10) SOVEREIGN DELIVERANCE BRINGS US TO THE PLACE OF SAFETY AND RENEWED SERVICE

A. The Sovereign Lord Accomplishes His Purposes

“The Lord commanded the fish”

B. The Process of Restoration Can be Painful and Messy

“and it vomited Jonah up”

Jonah pictures Israel’s future repentance and restoration (**Hos. 3:5; Zech. 12:10**). God preserves the nation despite rebellion, intending to use them again for global blessing.

C. The Place of Safety Brings Opportunity for Renewed Service

“onto the dry land”

Now it is time to obediently answer the call of God and go minister to Nineveh.

Chap. 2 Life Lessons:

- As long as we have breath, turn to the Lord in prayer
- God is gracious to hear our prayers when we repent – even after we have been rebellious
- **Salvation is from the Lord** – can come in dramatic fashion; we contribute nothing

- The Lord **commands everything** in this passage – the wind **1:4; 4:8**; the lot **1:7**; the sea **1:15**; the great fish **1:17; 2:10**; the repentance of Nineveh **3:10**; a plant **4:6**; a worm **4:7**; only Jonah disobeys
- Spiritual commitment is our responsibility
-

CHAP 3: JONAH'S FAITHFULNESS -- PREACHING GOD'S PROPHETIC MESSAGE
– WILL YOU REPENT IN TIME?

BIG IDEA:

THE PREACHING OF GOD'S PROPHETIC MESSAGE OF IMMINENT JUDGMENT CAN CHANGE MEN'S HEARTS AND TURN AWAY THE IMPENDING WRATH OF GOD

INTRODUCTION:

Cf. a mulligan in golf; opportunity to replay the shot
Jonah still doesn't have the right attitude and heart of compassion – we will see in **chapter 4**. He has heart of contempt and judgment – that is the main emphasis of the book – God wants to work on the **heart** of His people so that our heart towards the lost reflects His heart of compassion and mercy.

I. (:1-3) THE MESSENGER – CALLED TO DELIVER THE GOODS -- SAME CALLING . . . DIFFERENT RESPONSE

A. (:1) God Calls His Prophet a Second Time – Service is a Privilege

"Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying" How long??
He is the God of the Second Chance; but don't presume upon His patience

[**Doug Goins**: Let me ask you: Has the discipline of God, the distress that God has brought into your life because of sin, made you more obedient or less obedient to him? In the long haul have you become more flexible or less flexible in responding to God's heart desires? Are you more submissive to his will or less submissive? Has the stress made you bitter toward God, or better in serving him and following him? Are you more consistent in running with him and agreeing with him?]

B. (:2) God Commands Faithfulness in Proclaiming His Message

*"Arise, go to Nineveh the **great city** and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you."*
God doesn't always give us the entire picture up front.

C. (:3) God Casts a Big Vision of Great Challenge and Great Compassion

*"So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an **exceedingly great city**, a three days' walk."*

- a very **significant city**
Located about 40 miles east of Syria; a grand city; the last capital of the Assyrian Empire (705 BC)
- a very **large city**
- Significance of the reference to 3 days:

- Walking the circumference???
- Time to walk thru the city itself and deliver the message??
- Most importantly: an exceedingly great city to God – inner cities like Baltimore tend to be written off and neglected as a mission field – but important to God

[Bill McRae: 20 sq miles larger than London – Term Nineveh can be used of the city proper and city with its suburbs – 3 days travel; plenty of room for a large population; Fortified by a wall that was 100 feet high; at the base it was 50 feet thick; so wide at the top you could drive 3 chariots side by side; guarded by 1500 towers – each 200 feet high]

II. (:4) THE MISSION -- PROCLAIMING MESSAGE OF IMPENDING DESTRUCTION

A. Tackling the Scope of the Mission – Hardest part is actually beginning

*“Then Jonah began to go through the city **one day’s walk**”*

B. Conveying the Urgency of the Mission

“and he cried out and said”

C. Proclaiming the Message of the Mission – Unpopular and Dangerous

*“Yet **forty days** and Nineveh will be overthrown.”*

Short sermons can be quite effective!

40 days = time of testing or divine judgment – see it in other bible texts – God watching as well as Jonah – would the people repent?

III. (:5-9) THE MOVEMENT – HUMBLING THEMSELVES AND PETITIONING GOD FOR HIS MERCY

Perhaps most impressive and astonishing people movement of all time – an entire city repenting and turning away from their wickedness and back to God

What inspired such a dramatic turnaround?

- God’s heart of love and compassion reaching out to them
- Circumstances of the unusual prophet

Astonishing Revival ... Unprecedented – cf. preaching of George Whitfield in England

A. (:5) Response of the People

1. Faith – The essential starting point

“Then the people of Nineveh believed in God”

Corporate movement towards repentance on the part of all the people

2. Humbling themselves before God

“and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.”

Involves confession of sin and petitioning God for mercy

No caste system when it comes to our standing before God

B. (:6-8) Response of the King

C. (:9) Fear of God coupled with Hope in His Mercy

“Who knows, God may turn and relent, and withdraw His burning anger so that

we shall not perish?”

III. (:10) THE MERCY – RESPONDING BY AVERTING EXECUTION OF WRATH

A. Awareness of Fruits of Repentance

“When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way”

B. Averting Execution of Wrath

“then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.”

This generation genuinely repented; only takes one generation to all away in unbelief

Chap. 3 Life Lessons:

- God gives second chances—to serve, to obey, to speak. Are we a church where broken sinners get a second chance? Failure does not always disqualify from future service.
- Faithfulness, not sophistication, is the key to ministry impact. Simple message
- Whole cities can change when God’s Word is preached. Power of the Holy Spirit; Lifelong pattern of repenting and believing – not a one-time experience
- Even reluctant obedience is better than no obedience.

You might think that the book would end at this point; the prophet failed to obey God’s commission; God disciplined him; now the prophet fulfils his mission and the city repents. What more remains to be said? If we stop at this point we miss the whole point of the story.

CHAP 4: JONAH’S FAILURE (FRUSTRATION) – BEGRUDGING GOD’S MERCY AND COMPASSION TOWARDS THE UNDESERVING – WHO ARE YOU TO COMPLAIN AGAINST GOD’S SOVEREIGN DISPOSITION OF MERCY AND GRACE?

BIG IDEA:

THOSE WHO BENEFIT FROM GOD’S COMPASSION HAVE NO RIGHT TO COMPLAIN AGAINST THE SOVEREIGN EXTENSION OF MERCY TO OTHERS (NO MATTER HOW UNDESERVING)

INTRODUCTION:

Jonah’s ministry “success” was really “**failure**” when you examine his heart motivation. Here God takes the reluctant prophet to task and uses a simple object lesson to expose the difference between a heart of compassion and a heart of vengeance. Despite having just personally experienced the mercy of God in his own desperate situation, Jonah begrudges that same mercy to the city of Nineveh.

I. (:1-3) ANGER AGAINST GOD IS ESSENTIALLY COMPLAINING AGAINST SOME ASPECT OF GOD'S CHARACTER

A. (:1) Venting Displeasure -- Reformed Actions . . . But Same Judgmental Attitude

"But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry."

Doug Goins: Jonah's problem is that he wants to control God. And what do any of us do when we can't control circumstances and get our own way? We get angry. (We may express our anger in a lot of different ways---perhaps passively.)

B. (:2) Justifying Rebellion -- Preferring Personal Agenda

"And he prayed to the Lord and said, 'Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.'"

Jonah feared that the Ninevites would repent and that God would relent of His judgment. Did not want to be the prophet that brought Israel's enemy to repentance – tough to return home with that reputation as a prophet

Ex. 34:4-7 – God's revelation of Himself to Moses



"That 'Love thy neighbor' part,
does that include cats?"

C. (:3) Throwing in the Towel – Self Pity Party

“Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.”

II. (:4-8) SHADE PLANT OBJECT LESSON DEMONSTRATED: DO YOU HAVE GOOD REASON TO BE ANGRY?

A. (:4) Fundamental Question

“Do you have good reason to be angry?”

B. (:5) Safe Vantage Place

“Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city.”

C. (:6) Shade Plant Provided – Liking the Circumstances

“So the Lord God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant.”

D. (:7-8) Shade Plant Removed – Hating the Circumstances

“But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day, and it attacked the plant and it withered. And it came about when the sun came up that God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah’s head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, ‘Death is better to me than life.’”

III. (:9-11) SHADE PLANT OBJECT LESSON EXPLAINED: DO YOU HAVE GOOD REASON TO BE ANGRY?

A. (:9) Fundamental Question / Defensive Answer

“Then God said to Jonah, ‘Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?’ And he said, ‘I have good reason to be angry, even to death.’”

Ron Ritchie: That's the way we react (at least I do) when God doesn't do it our way. This is called "biblical thumb sucking." "When God doesn't do it my way, I'd just as soon die. What is the use? I can't go on! This is not the way I planned it, and therefore, it is better to be home with the Lord. "

B. (:10) Object Lesson of Shade Tree Reviewed

“Then the Lord said, ‘You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work, and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.’”

C. (:11) Application to Lord’s Compassion on Nineveh

“And 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, as well as many animals?”

- Probably not referring to underage children who are not of the age of moral responsibility where they can exercise such discernment. This would mean a total population of maybe 600,000 people.
- Instead, people are so morally adrift that they can't tell basic directions – cf. Karen as a navigator – many admirable qualities – but often says left when she means right and vice versa

Chap. 4 Life Lessons:

- We must **align our hearts with God's heart** = heart of mercy and compassion = Key
 - God's plan of salvation has always included the Gentiles
 - Anger at God often exposes our selfish preferences and prejudices
-

WHY STUDY THIS BOOK?

- To develop a heart of compassion and mercy for the lost
- To solidify our commitment to God's sovereign agenda and program for history
- To encourage immediate, unquestioning, complete obedience to God's unique calling
- To take comfort in God's forgiveness and extension of a second chance when we fail
- To increase our confidence in the power of the proclamation of God's revealed message
- To be able to recognize the evident fruit of repentance
- To become more fervent in our prayer life

BACKGROUND NOTES

GENERAL:

Leslie Allen: Throughout the story the figure of Jonah is a foil to the divine hero, a Watson to Yahweh's Holmes, a Gehazi to Yahweh's Elisha. The greatness and the goodness of God are enhanced against the background of Jonah's meanness and malevolence. Look out at the world, pleads the author, at God's world. See it through God's eyes. And let your new vision overcome your natural bitterness, your hardness of soul. Let the divine compassion flood your own hearts.

Daniel Timmer: The book of Jonah is a carefully constructed yet wonderfully simple and theologically powerful work. Its power is due to several features. It is set in the tumultuous eighth century bc, when the northern kingdom of Israel was for a time free from the menacing presence of Neo-Assyria and later saw that threat return stronger than before. The main character, the prophet Jonah, acts in extremely unusual ways that first subtly, and then explicitly, bring him into conflict with the very God who sent him to Nineveh. The non-Israelite characters, for their part, also act in very unusual ways that further reveal the character of all the actors: the sailors and Ninevites, Jonah, and God himself. All this is presented with humour, occasional sarcasm, and a focus that forces the book's reader to align himself or herself with the God of Israel, even if that means deconstructing a more comfortable, self-serving pseudo-theology.

James Nogalski: The book of Jonah differs in important ways from most prophetic books. Rather than a collection of sayings and speeches attributed to a prophet, the book of Jonah tells a story. Rather than portraying the prophet as a voice of authority speaking in the name of Yahweh, the book of Jonah portrays the prophet as the one doing the wrong thing. Rather than immediately deliver the word of Yahweh that came to him, the prophet flees in the opposite direction. Rather than confront an obstinate people who pay no heed to his message, the prophet Jonah reluctantly delivers a speech to the people of Nineveh who immediately repent in the hope that God will have mercy. In the book of Jonah, foreigners perform religious acts: sailors pray and offer sacrifice; the Ninevites fast and put on sackcloth and ashes. By contrast, Jonah prays to Yahweh to confront him for showing compassion. Nothing runs according to form in the book of Jonah.

Charles Lee Feinberg: Amazing as it strikes us each time we read it, the account states that Jonah was exceedingly displeased and very angry. Why was the chastened messenger of God angry? . . . Jonah begrudged the heathen Ninevites the abundant mercy of God.

What a contrast we have here between God's attitude toward Nineveh after its repentance and Jonah's attitude to the same city's repentance. He had received pardoning mercy from the Lord on his repentance but was not willing for Nineveh to have the same. We are reminded of the parable of our Lord in **Matthew 18:23-35**. The human heart is ever the same in all ages. (Cp. **Jer 17:9**.)

Jonah is like so many today: they feel they could govern God's world much better than He can. Think of it! The prophet of God angry beyond measure because of the pardoning grace of God. He was, like so many of us, more zealous about the judgment of Nineveh than the sparing of it. He assumed he knew better than God the proper course to be followed.

Trent Butler: Jonah tells a story -- a story filled with irony, satire, character reversal, and humor. Jonah wants you to laugh. Jonah wants you to be surprised. Jonah constantly throws the unexpected at you and waits a second for you to react. Jonah provides a negative example of how not to be a messenger for God. Jonah wants you to turn the negative satire around into a positive message.

AUTHORSHIP, BACKGROUND, SETTING, DATE

Chuck Swindoll: The book of Jonah, written primarily in the third person, does not explicitly name the prophet as the author of his own account, but we have no reason to doubt either the inspiration or the historical veracity of the book.

During Jonah's years as a prophet, Israel stood tall among the nations, though in a political rather than a spiritual sense. The reign of Jeroboam II (793–753 BC), who was an evil king before the Lord, saw Israel's borders expand to their greatest extent since the time of Solomon. Increased prosperity resulted in a materialistic culture that thrived on injustice to the poor and oppressed, one of the key messages of Jonah's prophetic contemporary, Amos.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The name Jonah means “dove.” A character and personality profile from the Book of Jonah suggest that perhaps the name **hawk** better describes him. He was an ardent nationalist and an isolationist. His truncated theology restricted the providence of God to the Israelites. The call to preach to the Assyrians was abhorrent to Jonah. [Others call him “chicken”!]

My conclusion is that the historical Jonah was called to go to Nineveh before the middle of the eighth century, and the Book of Jonah was written as a **didactic biography** sometime after that, but before 733 B.C., when Tiglath-Pileser III began his assaults on the northern kingdom, deporting captives to Assyria (**2 Kin. 15:29**). It would have been difficult for a Hebrew prophet to prophesy in Nineveh. If the book had been written later, the “*wickedness*” of Nineveh would probably have been focused on the **Assyrian captivity**.

In the final analysis, the message of Jonah is not dependent on the date when it was written. It is sufficient to say that Nineveh was a symbol of wickedness, an enemy of Israel, and the last place Jonah would expect the Lord to send him to express mercy.

John MacArthur: The autobiographical information revealed within its pages clearly points to Jonah as the author. The firsthand accounts of such unusual events and experiences would be best recounted from the hand of Jonah himself.

Nineveh's repentance may have been aided by the two plagues (765 and 759 B.C.) and a solar eclipse (763 B.C.), preparing them for Jonah's judgment message.

Daniel Timmer: Assyria's military might and calculated use of brutality made rebellion a very dangerous option for its vassals. The empire's force and tactics were guided by a royal ideology that laid upon the king the obligation to subjugate the entire world on behalf of the national god Assur, who was at the summit of the Assyrian pantheon and so laid claim to worldwide rule. In short, 'It was the king's duty to explore, overcome, and incorporate [all non-Assyrian territories] into the realm of Ashur' (**Parker** 2011: 363). In this ideology, the Assyrian king's warfare brought to reality the kingship of Assur and led to the only stable social order. Non-Assyrian states that resisted peaceful or coerced subjugation to the empire were thus believed to be in direct opposition to the empire's gods, and so merited the sharpest reprisals. . .

Our tentative dating of Jonah's ministry to the early or middle part of the eighth century suggests that he prophesied the renewal of Israel's control over its northern territories before that came about later in the reign of Jeroboam II. Although we do not know how long his ministry lasted, it is plausible to assume that he travelled to Nineveh around the same time, meaning near the middle of the eighth century.

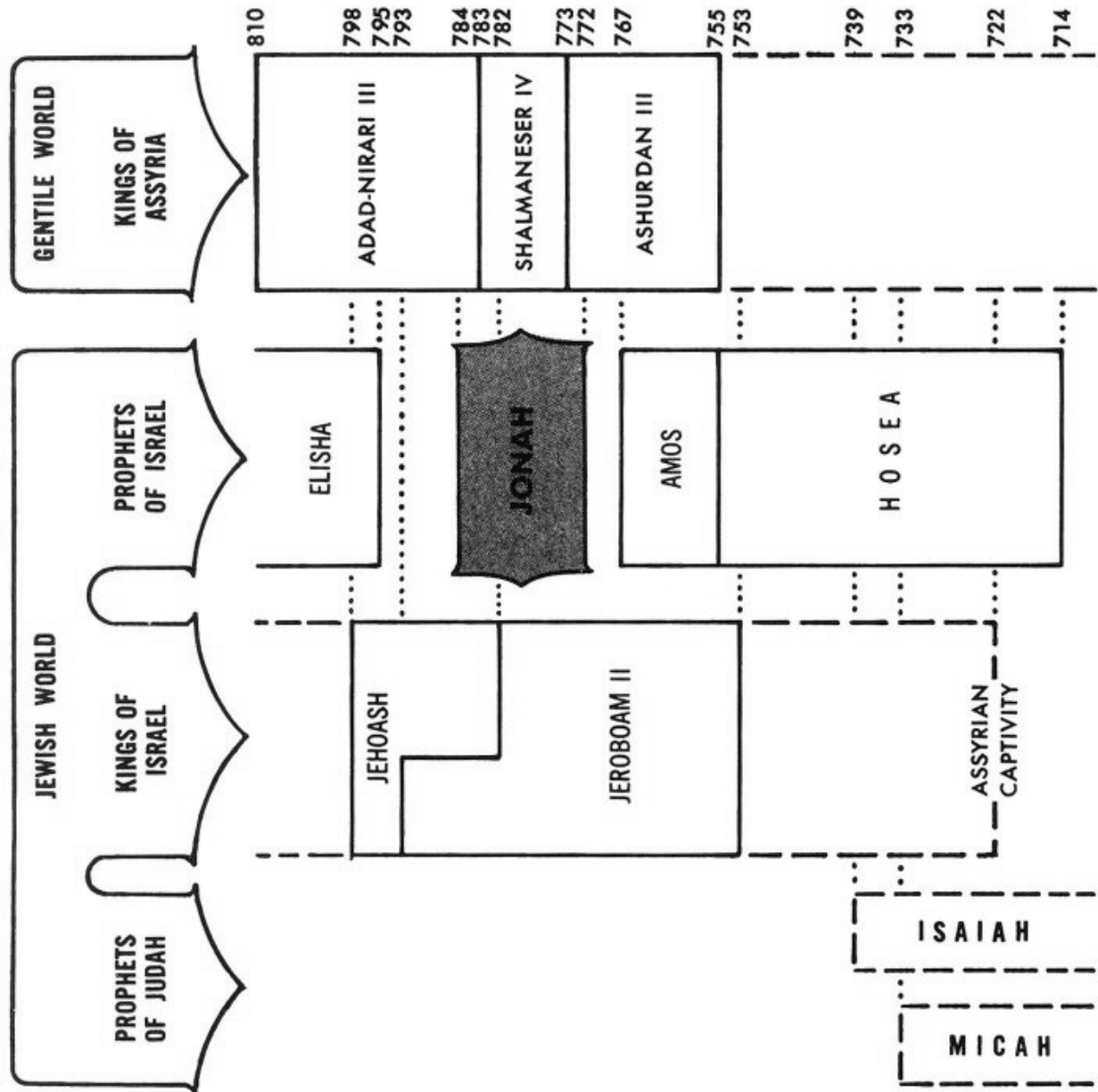
Philip Jenson: Jonah is a paradoxical figure, an eighth-century prophet who announces not judgment but salvation to an evil king of Israel (**2 Kgs 14**). This puzzling mismatch between calling and commission perhaps fits him for this strange story of a reluctant prophet being sent on a mission of mercy to Nineveh. Nineveh is the evil capital of the Assyrian nation, which will soon destroy the Northern Kingdom (**2 Kgs 17**).

Cyril Barber: Jonah was probably born in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jehoahaz (814-798 B.C.). Throughout his boyhood, the fortunes of the northern tribes of Israel were constantly changing (**2 Kings 10:32-33**). The Syrians and the Assyrians repeatedly invaded the land, and those kings who exhibited some military prowess were often found to be poor administrators. Consequently, the fifty years that preceded Jonah's birth saw unrest and turmoil. As a result, serious social and economic problems had developed (**2 Kings 13:7**).

Jonah's father was a man named Amittai. The name means "true, faithful," and from what we know of his son it would seem as if he lived up to his name. Amittai was evidently a worshiper of the true God and must have been one of the ever-decreasing group of God-fearing men who served the Lord in the midst of increasing secularism and spiritual decline. Such men are the "salt of the earth," and, while little is known of them. . . their influence nevertheless is felt by those about them. The impact of Amittai's example must have left its mark on Jonah, for it provided him with a godly model to

follow, contributed to a stable home environment, and gave Jonah a secure foundation on which to build his own life of devotion to the Lord.

Preceptaustin.org:



Hugh Martin: (Re the only recorded prophecy of Jonah in the OT = **2 Kings 14**)

It thus appears that, while Israel were in a very wretched and oppressed condition, the Lord had employed His servant Jonah to predict an unmerited and most gracious interposition of His power on their behalf, to restore to them the territory of which their enemies had deprived them. It is very remarkable that living, as the prophet did, in a time of abounding provocations, when we might have expected his sole office in Israel would have been to denounce judgment on the apostate tribes and their ungodly rulers, the only

one of his predictions on record is that of a most gracious and generous interposition on the part of Jehovah in defense of His afflicted people

PURPOSE OF WRITING

John MacArthur: Israel's political distaste for Assyria, coupled with a sense of spiritual superiority as the recipient of God's covenant blessing, produced a recalcitrant attitude in Jonah toward God's request for missionary service. Jonah was sent to Nineveh in part to shame Israel by the fact that a pagan city repented at the preaching of a stranger, whereas Israel would not repent though preached to by many prophets. He was soon to learn that God's love and mercy extends to all of His creatures (4:2, 10, 11), not just His covenant people (cf. Gen. 9:27; 12:3; Lev. 19:33, 34; 1 Sam. 2:10; Is. 2:2; Joel 2:28–32).

Fredk Tatford: The Divine purpose was always that Israel should be a witness to the nations and not merely the repository of Divine blessings for the nation's own satisfaction. In this purpose she completely failed and **George Adam Smith** (*The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, Vol. 2, p. 514) argues consequently that the purpose of this book "is to illustrate God's grace to the heathen in face of His people's refusal to fulfil their mission to them . . . It is the drama of Israel's career as the servant of God, in the most pathetic moments of that career . . . The cause of Israel's recusancy was not only wilfulness or cowardly sloth, but the honour of a whole world given over to idolatry, the paralysing sense of its irresistible force, of its cruel persecutions endured for centuries, and of the long famine of heaven's justice. These it was which had filled Israel's eyes too full of fever to see her duty."

Hugh Martin: It was partly, then, with the view of constructing, so to speak, a handle against His professed and peculiar people, and of "*provoking them to jealousy*," that Jehovah, the God of Israel, the God of all the earth, planned and executed this memorable dispensation of His righteousness and forbearance towards Nineveh. . .

Thus, in general, the doctrine of free grace is frequently said to encourage men in sin; but we are not to modify the freeness of God's offered mercy on pretense of taking care of the glory of God, and the maintenance of His law. This was substantially Jonah's sin; -- the sin of pretending to be more careful of God's glory, and more qualified to advance it, than God himself. It is a glorious fact that His thoughts are not as our thoughts; and we reduce them to a measure that would render them useless to ourselves, when we constrain them within the limits of our own judgment or capacity. God is able to vindicate His own procedure and all its principles; and He will do so without the aid of man's wisdom.

Patrick Fairbairn: Finally, we are taught here the salutary lesson, that whenever and wherever God is pleased to manifest of his grace and goodness, it is our part to acknowledge and rejoice in the manifestation. It may possibly be done through instruments that we should not have expected to be peculiarly honoured, or in regions which are in a manner cut off from our sympathies and regards. That such showers of blessing should descend there, while scarcely a drop falls where our desires and efforts

are mainly engaged, may often appear strange, and may even be felt to be mortifying, as if what were given to the one were somehow withheld from the other. But this is to judge after the flesh. The Spirit of the Lord is not straitened, and what he bestows on one corner of the vineyard is not given at the expense of another – it is rather designed to awaken a desire and expectation for like gifts of grace, where they have not yet been received, and to give manifest proof to all of God’s infinite power and goodness. If his eye, therefore, should be good toward any, far be it from us to cherish an evil eye – let us rather view with thankfulness the benevolent working of his hand . . .

Lloyd Ogilvie: The Book of Jonah is one of those accounts of a person’s encounter and struggle with God that is power-packed with theological truth and practical implications for people in every age. As we follow the story line, we find that analyzing Jonah is a look in the mirror, and we may not like what we see. We all have run away from God or His explicit guidance. And we all have run back to Him in times of need. We also remember the delight of running with God. But who hasn’t run ahead of Him, trying to use our prayers to tell Him what is best for us, others, and situations?

Chuck Swindoll: While Jonah eventually departed and proclaimed God’s message, the lesson of his story does not end there. Jonah prophesied to Nineveh but he wasn’t happy about it (**Jonah 4:1**). Herein we find another touchstone for our lives: aligning our desires with God’s is always a process. Just because we go through the motions of following God’s will does not mean our hearts are aligned with His. God wanted Jonah’s actions and his heart. He wants ours as well.

MAJOR THEMES AND THEOLOGY

H. A. Ironside: Unquestionably the great theme of this book is the divine sovereignty. The expressions “*The Lord prepared*” and “*God prepared*,” frequently repeated, would manifest this. Throughout, however man may plan, and whatever he may attempt, it is God who is over all, and working all things in such away as to bring glory to His own name. . .

For that it was pride and bigotry that was at the bottom of all his willfulness and waywardness is clear enough. He knew that God was long-suffering, and that He delighted in mercy. He tells us that in the end. He therefore feared for his prophetic reputation; and his thoughts were so far from those of the Lord that he could not endure that grace should be shown to a Gentile power.

David Malick: Yahweh’s merciful works of salvation are expressions of His good character towards all who repent of their rebellion against Him – whether Jew (Jonah) or Gentile (Sailors / Ninevites)

John Walton: Israel and Judah were going to be warned of coming judgment. This was going to come in the form of prophetic pronouncement – usually deemed irrevocable. The Book of Jonah tells them that repentance was a proper and acceptable response, and

could even turn back the pronouncement of the prophet (which, of course, was the pronouncement of the Lord). It had worked even for Nineveh, a naïve, wicked, pagan city (cf. **Ezek. 18:21**). When the warnings came to Israel (**2 Kings 14:27** tells us they had not yet), here was the example. Even though doom had been pronounced, repentance could bring mercy.

(Though arrived at independently, a similar understanding was expressed by **R. E. Clements**, “*The Purpose of the Book of Jonah*,” VT Supp. 28 (1974), pp. 16-28.)

J. Vernon McGee: There are six significant subjects which are suggested and developed in the book of Jonah which make it very relevant for us today:

(1) This is the one book of the Old Testament which sets forth *the resurrection of Jesus Christ*. . .

(2) The book of Jonah teaches that *salvation is not by works*, but it is by faith which leads to repentance. . . The most significant statement in the book of Jonah is in the second chapter: “*Salvation is of the Lord*” (**Jonah 2:9**). He is the author of salvation; He erected the great building of our salvation; He is the architect.

(3) The third great purpose of this book is to show that *God’s purpose of grace cannot be frustrated*. Jonah refused to go to Nineveh, but God was still going to get the message to Nineveh. The interesting thing in this particular case is that Jonah was going to be the witness for God in Nineveh – he didn’t know he was going there, but he did.

(4) The fourth great truth in this book is that *God will not cast us aside for faithlessness*. He may not use you, but He will not cast you aside. There are a lot of football players sitting on the bench; in fact, more sit on the bench than play in the game. A player is called out to play only when it is believed that he can make a contribution to the game. If you and I are faithless, God may bench us; but we are still wearing our uniform, and He will not cast us aside. Anytime we want to get back in the game of life and do His will, He will permit us to do it.

(5) The fifth great truth is that God is good and gracious. Read **Jonah 4:2** for the most penetrating picture of God in the entire Bible. It is wrong to say the Old Testament reveals a God of wrath and the New Testament reveals a God of love. He is no vengeful deity in the book of Jonah.

(6) The sixth and last great teaching is that *God is the God of the Gentiles*. When God chose Abraham, in effect He said to the Gentiles, “I’m going to have to leave you for awhile because of the sin that has come into the human family. I’m going to prepare salvation for you through a man and a nation, and I’ll bring the Redeemer, the Saviour into the world through them.” Now God has a salvation for all mankind. I have written Romans 3:29 over the book of Jonah in my Bible. Paul writes, “*Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also.*” The book of Jonah reveals that even in the Old Testament God did not forget the Gentiles. If He was willing

to save a woman like Rahab the harlot, and a brutal, cruel nation like the Assyrians and the inhabitants of Nineveh, its capital, then I want to say to you that God is in the business of saving sinners.

Leslie Allen: **G. Campbell Morgan** uttered a wise word: “Men have been looking so hard at the great fish that they have failed to see the great God.” It is the greatness of Israel’s God that is the burden of the book. Very much of its theology radiates out from the two credal confessions of Jonah in **1:9; 4:2**. The narrative is largely an application of the significance of this traditional material in easily digestible form.

Yahweh is the Creator of the world, Maker of land and sea; in Hebrew thought this implied that he was the providential controller who held the world in his grasp and manipulated its phenomena, manifesting his powerful presence via the natural world in order to achieve his purposes among men.

John Goldingay: Within the scroll itself, three key themes may be identified. First, the story is about **the attitude God can take and the relationship God can have with a great and violent city**. The dire dealings of a big city may come up to God, and he may do something about it. He may then send someone to preach to it, and he’s prepared to imperil “innocent” people in pursuing his purpose. He’s prepared to act against it for its waywardness but glad to remit its punishment if it turns from its waywardness. . .

Second, the story is about **the kind of person a prophet may or can be**, almost a manual about how not to be a prophet. Prophets can be resistant to their vocation yet also willing to do what God says; they can be quite conflicted people; they can be simultaneously knowledgeable and slow on the uptake. Prophets need not to take themselves too seriously, and people in general need not to take them too seriously. Prophets may resist God’s commission, endanger people who worship other gods, and earn shame before them. “The tension in the book of Jonah does not reside in a perceived lack of coherence between human actions . . . and divine response, but rather between YHWH’s actions and a prophet’s response to them.”

Third, the story is about **the sort of person Yahweh is**. He is the one God, the God of the heavens, the creator of sea and land. He has power over creation, and he may work out his purpose by means of nature. The story portrays Yahweh’s manifold involvement with nature (the storm, the fish, the animals, the plant, the worm, the wind, the sun). Yahweh is also sovereign over the great nations, gracious and compassionate, long-tempered and abounding in commitment, as well as being sovereign and flexible enough to relent about sending dire trouble—to imperial powers as well as to Judahites. The Jonah scroll is an encouragement to repentance and an assurance that Yahweh’s threats can be canceled. . .

STRUCTURE

Geoffrey Bull:

- I. JONAH AND THE GREAT MISTAKE
- II. JONAH AND THE GREAT WIND
- III. JONAH AND THE GREAT FISH
- IV. JONAH AND THE GREAT CITY
- V. JONAH AND THE GREAT KINDNESS

O. S. Hawkins:

I. THE STORY OF A MAN'S PILGRIMAGE

A. Rejection

Jonah went in the opposite direction, choosing to reject the will of God for his life.

B. Reflection

Often the adversities of life bring us to this moment of reflection.

C. Correction

Yes, God is the God of the second chance. Jonah corrected his ways.

D. Objection

II. THE STORY OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE

A. Election

God elects his own people, assigns their duties, appoints their places. He calls particular people to particular places for particular purposes.

B. Protection

Even in our rebellion He protects us until we come to ourselves.

C. Perfection

God is more interested in revival than we are.

D. Affection

God has compassion for sinners.

John Ferreira: Many commentators naturally divide the book of Jonah into four sections or scenes, corresponding to the four chapter divisions. These divisions are variously titled but they more or less indicate the same meaning:

- 1) Jonah Flees (**1:1–17**);
- 2) Jonah Prays (**2:1–10**);
- 3) Jonah Preaches (**3:1–10**);
- 4) Jonah Complains (**4:1–11**).

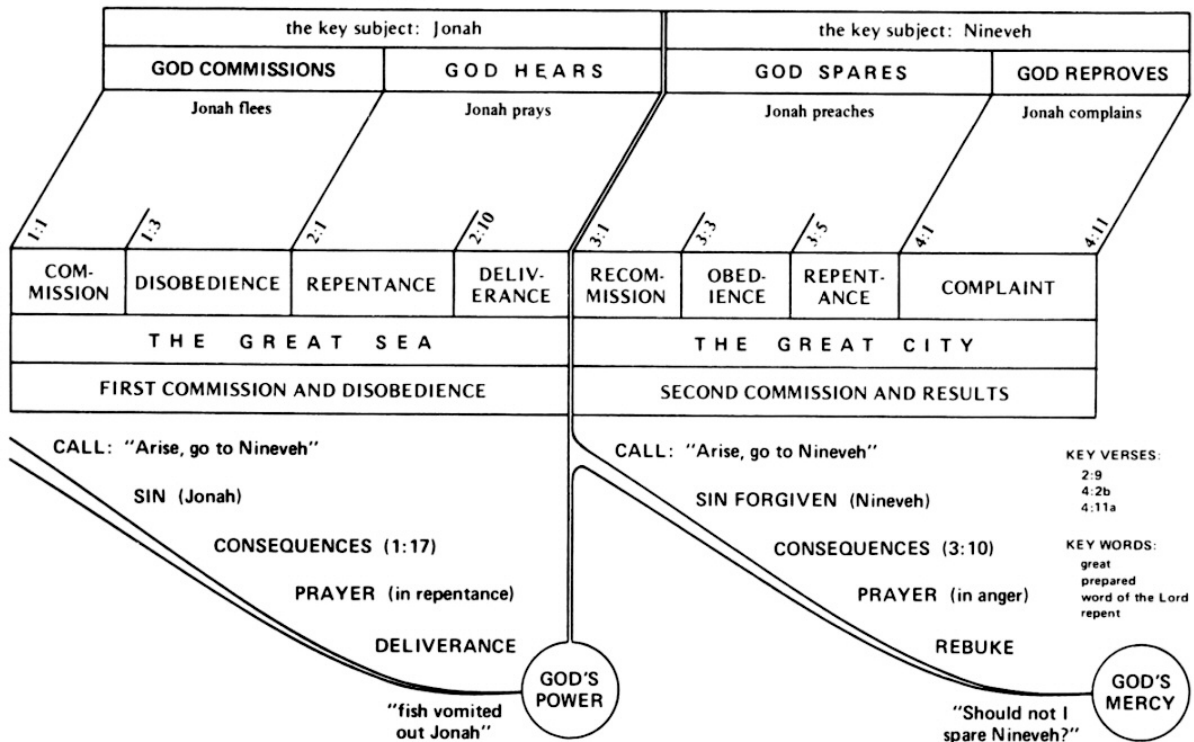
Some authors prefer a simpler two-section division:

- 1) Jonah's First Commission or the Prophet at Sea (1:1—2:10);
- 2) Jonah's Second Commission or the Prophet at Nineveh (3:1—4:11).

A somewhat more complex analysis is to divide the book into seven scenes:

- 1) Jonah's Call (1:1—3);
- 2) The Storm (1:4—16);
- 3) The Great Fish (1:17—2:10);
- 4) The Second Call (3:1—3a);
- 5) Preaching in Nineveh (3:3b—10);
- 6) Jonah's Prayer (4:1—3);
- 7) The Lord's Questions (4:4—11).

Preceptaustin.org:



Leslie Allen:

I. Hebrew Sinner Saved (1:1—2:10[11])

- A. Jonah's disobedience (1:1—3)
- B. Jonah's punishment; heathen homage (1:4—16)
- C. Jonah's rescue (1:17—2:10 [2:1—11])
 1. God's grace (1:17 [2:1])
 2. Jonah's praise (2:1—9 [2—10])
 3. God's last word (2:10 [11])

II. Heathen Sinners Saved (3:1–4:11)

A. Jonah's obedience (3:1–4)

B. Nineveh's repentance (3:5–9)

C. Jonah's rebuke (3:10–4:11)

1. God's grace (3:10)

2. Jonah's complaint (4:1–3)

3. God's last word (4:4–11)

TEXT: Jonah 1:1-17

TITLE: JONAH'S FLIGHT -- RUNNING AWAY FROM GOD –
WHERE CAN I HIDE FROM HIS PRESENCE?

BIG IDEA:
RUNNING AWAY FROM GOD NEVER WORKS –
IT ONLY EXPOSES A HEART THAT IS OPPOSED TO GOD'S SOVEREIGN
AGENDA

INTRODUCTION:

People try to run away from God for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways:

- 1) Run away from His Presence – Desire to Hide from God
- 2) Run away from His Calling or His Mission – Desire to Do Your Own Thing
- 3) Run away from His Accountability over you – Desire to Escape Judgment

But there is no escaping God. That doesn't change the reality that in their desperation and panic, people's first impulse is to try to flee and escape.

I. (:1-3) A JUDGMENTAL SPIRIT AVOIDS MISSIONS OF COMPASSION AND MERCY

Why?

- thinking people don't deserve to be helped
- thinking it's not my job or responsibility to get involved

A. (:1-2) Jonah's Calling – The Compassion of God for a Lost World Cannot be Reconciled with a Judgmental Spirit
(4:1-3 provide the commentary here)

1. The Prophet of God Should Always Welcome the Word of God
 "The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying"

James Nogalski: The opening word of Jonah contains a vav-consecutive, which normally presumes a prior action. In this case, however, the word, *wayyāhî*, means "*and it happened,*" and represents a typical way to begin a story. Seven biblical books begin with this form: Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, Ruth, Esther, and Nehemiah. It also conveys a sense of the past. In this sense, it signals a story is about to follow in much the same way as the phrase "once upon a time" functions in English, except the story is not deemed to be a fairy tale.

Should always be an exciting experience to receive new revelation from God.

Cyril Barber: The usage of His name, Yahweh (LORD), is designed to give "parental" reassurance to Jonah. It is as if God, recognizing Jonah's possible anxiety over his coming assignment, is saying to him: 'You are My son. You have a special place in My heart. I want you to on an important mission to Nineveh and bring them the message of My love.' This term refers to God as the self-existent One, and is used of Him in

relation to His people as their covenant-keeping God.

2. Jonah's Commission Was Clear But Distasteful

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

Daniel Timmer: The author of Jonah uses the terms 'large/great' and 'evil' with precision, as our exploration of the book will show, but only here and in **4:1** (with a different form of the same root) are they used together. This, along with the fact that God himself utters this very negative evaluation of one of Assyria's key cities, highlights its religious and moral degradation and the consequent danger of divine judgment.

James Nogalski: These two elements (the commission and the rationale) frequently appear in prophetic judgment oracles (e.g., **2 Kgs 1:3–4**). . . Yahweh expects the prophet to warn Nineveh that they have done something wrong.

- a. Apparently he had no problem traveling
quick to hop a boat headed the opposite direction
- b. Reputation of wicked Nineveh well-known

Cyril Barber: The atrocities of the ancient Assyrians are well known, for they boasted of them in their histories and on their monuments. Ashurbanipal, the grandson of Sennacherib, was accustomed to tearing off the lips and hands of his victims. Tiglath-pileser flayed his captives alive. Women were abused by the brutal soldiers, babies and young children were buried or burned alive, and great pyramids of human heads were made of the vanquished.

- c. Proclamation was one of Judgment
- d. But Heart of God is one of Compassion and Mercy
- e. Heart of Jonah was one of Bitterness and Condemnation

B. (:3) Jonah's Rebellion – Substituting His Judgmental Agenda for the Lord's Mission of Mercy

"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."

Called the reluctant prophet ... but we could use much stronger terminology ... direct rebellion here

Daniel Timmer: The author repeats the prophet's intention to escape yhwh's presence, certainly a means of ridiculing Jonah's benighted scheme. This is the first, but certainly not the last, humorous element in the book.

II. (:4-9) OPEN REBELLION FLIES IN THE FACE OF OUR PROFESSED FEAR OF GOD

A. (:4) Terrifying Situation – The Perfect Storm

“And 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.”

Eric Redmond: God responds so fiercely because **rebellion is serious**. Sin, in any form, is something our God hates. When someone brushes off the Holy Spirit's urging to tell a person about Jesus, eventually that person could clear his conscience by going on with routine business. But the Lord does not brush off sin. Sin is an affront to God's absolute holiness. Our “God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in Him” (**1 John 1:5**). James says that God cannot be tempted by evil (**Jas 1:14**). God's eyes are too pure to look on evil (**Hab 1:13**)! If He were to permit Jonah's sin (or ours) and sin were to go without reckoning, then He would not be holy, and we could rebel against anything and everything He says without concern for consequences. Commands would become some good advice from a well-meaning and nice deity rather than absolute directives from a righteous and all-powerful Creator whom one disobeys at one's own peril.

B. (:5a) Appropriate Fear Motivates Pagans to Take Desperate Measures

1. Reality of Their Fear

“Then the sailors became afraid”

These were hard core sailors, in their element, but recognizing they were up against unusually powerful forces of nature

2. Renewal of Their Religious Commitments

“and every man cried to his god”

There are no atheists in the foxhole of battle

3. Resourcefulness of Their Desperate Tactics – did everything humanly possible

“and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them.”

A lot of **hurling** in this book: God hurls the great storm; the sailors hurl their cargo overboard; the great fish ends up hurling Jonah onto the shore

C. (:5b-6) Denial of Rebellion Associated with Exhaustion and Prayerlessness

“But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down, and fallen sound asleep. 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.’”

Leslie Allen: **Where was Jonah all this time?** The narrator has a surprise for us. Jonah is sound asleep, lying in a corner of the hold below the busy deck. The storm that so alarmed the crew served only to rock Jonah into deeper slumber, blissfully unaware of all the trouble he is causing. The shock of being called to Nineveh and the journey to the coast have taken toll of his nerves and physique, and he is glad to relax, safe on the ship that would carry him far away, as he thinks, from that appalling experience. Little does he know what has just been told to the listening circle. He is due for a rude awakening.

Jonah recognized as a religious personage; if he didn't care about his own safety, at least he should be praying for the safety of the others

Daniel Timmer: Although arguments from silence must be handled with care, the fact that Jonah never prays during this sequence of events seems to confirm that he has no intention of dealing with yhwh, from whose gaze he hopes to escape. It also reveals a shocking lack of concern for the lives of those on board with him, a hint that his response to Nineveh's deliverance will amplify enormously.

D. (:7-8) Exposure of Jonah as the Cause of the Calamity

1. (:7) The Inquiry – Who is to Blame?

“And 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.”

2. (:8) The Inquisition – Who are You really and What did you do?

“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?”*

E. (:9) Empty Profession of Faith – not practicing the fear of the Lord

“And he said to them, ‘I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land.’”

I don't just serve some localized deity.

Reminds us how important it is to maintain our belief in Creationism. Much practical application flows out of the truth that God created the heavens and the earth.

Leslie Allen: As Jonah answers their questions and tells them the sorry tale of his flight from this very God, they become more and more horrified. No wonder Yahweh has sent such a father and mother of a storm, for so grave a sin deserves no less a show of wrath. “How could you do such a thing!” they exclaim, aghast at Jonah's insolent temerity. They go on to make another vocal contribution, so that their pair of speeches in vv. 7, 8

correspond with a further pair. Since it is Jonah's God who is behind the worsening storm, he ought to know how best the tempestuous sea can be calmed.³⁹ So they ask him what should be done with him, for Jonah is the key not only to the storm but to its stilling, and they cannot withstand the sea's attack much longer. Jonah's reply is the counterpart to the captain's outburst in v. 6 and is a crucial step forward in the development of the plot. The captain had posed the stark alternatives: "Pray or we perish," but Jonah knows that the upshot must be that he should perish. He is the target of Yahweh's weapon and sooner or later it will catch him. He accepts his fate and is prepared to face it at once. He replies at last to a question put to him by the sailors earlier. Yes, he admits his responsibility for the storm. The piety of the seamen has evidently banished his nonchalant indifference and touched his conscience. By now he has realized how terrible is the sin that has provoked this terrible storm. The only way to appease the tempest of Yahweh's wrath is to abandon himself to it as just deserts for his sin. His willingness to die is an indication that he realizes his guilt before God.

III. (:10-16) PACIFYING THE LORD REQUIRES THE PAYING OF THE APPROPRIATE PRICE

In this instance, Jonah had to be tossed into the sea to quiet the storm

A. (:10-12) Figuring Out the Price that Needs to be Paid –

Only One Price Will Satisfy

1. (:10) Indignation at Jonah's Foolishness to Put Them All in Jeopardy
"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."
Even the pagans understood that you cannot flee from an all-present Sovereign

Daniel Timmer: While Jonah remains existentially detached from the theological truth that he conveys to the sailors, their response is radically different. Upon hearing it (plus his confession of having attempted to flee from yhwh) they feared with great fear (*yir'āh gēdōlā*) and express disbelief at his actions. In context, both reactions are to be understood as the result of their new-found knowledge of yhwh, against whom Jonah has sinned. This is the first of several indications that, against all odds, the sailors' knowledge of God is increasing.

2. (:11) Pursuit of Justice
"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."
 - How to punish the transgressor in appropriate fashion
 - How to spare the victims further damage

3. (:12) Only One Solution
"And 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. ”

Cf. how salvation attacked as exclusivistic – there is only one price God will accept

James Nogalski: Jonah essentially commands the sailors to kill him in order to silence the storm. Here we see for the first time Jonah’s proclivity to prefer death over fulfilling Yahweh’s commission. Jonah has no reason at this point to think that Yahweh will deliver him once he is hurled into the sea. At best, Jonah concedes the futility of escape from Yahweh. He does not intercede on behalf of the sailors or on his own behalf. Interestingly, Jonah does not run away from the assignment to go to Nineveh for fear of dying. Here, one can only assume that Jonah thought he would perish in the raging waters, and in **chapter 4**, Jonah wishes someone would take his life so he would not have to watch what happens (**4:3–4**).

B. (:13-14) Last Ditch Effort at Mercy

(Jonah unwilling for people of Nineveh to be shown mercy; but here the pagans are willing to extend mercy to Jonah if at all possible)

1. (:13) Self Effort can seem Magnanimous, but actually is Counter Productive
“However, the men rowed desperately to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming even stormier against them.”

They want a solution without submitting to the Lord.

Daniel Timmer: Interestingly, even though the crew takes with utmost seriousness what Jonah says about yhwh, they are very sceptical that his self-imposed death penalty is just. Instead of implementing it (a very easy task), they do their utmost to bring the ship to safety, hoping to save themselves and Jonah (hardly an easy task). Despite the correctness of their moral instinct and their admirable reticence to end Jonah’s life themselves (cf. **1:15**), yhwh’s sovereign decision to make the storm grow still worse prevents them from reaching land.

2. (:14) Plea for Absolution / Accepting the Inevitable
“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 Thou, O Lord, hast done as Thou hast pleased.’”

C. (:15) Paying the Price Demanded

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

Eric Redmond: What God wants them to do is stop calling on false gods, stop looking for a solution with lots, stop rowing, and throw Jonah into the sea. When they do this, the storm stops in an instant! In an instant the Lord’s wrath is gone from being over them—the moment they stop putting forth effort and instead rely on God’s solution. This is the difference between works and faith. These men experience real conversion.

Their testimony is the same as that of the Thessalonians: “*You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath*” (1 Thess 1:9-10).

Instead of a pluralistic option for salvation, the sailors receive revelation that the Lord is the absolute ruler, and that His wrath is on the ship in the storm. They hear that they need a substitute to die—in their case, Jonah—so that they don’t have to die for their idolatry of self-effort. They trust the word of the prophet and cry out to the Lord for mercy on their guilt for killing the prophet. They place their faith in the death of the prophet to stop God’s wrath, and their faith produces corresponding actions of fear. This is real conversion. If the Lord did not smash the idols of their self-efforts, they would not have seen the only true solution and they would not have experienced conversion.

D. (:16) Genuine Conversion Results in Genuine Fear of the Lord and Obedient Commitment

“Then the men feared the Lord greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.”

Daniel Timmer: The sailors’ response to their deliverance is the last step in their transformation from polytheists who know nothing of yhwh (1:5) into men who know of his sovereignty and worldwide rule (1:9–10) and who now are his authentic, fully committed worshippers. This verse makes the last step of this radical change clear by applying to the sailors two descriptions that are fundamental and defining for Israelites who genuinely know and live in a healthy relationship with yhwh.

The first description, ‘to revere yhwh’, is a concise description of someone who truly knows God, is reconciled to him through repentance, and lives in accord with his will. The concept expresses ‘both the inward orientation and its practical outcome in behavior’ (Sheriffs 1996: 164), and so excludes superficial orthodoxy, that is, holding beliefs that do not affect one’s behaviour. This description of the sailors, which comes from the narrator and therefore is entirely reliable, contrasts with Jonah’s claim to revere yhwh (1:9), which fails to convince because of his entrenched opposition to yhwh’s will. The contrast is sharpened still further by the narrator’s addition that these non-Israelites revered yhwh with great reverence, a phrase without parallel in the Old Testament. It is all the more striking in the light of the very limited religious knowledge these men had and the rapidity with which it bore fruit in their lives.

The second element of the narrator’s description of the sailors that shows them to be genuine worshippers of yhwh is the affirmation that (presumably after reaching land) they offered a sacrifice to yhwh and made vows. These actions express a healthy, integral relationship with God in narrative contexts (1 Sam. 1:21) and prophecy (Isa. 19:21), and are frequently part of the vows to praise that appear in psalms and prayers throughout the Old Testament (e.g. Pss 50:14; 65:1–2; 66:13–15; 107:22; 116:12–14, 17–19). These two descriptions of the sailors establish beyond doubt their new religious identity as a result of abandoning their gods and entering into an exclusive

relationship with yhwh. This transformation is ironically the result of a rebellious prophet's refusal to bring a message of judgment against a foreign city out of fear that they would respond in repentance. In God's (sometimes humorous) providence, Jonah's feckless attempt at escape brings about the very thing he is committed to avoiding or impeding even at the cost of his life: the extension of yhwh's grace to non-Israelites. The fact that he remains ignorant of it (the sailors are presumably the referent of **2:8**) only adds to the reader's delight.

(:17) CONCLUSION: SOLITARY CONFINEMENT FOR THE REBELLIOUS RUNAWAY

A. Divine Appointment

“And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah”

Of course it is not possible – that is why it is a miracle! Something outside the normal course of nature.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The subject of the first sentence is not the great fish, but **the Lord**. The point the author wants to make is that God provide a way of delivering Jonah. The salient thing is God's intervention to save Jonah and retranscript him with the original call to go to Nineveh. This point is often lost in the volumes of scholarship on the Book of Jonah.

B. Death and Resurrection Experience

“and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When have we tried to run away from the Lord? How has He brought us back to Himself?
- 2) When are we reluctant to carry out God's agenda of mercy and compassion? What people or groups of people cause us to react with a judgmental spirit?
- 3) How are we evidencing a genuine fear of the Lord?
- 4) Where are we relying on self effort instead of submitting to God's sovereign plan?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Goins: But the question I want to confront you with this morning is, how do you

respond when you're asked to be a minister of reconciliation and an ambassador for Christ to individuals or groups whom you fear or find difficult to love---those who don't have the innocence of children, or perhaps those with whom you have radical disagreement?

Think specifically of individuals, types of people, or groups of people of whom you're the most critical and judgmental. (They may very well deserve your judgment and evaluation.) Think about the people whom you tend to dismiss, those you hope to have very little contact with, and those for whom you want no responsibility. They may be as close as a spouse or a child who has deeply disappointed or hurt you. Or they may be as distant as the television image of a terrorist who massacres innocent victims.

These are people who have become our enemies because of what they believe, say, or do. If these individuals or groups have declared themselves to be God's enemies then we feel all the more justified in passing judgment on them, writing them off, and distancing ourselves from them. That is exactly what happened to the Old Testament prophet Jonah. . .

Jonah is introduced to us as a prophet of God who served the Lord faithfully during the reign of Jeroboam II in the middle of the eighth century BC. He ministered to Israel in the north in the time of the divided kingdoms, before any of the invasions and deportations that would affect both kingdoms. King Jeroboam was an idolatrous and immoral king who brought nothing but evil to the land. And yet God in mercy and grace had Jonah prophesy to the nation that the territorial boundaries were going to be expanded. God was going to give back to Israel territory that had been taken several generations earlier by the Syrians. God hoped that the nation would respond to his mercy in repentance. And Jonah's ministry was fulfilled; he preached expansion and it happened. He had great public success in the economic and military glory days of the northern kingdom.

Thomas Leake: The Reluctant Evangelist -- The Fleeing Prophet
Text highlights the grandeur of the mercy of the God of Israel.

Chaps. 1-2 – God's Mercy on Jonah

Chaps. 3-4 – God's Mercy on Nineveh

Introduction:

Favorite passage for the liberals to bash; they like to make fun of the story; but they come with presuppositions that there cannot be an omnipotent miracle-working God; Story is not about the fish (never called a whale in the account); greatest miracle in the book is **God's Sovereign Mercy** upon a rebellious, sinful people

The content focuses more on the messenger than on the message – different in that respect from the other minor prophets; a running narrative; didactic history; not a prophetic oracle; you read the story and learn the lesson; don't get bogged down in the details; from literary, artistic standpoint it is a masterpiece; a great read

Cf. some of the clever outlines of other commentators:

Chap. 1 – “I won’t go”

Chap. 2 – “OK, I’ll go”

Chap. 3 – “Here I am”

Chap. 4 – “I knew I shouldn’t have come”

I. (:1-3) The Opening

A. (:1) Who Was Jonah?

Name means “dove”; father’s name means “truthful, loyal”

Matt. 12:41 – Jonah was a real person preaching to real people; **2 Kings 14:25**; ministered during reign of Jeroboam II in N. Kingdom of Israel

B. (:2) What did God want Jonah to do?

What’s the big deal in being commissioned to preach judgment to Nineveh? We need to place ourselves in his shoes and try to understand how he felt. Would have been an astonishing command to any Jew. Nineveh was a very wicked city – among many wicked cities it is singled out – something very bad; similar to Sodom and Gomorrah; but no missionaries were ever sent to Sodom and Gomorrah; God did not have mercy on them; It was not normally God’s method in OT times to send out missionaries to Gentile nations; in fact Jonah is the only prophet to have received such a call; The world was to come to Israel to worship the true God; the Great Commission reversed all of this

C. (:3) Jonah’s Response = refusing God’s Commission

How could a little prophet like Jonah stand up against God? Everything in this book obeys God – the wind, the sea, the fish, the heathen sailors...

Did Jonah think he was going to be successful in fleeing God? He knew the doctrines of the character of God – His omnipresence, etc.; he wasn’t surprised when he got caught; He was attempting to flee from the special manifested presence of God in Jerusalem (same language used of Cain in **Gen. 4:16**)

Fleeing his calling; his service obligation; smooth sailing at first; no problems; looked like the coast is clear; maybe feeling relieved; God allows us our own plans; we might think that all will be well; but eventually judgment catches up to us; cf. Harvest Principle

II. (:4-16) The Storm

A. (:4-9) The Storm Hits

A great wind; we give names to storms today; delayed response by God; He did not send this storm immediately; **Ps. 104**

Whatever you call on in your moment of need is your god;

Sailors = Rope pullers; Phoenicians; large decked ship

They were desperate = willing to throw valuable cargo overboard;

Contrast: Christ sleeping peacefully in boat in the midst of a storm – He had every right to be at peace; Jonah’s was a false peace

Irony: you have a pagan captain instructing Jonah to call on his God; Unbelievers involved in rebuking the prophet of God

“*Arise*” = same command word used by God in the original commission
“*lots*” were often viewed as valid in the Scriptures – **Acts 1:26** – little stones from ankle bones; “You can roll the dice, but God determines the outcome”
The jig is up; identified himself as a “*Hebrew*”

B. (:10-14) The Storm Worsens

These experienced sailors were terrified; could not be a worse scenario; If they kept Jonah in the boat they would perish; if they threw him overboard they would be guilty of the blood of an innocent man (not convicted of any crime);
How could you do this to us?
God had nothing against these sailors;
Jonah not suicidal but making a confession that he was worthy of death and of being sacrificed to save the others; these were noble sailors – still tried to row harder to reach land and save Jonah; but the storm kept worsening;
What God decrees always comes to pass; He is in control of all history

C. (:15-17) The Storm Ceases – storm = life-changing encounter

1) Spiritual pilgrimage of the sailors: began with self effort; turned to their gods; then turned to God of Israel = genuine conversion experience; convinced that Jonah had died; even if they had seen the big fish, they would not have interpreted that as God’s mercy or deliverance

Psalms 107:23ff; 76:11

the storm humbled these strong, self-sufficient men
You can tell their repentance and confession was genuine because it was followed by vows of obedience (not some phony foxhole conversion)
God was merciful in granting them repentance

2) Spiritual pilgrimage of Jonah – he had some time to think before the fish swallowed him; he was almost half-drowned by that time
This is example of didactic poetry – Hebrews loved poetry = it taught history; emphasis not on rhyming but on comparisons and contrasts; restatement, enhancement; increase in intensity, etc. – Transition to **Chap. 2**

Conclusion: **Prov. 3:5-7**

Francis Thompson: “*The Hound of Heaven*”

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears I hid from
Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped; And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase, And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat-and a Voice beat

More instant than the Feet –
“All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.”

Eric Redmond: Regarding Disobeying the Great Commission today

However, when we are slow to tell people about Jesus or don't tell people at all, we are doing the very thing Jonah did. We are rebelling against a great commission. If we keep doing that unchecked, we could soon find ourselves moving away from the presence of the Lord. For to reject any one command of the Lord, no matter how tough the application of the command seems to be, is to reject God's will and thus to reject the Lord Himself.

Daniel Timmer: This section reveals two equally surprising responses to yhwh that the reader is invited to compare and contrast. Jonah, who knows a good deal about yhwh, understands that he is displeased by his disobedience, but claims to 'revere' yhwh as the creator and ruler of the heavens and the earth, all the while acting in ways that are radically inconsistent with his knowledge. His final attempt to evade his calling by having himself thrown into the sea demonstrates that he is willing to die rather than obey yhwh, a situation that cannot but leave the reader mystified (the reasons for this unparalleled rebellion will be revealed only in **ch. 4**).

The non-Israelite sailors, on the other hand, who have the most limited knowledge of yhwh one can imagine (ironically, it comes to them through Jonah's disingenuous profession of Yahwistic faith), yet respond to yhwh in ways that sharply contrast them with Jonah and put them on a par with the most pious of Israelites. This radical contrast prepares the reader for the subtle negative portrayal of Jonah in **chapter 2**, but also for the comparable response of the Ninevites to Jonah's message in the second half of the book. Finally, despite Jonah's plans, the sailors' conversion reveals that one of the book's main interests is the fact that non-Israelites can respond positively to God even before the dawn of the eschatological age in which prophetic books typically situate that almost unprecedented development.

TEXT: Jonah 2:1-10

TITLE: JONAH'S FERVENCY -- CRYING OUT TO GOD IN DESPERATE PRAYER –
CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

BIG IDEA:

**THE GOD OF THE SECOND CHANCE HEARS OUR DESPERATE CRIES
DESPITE THE DEPTHS OF OUR DISTRESS**

**(GOD'S DELIVERANCE IS NOT CONSTRAINED BY THE DEPTHS OF OUR
DISTRESS)**

INTRODUCTION:

Do you ever feel that your situation is so hopeless and entangled that God could never bail you out?

The belly of the fish is a lot safer place than the depths of the sea. God is moving Jonah through various stages on the way back to following Him.

As long as you can still pray there is still hope.

Daniel Timmer: Although the structure of the prayer is similar to that of biblical psalms of thanksgiving, it follows that pattern only loosely, yielding the following structure:

1. Introduction (2:2): a summary of the psalm (problem→ prayer→ provision)
2. Lament (2:3–6a): the psalmist's problem is described
3. Proclamation (2:6b): praise of yhwh's mighty act of deliverance
4. Appeal (2:7): call to yhwh for help
5. Testimonial (2:8): recital of yhwh's greatness and glory (transformed into a condemnation of the ungodly)
6. Thanksgiving and vow (2:9): praise of yhwh and promise of concrete acts of worship

Trent Butler: The fish apparently represents a safe haven for Jonah, a God-given vessel of safety escorting him out of Sheol. From inside the fish Jonah can look back at his distressful times in the sea before the rescue occurred. He describes Sheol as “a hyperbole for his brink-of-death experience (as in **Pss. 18:5; 30:3**)” (**Barker**, *Breaking Old Testament Codes*, 229).

**I. (:1-2) ANSWERED PRAYER REACHES DOWN TO THE DEPTHS OF OUR
DISTRESS**

“Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, ‘I called out of my distress to the Lord, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; Thou didst hear my voice.’”

A. Prayer as the Lifeline Connection to our Personal God

“prayed to the Lord his God”

B. Prayer in the Nick of Time -- Even as the Last Resort

- *Jonah prayed*
- *I called out to the Lord*
- *I cried for help*

Context: running away from God; under God’s hand of judgment – yet still able to pray to God for help.

In the belly of the fish for three days and three nights – did he start calling out to God right away . . . or did he sulk for some time?

C. Prayer from the Depths of Distress (Impossible Complications)

- *from the stomach of the fish*
- *my distress*
- *from the depth of Sheol*

Lloyd Ogilvie: Before we go on in the psalm of Jonah, we need to identify with the prophet’s despair in the depths of the sea. If we move to the next portion too quickly, we will miss what the psalm has to teach us about the treasures of the depths. God tracks us down and stops us in our runaway path from obedience, then confronts us with what we are doing. He also allows us to go through a time of death of our willfulness. As we pray we are aware of the hopelessness of changing either ourselves or the problem we created. This moment of hopelessness puts us through a death to self and in a good sense we give up. There is nothing we can do. We hit rock-bottom. And when we do, our surrender to God and His mercy is more than words. We cast ourselves into the arms of everlasting Mercy. That is when resurrection to a new beginning can happen. When Jonah gave up hope of surviving and could sink no lower, God intervened and saved him. **Ps. 103:4**

D. Prayer that Receives Merciful Response – (The Mercy of Answered Prayer)

- *He answered me*
- *Thou didst hear my voice*

The Lord wants to train us to be merciful instead of judgmental and prideful.
He wants our heart of compassion to be wide like His.

David Guzik: God can give us a total peace and assurance that our prayers have been answered, even before the actual answer comes

II. (:3-4) HOPE COMES FROM UNDERSTANDING THE HAND OF THE LORD IN ADMINISTERING DISCIPLINE

“For Thou hadst cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the current engulfed me. All Thy breakers and billows passed over me. So I said, ‘I

have been expelled from Thy sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Thy holy temple.”

Daniel Timmer: Jonah’s statement that the waves and billows are yhwh’s is technically correct in the abstract, but here it most likely continues his attempt to attribute his current difficulties to yhwh’s will (without any further explanation) rather than recognizing that he was responsible for his near death by drowning.

A. Sovereign Discipline – from the hand of the Lord

“Thou hadst cast me”

“Thy breakers and billows”

Trent Butler: Jonah describes his trouble in very personal terms. It was not an accident. It was a you-and-me confrontation. Jonah remembered the horror of the situation, a horror caused not only by his fear of the sea but even more by his knowledge that God hurled (or cast him out) into the deep. If God had put him there, then only God could deliver him, and Jonah knew he had become a rebel whom God might not want to deliver. Why would God deliver him when the threat came from all your waves and breakers? As Jonah pictured his plight, he was as good as dead. Any deliverance had to come from God.

B. Severe Discipline

“into the deep”

“into the heart of the seas”

C. Surpassing Discipline – beyond measure – looks like I am permanently separated from God

“engulfed me”

“passed over me”

“So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Thy sight.’”

D. Sufficient Discipline – Accomplishes purpose of Restoration and Orientation towards Holiness, Worship and Service

“Nevertheless I will look again toward Thy holy temple.”

III. (:5-6) THE AWESOMENESS OF THE DELIVERANCE CORRESPONDS TO THE MESSINESS AND HOPELESSNESS OF THE PIT

A. The Messiness and Hopelessness of the Pit -- 5 Images

“Water encompassed me to the point of death”

“The great deep engulfed me.”

“Weeds were wrapped around my head.”

“I descended to the roots of the mountains.”

“The earth with its bars was around me forever,”

John Goldingay: Reed or seaweed suggests the growth on the ocean floor in which one could get fatally entangled; it thus also suggests a parallel image to the ropes with which She'ol catches and holds its victims. The feet of the mountains are their extreme bottoms in the subterranean and suboceanic depths. The earth is here the (under)world, where the gates of Hades had been closed and barred behind him (cf. **Matt. 16:18**).

B. The Awesomeness of the Deliverance

“But Thou has brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.”

Trent Butler: Jonah sank as low as he could go, to the roots (or base or foundation stones) of the mountains. His journey downward that started in **chapter 1** is finished. He reached the bars of the earth—the gates to Sheol or the underworld itself. He was in the pit, another term for the residence of the dead (**Ezek. 28:8**). Humanly speaking, escape was impossible. Jonah was there forever. Even entry into the residence of the dead was not eternal because God maintains control of life even in the realm of the dead. For Jonah this proved more than a theological statement of faith. He confessed to his own experience: you brought my life up.

IV. (:7-9) REPENTANCE SPARKS RENEWED COMMITMENT AND THANKSGIVING

A. Turning Back to the Lord with his Last Gasp

“While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came to Thee, into Thy holy temple.”

B. Specific Repentance to Return to Faithfulness

“Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness”

Charles Ryrie: Jonah includes himself among those who forsake God’s faithfulness for lies.

Daniel Timmer: The last few verses of the psalm, its testimonial (**2:8**) and thanksgiving sections (**2:9**), bring Jonah’s self-congratulatory and self-centred view of God and himself to bear on the issue of non-Israelites by contrasting those who hold to worthless gods (**2:8**) with Jonah (**2:9**). This is highly salient in the light of Jonah’s commission to go to Nineveh and the shocking response of the sailors to the meagre knowledge of yhwh they gained from him in **chapter 1**. But in contrast to other psalms that praise God for manifesting his glory, power, faithful love, amazing deeds and so on in the author’s deliverance (**Pss 30:11; 31:22; 34:7–9; 35:10; 40:5**, etc.), the ‘testimonial’ is replaced by a condemnation of those who worship false gods (cf. **Ps. 31:6**). Jonah most likely has in mind the sailors, perhaps because he is unaware that the sea calmed once he was thrown overboard. But whether they, the Ninevites or non-Israelites in general are in view, the contrast clearly presumes that Jonah, because he has been delivered, is the **polar opposite** of such people and has himself experienced God’s faithful love (*hesed*). The larger context in which Jonah constructs this flattering contrast invites the reader to draw the opposite conclusion. On the one hand, the sailors’ new-found

relationship with yhwh is undoubtedly genuine, and constitutes a revelation of his *hesed* to those who do not worship false gods (note **Ps. 31:7**, which follows a similar condemnation in **31:6**). On the other hand, Jonah's deliverance is in large part a means to God's end: bringing a message of condemnation to Nineveh that will reveal his *hesed* to the most unpromising non-Israelites (**Jon. 4:2**).

C. Renewed Commitment

1. Worship from a Heart of Thanksgiving

"But I will sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving."

Mark Copeland: It is interesting to note that his prayer is more of a THANKSGIVING, than a petition

Trent Butler: The present context is a praise to God expressed first in the negative statement about worthless nothings and then in the positive vow to praise and worship and sacrifice. Part of that praise is to express the availability of God's grace, his love, his covenant faithfulness to his people, and to warn them of the danger of abandoning that grace when they abandon God. The Lord personifies grace, and he gives objective blessings because of his grace. Both are tied up in the meaning of "their grace."

In the midst of the sea, he thanked God for deliverance. In the belly of the fish, he repeated that prayer, and certainly at the public thanksgiving service in the temple later, he repeated the prayer. We cannot say thank you to God too many times.

John Goldingay: It is a textbook example of a thanksgiving psalm, which tells the story of how a suppliant experienced a life-threatening predicament, how that person prayed, how Yahweh listened to the prayer, and how Yahweh acted to deliver the suppliant, who then affirms the nature of Yahweh and makes a commitment for the future. A thanksgiving psalm may tell its story more than once, and Jonah's psalm does so by summarizing it (**v. 2 [3]**) and then giving a detailed version (**vv. 3–7 [4–8]**) before coming to the affirmation and commitment (**vv. 8–9 [9–10]**).

2. Service in the context of Faithfulness

"That which I have vowed I will pay."

Trent Butler: Still in the belly of the fish, looking back at his desperation in the sea, Jonah looks forward to the temple experience. He believes he will once more see the temple. Once there he will carry out his obligations to God. He will sing a song of thanksgiving at a special thanksgiving ceremony. He will make the thanksgiving sacrifice and share it with family, friends, and priests. He will recount all that God has done to deliver him and will testify about God's goodness to him. This is Jonah's promise to God, and this is exactly what he will do when he sees the temple again.

3. Dependence Upon God's Grace and Mercy

"Salvation is from the Lord."

Note: But we can tell from the events of **Chapter 4** and Jonah's attitude there that he had not fully repented or grasped the lessons yet that the Lord had for him.

V. (:10) SOVEREIGN DELIVERANCE BRINGS US TO THE PLACE OF SAFETY AND RENEWED SERVICE

A. The Sovereign Lord Accomplishes His Purposes

"The Lord commanded the fish"

B. The Process of Restoration Can be Painful and Messy

"and it vomited Jonah up"

C. The Place of Safety Brings Opportunity for Renewed Service

"onto the dry land"

Now it is time to obediently answer the call of God and go minister to Nineveh.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When have we felt **disconnected** from God? How have we seen Him still respond to our prayers and pleas for help?
- 2) How have we learned to be **merciful** to others from God showing us mercy?
- 3) What **vain idols** have we had to turn away from in order to faithfully maintain our loyalty to our God?
- 4) How are we encouraged by resting in the sovereignty of God – *"Salvation is from the Lord"*?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Piper: Before we look at this chapter let me mention briefly why I regard the book as historical rather than as a parable. Not only was Jonah a historical person, as we saw from **2 Kings 14:25**, but also in the New Testament Jesus treats Jonah's story as historical. He says in **Matthew 12:40**, *"Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will arise 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."* Those of us who respect the wisdom of Jesus will be very slow to call his judgment into question. He thought the story was historical. We should, too. If you ask how a man can survive in the belly of a fish three days, the

answer is, he probably can't—any more than a person can stay three days in the grave and live again. That's why Jesus called it a "*sign*." In **Matthew 12:39** he says, "*An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah, the prophet.*" Jesus knew this was no ordinary event. It was a **miraculous sign** of God's gracious and powerful intervention. There is no point in trying to explain it scientifically any more than the miraculous signs of Jesus' ministry. Jonah cried for help and God saved him miraculously with a fish.

[Outline of message:]

First, God answers us in spite of our guilt.

Second, God answers us in spite of his judgment.

Third, God answers us and delivers us from impossible circumstances.

Fourth, God answers us in the nick of time.

Fifth, God answers us in stages, not all of which are comfortable.

Sixth, God answers us in order to win our undivided loyalty and thanks.

Finally, God answers us in our guilty distress to help us become merciful like he is.

Hampton Keathley: I think the life of every individual is also parallel to Jonah's experience. God calls us, but we rebel. We search for life in everything else but God until we come to a point in our life where we are so low that we finally recognize our inability and come to the conclusion that Salvation is from the Lord.

John Calvin: But we must remember that his prayer was not composed in the words which are here related; but Jonah, while in the bowels of the fish, dwelt on these thoughts in his mind. Hence he relates in this song how he thought and felt; and we shall see that he was then in a state of distraction, as our minds must necessarily be tossed here and there by temptations. For the servants of God do not gain the victory without great struggle. We must fight, and indeed strenuously, that we may conquer. Jonah then in this song shows that he was agitated with great trouble and hard contests: yet this conviction was firmly fixed in his heart,— that God was to be sought, and would not be sought in vain, as he is ever ready to bring help to his people whenever they cry to him.

PRAYER

Grant, Almighty God, that as thou hast once given us such an evidence of thy infinite power in thy servant Jonah, whose mind, when he was almost sunk down into hell, thou hadst yet raised up to thyself, and hadst so supported with firm constancy, that he ceased not to pray and to call on thee,— O grant, that in the trials by which we must be daily exercised, we may raise upwards our minds to thee, and never cease to think that thou art near us; and that when the signs of thy wrath appear, and when our sins thrust themselves before our eyes, to drive us to despair, may we still constantly struggle, and never surrender the hope of thy mercy, until having finished all our contests, we may at length freely and fully give thanks to thee, and praise thy infinite goodness, such as we

daily experience that being conducted through continual trials, we may at last come into that blessed rest which is laid up for us in heaven, through Christ one Lord. Amen.

Thomas Constable: The following prayer is mainly thanksgiving for deliverance from drowning. It is not thanksgiving for deliverance from the fish. Jonah prayed it while he was in the fish. Evidently he concluded after some time in the fish's stomach that he would not die from drowning. Drowning was a particularly distasteful form of death for an ancient Near Easterner such as Jonah who regarded the sea as a great enemy. Jonah's ability to thank God in the midst of his black torture chamber, which pitched him uncontrollably in every direction, shows that he had experienced a remarkable change in attitude (cf. **1:3, 12**). . .

The testimony that salvation comes from Yahweh is the expression of Jonah's thanksgiving that he promised God. The last declaration in this psalm is one of the great summary statements about salvation in the Bible. Salvation, either physical or spiritual, ultimately comes from Yahweh and only from Him, not from idols or people including oneself (cf. **Ps. 3:8; 37:39**). It is in His power, and only He can give it. This statement also implies a recognition of the fact that God has the right to save whom He will.

Daniel Timmer: Jonah's deliverance demonstrates God's mercy to him despite his disobedience, but the prophet's prayer continues to develop the very strange disconnect between the theology that Jonah knows in his head and the attitudes of his heart that drive his actions. With great subtlety, the author juxtaposes Jonah's pious self-image with his self-absorption, his assumption of his own innocence and cavalier attribution of his troubles to God's carelessness or mistreatment of him, and his newly revealed disdain for those who, in his mind, do not share his orthodox religious beliefs. Despite its pious overtones, this depiction of the prophet is extremely negative, and is a very sharp warning to all who profess to know God. Jonah neither loves God (he would rather die than do what yhwah wants, for reasons revealed in **ch. 4**) nor loves his non-Israelite neighbour, whose unhappy fate he imagines and glibly contrasts with his own. Those who genuinely love God reflect his character and rejoice to see others receive and enjoy the grace they have received.

TEXT: Jonah 3:1-10

TITLE: JONAH'S FAITHFULNESS -- PREACHING GOD'S PROPHETIC MESSAGE
– WILL YOU REPENT IN TIME?

BIG IDEA:

THE PREACHING OF GOD'S PROPHETIC MESSAGE OF IMMINENT JUDGMENT CAN CHANGE MEN'S HEARTS AND TURN AWAY THE IMPENDING WRATH OF GOD

INTRODUCTION:

John Goldingay: The opening of Act Two pointedly parallels the opening of Act One. It indicates that Yahweh will not be put off and that his designated agent may not be able to escape his commission.

Cf. a mulligan in golf; opportunity to replay the shot

Jonah still doesn't have the right attitude and heart of compassion – we will see in **chapter 4**. He has heart of contempt and judgment – that is the main emphasis of the book – God wants to work on the heart of His people so that our heart towards the lost reflects His heart of compassion and mercy.

Philip Peter Jenson: There are a number of differences between the two similar introductions to **chs. 1** and **3**, but both focus on the **outward action**. Because of this it is difficult to be certain about Jonah's own thoughts and attitudes. Did he go resisting inwardly (**Trible** 1996), reluctantly (**Fretheim** 1977, 108–9), resigned to his charge or eagerly (like Noah in **Gen 6:22** or Abraham in **Gen 12:4**)? How far should the text be examined for subtle indications of the **author's purpose**? And how far does an interpretation contribute to an overall portrait of Jonah's character? I have argued that the story makes the most sense if Jonah emerges grateful but with a continuing **ambivalent attitude** to his commission. His silence, together with hints provided by the narrator, indicates that he has been subdued but not persuaded (**Simon** 1999). But whatever his attitude, the most important point in these verses is that **he did obey**, whereas in **ch. 1** he disobeyed. The letter of the command is fulfilled, whatever the spirit in which this was done (**Golka** 1988).

I. (:1-3) THE MESSENGER – CALLED TO DELIVER THE GOODS -- SAME CALLING . . . DIFFERENT RESPONSE

A. (:1) God Calls His Prophet a Second Time – Service is a Privilege
“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying”

He is the God of the Second Chance; but don't presume upon His patience

Doug Goins: Let me ask you: Has the discipline of God, the distress that God has brought into your life because of sin, made you more obedient or less obedient to him? In the long haul have you become more flexible or less flexible in responding to God's heart desires? Are you more submissive to his will or less submissive? Has the stress made you bitter toward God, or better in serving him and following him? Are you more consistent in running with him and agreeing with him?

B. (:2) God Commands Faithfulness in Proclaiming His Message

“Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.”

God doesn't always give us the entire picture up front.

C. (:3) God Casts a Big Vision of Great Challenge and Great Compassion

“So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk.”

- a very significant city
- a very large city

John Goldingay: But it hardly requires three days simply to walk through once or to walk around once; more likely the implication is that it would take three days to go and preach in every neighborhood.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Verse 3 reminds us again that Nineveh was a “great” city; 1:2 is expanded here to “an exceedingly great city.” The words literally mean “a great city to God.” Our mission to our own cities should be motivated by the same designation. Through Jeremiah, God called the displaced Judeans in exile to seek the peace of their city, for in its peace they would find their peace (**Jer. 29:7**). Jesus wept over Jerusalem, and through the centuries of Christian history the cities have been a neglected mission field. **William Booth** said, “When I got the poor of London on my heart and a vision of what Christ could do, I decided He would have all of William Booth that there was.” **Nineveh was important to God.**

II. (:4) THE MISSION -- PROCLAIMING MESSAGE OF IMPENDING DESTRUCTION

A. Tackling the Scope of the Mission – Hardest part is actually beginning

“Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk”

B. Conveying the Urgency of the Mission

“and he cried out and said”

C. Proclaiming the Message of the Mission – Unpopular and Dangerous

“Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”

Short sermons can be quite effective!

Daniel Timmer: Despite our tendency to read biblical prophetic warnings as unconditional, there is no doubt that the warning's opening words, Yet forty days, reveal that God might relent. It is highly unlikely that Jonah would have waited to see what would happen to the city after delivering his message (4:5) if he had understood that message as an unchangeable divine promise of destruction. Similarly, without presuming upon a favourable outcome, Nineveh's king was able to contemplate (in his admittedly different theological calculus) the possibility that God would relent. Still more importantly, **Jeremiah 18:7–8** shows that God retains the right to rescind judgment when those threatened by it repent. Finally, the verb used for overturned (*hāpak*) is used in radically different ways in the Old Testament, and can refer to a city's being 'turned upside down' in destruction (**Gen. 19:21, 25, 29**, Qal), to the 'turning' of a curse into a blessing (**Deut. 23:5**, Qal; cf. **Esth. 9:1, 22**), to being 'transformed' temporarily into a prophet (**1 Sam. 10:6**), to 'changing' the sea into dry ground (**Ps. 66:6**), to changing one's heart (**Exod. 14:5**), or to producing spiritual transformation in someone (**Zeph. 3:9**). The ambiguity of the verb suggests that very different outcomes attend Nineveh's possible responses to God's threat of judgment.

III. (:5-9) THE MOVEMENT – HUMBLING THEMSELVES AND PETITIONING GOD FOR HIS MERCY

Perhaps most impressive and astonishing people movement of all time – an entire city repenting and turning away from their wickedness and back to God

What inspired such a dramatic turnaround?

- God's heart of love and compassion reaching out to them
- Circumstances of the unusual prophet

Ron Ritchie: Well, the second thing that caused their repentance, I suggest, is that I think that **Jonah looked strange**. Let me explain. There is some evidence that in the late 1800's a sailor fell overboard and was swallowed by a great fish of the shark family. Two days later the shark was caught in a net. He was brought on board, cut open, and the man was found alive. There was only one difference about him, and that was that somehow the fish's digestive juices (which hadn't got to him totally), had burned off his first layer of skin so that every feature of the man was white, and he stayed that way for the rest of his life.

A. (:5) Response of the People

1. Faith – The essential starting point

“Then the people of Nineveh believed in God”

Corporate movement towards repentance on the part of all the people

Trent Butler: Nineveh was known as a religious city with temples to many gods, but in this instance the people of Nineveh turned their backs on all their national gods and personal gods and turned to the God of Israel who created the heavens and the earth. They recognized God's power and believed he would carry out the threats he had made through Jonah.

2. Humbling themselves before God

“and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.”

Involves confession of sin and petitioning God for mercy

No caste system when it comes to our standing before God

B. (:6-8) Response of the King

1. (:6) Personal Response – Same as that of the people

“When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on the ashes.”

Effectiveness of Jonah’s preaching – *the word reached the king*

King taking a leadership position

Recognizing the sovereignty of the King of the Universe

(how different from Nebuchadnezzar)

Doug Goins: It is amazing that what the king is doing is following the lead of his people as he exchanges his own royal robes for sackcloth. To put on that scratchy burlap covering acknowledges that one deserves God's judgment and affliction. It symbolizes grieving over one's own sin. For the king to sit in ashes means he leaves his seat of authority and humiliates himself. He prostrates himself before God in repentance. These are powerful symbolic actions in leadership. When the king issues this royal decree, although it comes in response to the people's initiation of mourning and fasting, it does add official sanction and impetus to what is already going on.

Daniel Timmer: Since Nineveh did not become Assyria’s capital city until **705**, it is very unlikely that the king mentioned here is the Assyrian monarch. Recalling the **partial fragmentation** of the Assyrian Empire in the first half of the eighth century, it is much more likely that this man was one of the magnates who ruled over a swathe of territory that included or was near Nineveh. The presence of various visiting religious specialists in the royal court makes it possible that Jonah was viewed in the same way in Nineveh’s regional context, and the striking response of Nineveh’s ruler to Jonah’s message leaves no doubt that it was taken seriously.

The ruler’s personal response involves two contrasting movements. He arises from his throne, replaces his royal robes with sackcloth, and then sits down in ashes/dust. This puts him on the same level as the general population and visibly demonstrates his humility before God’s warning. Further, as the representative of Nineveh, he symbolizes the **humiliation** of the city before God.

2. (:7-8) Public Response – Issuing Mandate

a. Invoking his Authority

“And he issued a proclamation and it said, ‘In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles:’”

Buy-in from his nobles

- b. Instituting Extreme Corporate Fast – extending it to animals
“Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water.”
- c. Calling for Extreme Expression of Humility
“But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth”
- d. Commanding Repentance – Petitioning God for Mercy
“and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.”
Fervency entreated
Corporate concern, but personal responsibility
Calling for radical lifestyle transformation
No movement on God’s part apart from movement on our part
We need God’s working in our hearts to enable us to repent

Daniel Timmer: The edict then focuses on prayer (3:8b) and repentance (3:8c). This last element is notable for its focus on **behaviour**, which is captured by the quintessential term for **repentance**, *turn*. Specifically, the ruler urges the population to turn from evil and violence. *Evil* echoes God’s condemnation of Nineveh as evil in 1:2, but *violence* adds new specificity (see the same expression in **Job 16:17; Ps. 58:2; Isa. 59:6**). It is very unlikely that this violence is limited to the city of Nineveh, or that it refers primarily to inner-Assyrian crimes. In the light of Nineveh’s religious and political prominence even before it became the capital city in 705, the violence in view is more likely that exercised by the empire as a whole, and thus a reality already known in the northern kingdom of Israel. The king’s recognition of guilt thus goes to the heart of the violent imperial project described above in the Introduction. The final statement of the edict recognizes that God may, or may not, respond favourably to the actions of the Ninevites (3:9).

C. (:9) Fear of God coupled with Hope in His Mercy

“Who knows, God may turn and relent, and withdraw His burning anger so that we shall not perish?”

Trent Butler: Prayer, repentance, a change of attitudes and actions influence God. He reacts as a person in a personal relationship and changes his plans in accordance with the way people have changed their conduct.

III. (:10) THE MERCY – RESPONDING BY AVERTING EXECUTION OF WRATH

A. Awareness of Fruits of Repentance

“When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way”

B. Averting Execution of Wrath

“then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When have we blown it but God has graciously given us another opportunity to serve Him? How have we responded?
- 2) Are we being faithful to proclaim the message that God has committed to us?
- 3) What is our expectation in terms of how people might respond to the message? Do we write off certain groups of society and look down on them with contempt?
- 4) What concrete steps do we take to humble ourselves before God and seek His mercy?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ron Ritchie: In Genesis 10 we are told that Nimrod built the city of Nineveh and during all those years it had continued to grow bigger. (The city proper was something like San Francisco, with three smaller cities surrounding it, like Daly City, Pacifica and Millbrae.) In Jonah's time Nineveh was about to become the capital of the Assyrian Empire which, in 726 B.C., would take Israel into captivity and become the ruler of the world until Babylon became strong.

So Jonah comes to the city and finds over six hundred thousand people going about their business. He finds within the city all kinds of shrines and temples; he discovers that the Ninevites love astrology and they love the gods. He goes through the city, which is majestic in his eyes, for about a day and a half, after completing a 500-mile journey across high mountains and desert plains, and he proclaims a message to the people.

Now the people are the issue in this story. God loves these wicked Assyrians even though they are hung up on all kinds of astrology and pagan worship. They had water gods and land gods; they had sky gods and wind gods, but they were forever under fear, because the gods they created in their minds were like people--they were greedy and demanding; they loved sacrifice; they had husbands and wives and children. Their gods controlled their destiny, so the Ninevites were forever trying to appease them. So in a true sense they were religious people; they were very conscious of the other world; they were very aware of powers and beings and destiny; they were very aware of the stars and how they moved in the heavens.

Doug Goins: Jonah says two things in the condensed sermon. First, he says there are forty days before judgment will come. Throughout the ancient Near East that would have had religious significance. It always suggested a time of waiting for divine activity, or a period of divine activity. Think of some of the instances in the Old Testament: Forty years that Israel wanders in the wilderness, forty days of the flood. And in other ancient Near Eastern cultures it had similar religious significance. So when they hear that in forty days something bad is going to happen, it comes like a trumpet blast of warning: "There is danger coming and you had better pay attention!" And all ears would prick up.

The other thing Jonah says is that Nineveh is going to be destroyed or overthrown. This is an unambiguous announcement of judgment or divine wrath. Remember, in God's first call to Jonah in **chapter 1** he said, "*Cry against [this great city]; because their wickedness has come up before me.*" Nineveh is going to be destroyed as a consequence of its sinfulness. That is really the heart of the message. And sin is always going to be judged in the life of an individual, a community, or a nation; that message is very consistent in the Scriptures. . .

But what is even more awesome to me is that God is the one who instigates our ability to repent and turn back to him. His activity precedes as well as follows our repentance in a three-step process. In this account we see God first sovereignly choosing the city of Nineveh on which to focus his love; out of grace he elects these people to salvation. Second, the people respond to God's word through Jonah and repent of their sin. And then third, God seems to repent in granting forgiveness for sin and withholding judgment, but in fact that was his purpose all along. So in the story of the king and people of Nineveh, the full circle of repentance takes place, and Jonah is strategic in that process because of his obedience, ambivalent as it is, to God's will and God's message. There is an unparalleled outpouring of God's Spirit in Nineveh. A revival like this never happened even in Israel throughout biblical history.

Thomas Constable: The meaning of "*a three days' walk*" remains somewhat obscure. The Hebrew phrase is literally "*a distance of three days*," which does not solve the problem. It may mean that it took three days to walk through the city from one extremity to the opposite one. It may also mean that it took three days to walk around the circumference of the city, though this seems unlikely (cf. v. 4). Whether the size refers to the area enclosed by the major eight-mile wall, which seems improbable, or includes the outlying suburbs is also unclear. Regardless, the description clearly points to Nineveh's **geographical size** as being large and requiring several days for Jonah's message to reach everyone (cf. 4:11).

Another explanation is that the literal meaning of the phrase, namely, "*a visit of three days*," describes the protocol involved in visiting an important city such as Nineveh. It was customary in the ancient Near East for an emissary from another city-state to take three days for an official visit. He would spend the first day meeting and enjoying the hospitality of his host, the second day discussing the primary purpose of his visit, and

the third saying his farewells. If Jonah was such an emissary, he went as a divine representative to Nineveh's king and other government officials as well as to the people. This explanation suggests that Jonah's preaching may have started with the king and then proceeded to the people rather than the other way around. This view may account better for the king's repentance and his decree to all the people to repent (vv. 6-9) compared to the traditional view. . .

Notice that in this section of verses (vv. 5-10) the name "God" (Heb. *Elohim*, the strong one) appears exclusively. Earlier and later in the story the name "Lord" (Heb. *Yahweh*, the covenant keeping God) occurs frequently. Jonah did not present God, and the Ninevites did not fear God, as the covenant keeping God of Israel but as the universal supreme being. Likewise God did not deal with the Ninevites as He dealt with His covenant people Israel but as He deals with all people generally. His mercy was part of the "common grace" that He bestows on all people who do right rather than a manifestation of "special grace." Thus the story teaches that God will be merciful to anyone, His elect and His non-elect, who live submissively to natural divine law.

Matthew Henry: Here is a wonder of divine mercy in the sparing of these Ninevites upon their repentance (v. 10): God saw their works; he not only heard their good words, by which they professed repentance, but saw their good works, by which they brought forth fruits meet for repentance; he saw that they turned from their evil way, and that was the thing he looked for and required. If he had not seen that, their fasting and sackcloth would have been as nothing in his account. He saw there was among them a general conviction of their sins and a general resolution not to return to them, and that for some days they lived better, and there was a new face of things upon the city; and this he was well pleased with. Note, God takes notice of every instance of the reformation of sinners, even those instances that fall not under the cognizance and observation of the world. He sees who turn from their evil way and who do not, and meets those with favour that meet him in a sincere conversion. When they repent of the evil of sin committed by them he repents of the evil of judgment pronounced against them. Thus he spared Nineveh, and did not the evil which he said he would do against it. Here were no sacrifices offered to God, that we read of, to make atonement for sin, but the sacrifice of God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, such as the Ninevites now had, it what he will not despise; it is what he will give countenance to and put honour upon.

David Guzik: (5-9) The response of the people: repentance

a. The word repentance isn't in this passage; but repentance isn't really a word, it is something you do - and these people were doing repentance

b. Repentance begins with believing God; as we believe Him and His word, we have the power to transform our lives as He wills - you can do all these other things of repentance, but if it doesn't begin with believing on and trusting God, it is all a useless work of the flesh

c. Repentance means doing something - the people of Nineveh fasted, mourned as if for the dead, and they did it from the highest to the lowest

- i. If repentance is anything, it is not business as usual; something has to change, something has to be different - in their case, they took off their normal clothes and put on sackcloth - made of a thick coarse cloth, normally made from goat's hair; to wear it symbolized the rejection of earthly comforts and pleasures
- ii. They even repented on behalf of their animals, dressing them as if they were mourning for the dead!

d. Repentance means cry[ing] mightily to God; it means coming to God with passion and seriousness about your sin and need for His mercy and forgiveness

- i. So much of modern "repentance," with its claim of excuses and reasons why we sinned, is really not repentance at all - it is an attempt to justify and excuse our sin - but either you have sinned or you haven't; if you have, there is no excuse, and if you haven't, there is no need to repent

e. Repentance means turn[ing] from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands; it means to change your minds and turn from your previously sinful actions

- i. In the Christian life, repentance does not describe what you must do to turn to God; it describes the very process of turning to God, because when we truly turn to Him, we turn away from the things that displease Him

f. Repentance has hope in the mercy and love of God; it hopes that God will relent and that the repentant people will not perish.

Pastor Thomas Leake: Real Repentance and Revival – 4 Scenes Described

Big Idea: True Revival is always ignited by the preaching of God's Word which leads to genuine repentance which is evidenced by a humble turning from sinful acts and subsequent obedient acts

Introduction:

Recall the Revival under the preaching of George Whitfield in England and then in the colonies = the Great Awakening. It happened in an unlikely place; at an unlikely time; His message was simply to call men to repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ. As a Calvinist he clearly understood that "salvation is from God" (= the message from **Jonah chapter 2**). But his belief in sovereign election did not dull his zeal for evangelism; instead it gave him confidence in the efficacy of evangelism.

But as great as that revival was the 8th century B.C. revival in the wicked city of Nineveh surpasses it as a surprising and powerful work of God. **Jonah 3** records the climax to the dramatic account of Jonah's life = stunning events. Many people lose sight of **how astonishing this repentance was** because they focus just on the story of Jonah and the fish. But this was an **unprecedented work of God**. It teaches us what true revival is all about – in contrast to the many counterfeit claims to revival we see today. Cf. the need for revival today in America

I. (:1-2) Scene #1 – Recommissioning of Jonah

A. “*the second time*” – brings to mind all of the events of **chapters 1-2**. How long did it take for God to send this word to Jonah? Probably very soon after he got thrown up on the beach of Joppa. Why delay any longer? There already had been some delay because of Jonah’s disobedience.

B. The job of a prophet is not to be an innovator; just faithfully proclaim God’s truth.

C. Amazing that God still was willing to use Jonah

He was a reluctant prophet at best. He had failed miserably. Yet in His mercy and grace God continued to use him. Cf. **Eph. 2** – the riches of God’s mercy and grace; definitions of mercy and grace; example of God using the Apostle Paul after he had persecuted the church (**Eph. 3:8**); but God also warned Jonah not to presume on His grace; many people today sound like grace can offer a free ride so we do not have to feel the obligations of obedient service; grace is never a license to live as we please; but grace strengthens us to obey fully the commands of God

D. Commissioned to cry out with a great voice a great message to a great city with great consequences; not allowed to offer some accommodating, entertaining message; had to cover 500 miles to reach Nineveh

II. (:3-4) Scene #2 -- Response of Jonah

A. Complete opposite response from **1:3**

Jonah had to change the label on his suitcase from “Tarshish or Bust” to “Nineveh here I come”

B. What was Nineveh like? Founded by Nimrod; **Nahum 3:1-4** – an account from 150 years after Jonah – but still gives us a good idea; violent group of people; about 120,000 people

C. “*a three days walk*” – 2 possibilities

- circumference walking distance

- time it would take to walk up and down the streets proclaiming the message

D. Manner of preaching: walking and preaching; Jonah wanted everyone to hear the message of judgment; repeated the same message over and over; not hard to understand; Jonah liked preaching this message of judgment; he was not rooting for their salvation; shows that God can use the preaching of the truth even when the motives of the preacher are not totally pure; the truth has power

E. 40 days – significance of this number 40 in Scriptures

Time of testing or divine judgment; a waiting period; God watching: would they repent? Would God still go ahead and punish them anyway?

F. Sometimes people like to argue that certain people groups don’t get a fair shake in terms of exposure to the gospel message – you could argue that these Assyrians had not

been so blessed; but God never excuses our ignorance of Him (cf. **Romans 2**); God did not owe the Ninevites a special divine message; they knew they were violating the standards of God and they didn't care; no fear of God

III. (:5-9) Scene #3 -- Repentance of Nineveh

A. Simplistic message

No frills; how could they have responded – laughed at him; called him Nuts; imprisoned him; etc.

B. Responded in genuine faith and repentance – believed in God; not in Jonah; the king knew the message was true; now we find him sitting on a new throne = throne of ashes

C. Felt so serious about this repentance that they included the animals – they were headed for destruction as well

D. Hope in the king's voice – Will God have mercy on such a wicked people as the Ninevites if they repent? – this is the subject of the entire book

God's mercy is their only hope; they have no other; not making excuses for their sin; all segments of society in the same boat

E. Message of Repentance cannot be changed or diluted

People may find it distasteful today; but it is the only message that is the power of God unto salvation; we need to keep speaking this message of divine judgment; **Acts 17:30-31**; often we think "that won't work" or we think we have a better idea how to attract the response of faith; cannot try to get a free ride by aligning with Christ as your Savior but not submitting to His Lordship; you must repent from sin and have following acts of obedience

F. Genuine Revival for this generation

Future generation slipped back into sin and was wiped out; there might have been a few tares amongst the wheat; but the city was characterized by genuine repentance; Not every generation repents – cf. generation of the day of Christ – a greater one than Jonah was present preaching the same message of repentance and divine judgment, but the people did not respond; they stubbornly remained in their sins; no godly conviction of sin

Day of the Lord is coming – count on it

IV. (:10) Scene #4 – Relenting of God's Wrath

(next week)

Daniel Timmer: In comparison with the sailors, the most significant difference is the absence of any claim that the Ninevites *feared yhwh/God* (contrast **1:16**). Similarly, there is no indication that they offered the prayer the edict called for (**3:8**, notably absent from **3:10**, and contrast **1:14**). In comparison with other non-Israelites who turn to yhwh, other significant differences appear. Rahab (**Josh. 2:8-12**) was well aware of yhwh's power over the land's inhabitants (**2:9**), and included herself in those who know

that *'yhwh your God is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath'* (2:11). Moreover, her faith led her to join Israel (**Josh. 6:25**). Ruth similarly shifted her allegiance from her Moabite gods to the God of Israel (**Ruth 1:16**). The account of Na'aman's healing (**2 Kgs 5:15–19**) likewise peppers his discourse with references to yhwh, whom he recognized as the only *'God in all the earth'*, adding that even when he must bow to other gods with his master once back in Aram, this would not indicate a less than exclusive allegiance to yhwh (**Aurelius 2003: 157**). It is also noteworthy that these three episodes do not involve external rites of repentance or mourning, which suggests that such actions are neither necessary nor sufficient for genuine conversion. These points favour the conclusion that the majority of Nineveh's population underwent a change **less significant** than that of the sailors in **chapter 1**. If some Ninevites did turn to the God of Israel, their influence on Nineveh was negligible in the light of the city's subsequent participation in Assyrian imperialism that culminates in Nahum's condemnation of it some hundred years later. . .

This episode, together with that of the sailors in **chapter 1**, continues to guide the reader towards the book's main theological claim: because grace cannot be merited, those who have received it may not begrudge God's sharing it with others. As **chapter 4** reveals, those who cannot bear to see the grace they think they enjoy shared with others reveal that they have not in fact tasted that grace. But in **chapter 3**, as in **chapter 4**, God has the last word: he clearly delights to show mercy to non-Israelites, not least because it proves in the clearest way possible that his grace knows no bounds and cannot be deprived of its gloriously indiscriminate nature.

TEXT: Jonah 4:1-11

TITLE: JONAH'S FAILURE – BEGRUDGING GOD'S MERCY AND COMPASSION
TOWARDS THE UNDESERVING –
WHO ARE YOU TO COMPLAIN AGAINST GOD'S SOVEREIGN DISPOSITION OF
MERCY AND GRACE?

BIG IDEA:

**THOSE WHO BENEFIT FROM GOD'S COMPASSION HAVE NO RIGHT TO
COMPLAIN AGAINST THE SOVEREIGN EXTENSION OF MERCY TO
OTHERS (NO MATTER HOW UNDESERVING)**

INTRODUCTION:

Jonah's ministry "success" was really "failure" when you examine his heart motivation. Here God takes the reluctant prophet to task and uses a simple object lesson to expose the difference between a heart of compassion and a heart of vengeance. Despite having just personally experienced the mercy of God in his own desperate situation, Jonah begrudges that same mercy to the city of Nineveh.

John Goldingay: The chapter division usefully marks the story's return to a focus on Jonah, but it keeps a focus on what is "dire" (*ra'*) for other people and for Jonah, and on what is "good" (*tôb*) in Jonah's eyes, and in God's.

Daniel Timmer: Chapter 4 presents two responses:

- Jonah responds to yhwh's deliverance of Nineveh,
- and yhwh has the last word as he responds, patiently but unrelentingly, to Jonah's response.

Trent Butler: Prejudice and hatred lead people away from God's loving plan to a demand for revenge and destruction. Prejudice and hatred lead to a concern for self while love and pity lead to a commitment to help and save.

**I. (:1-3) ANGER AGAINST GOD IS ESSENTIALLY COMPLAINING
AGAINST SOME ASPECT OF GOD'S CHARACTER**

**A. (:1) Venting Displeasure -- Reformed Actions . . . But Same Judgmental
Attitude**

"But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry."

Doug Goins: Jonah's problem is that he wants to control God. And what do any of us do when we can't control circumstances and get our own way? We get angry. (We may express our anger in a lot of different ways---perhaps passively.)

Daniel Timmer: The author presents Jonah's reaction to yhwh's mercy to Nineveh in the strongest terms. Incredibly, Jonah considers it to be a great evil, something worse in

his eyes than was Nineveh's evil in God's eyes (1:2)! This statement is so arrogant and blasphemous that it can hardly be understood. Jonah, the Israelite who benefits in countless ways from God's past mercy towards and self-revelation to his people, who shows no awareness of his sin and does not repent even when faced with death (ch. 2), finds a way to condemn the very God who delights to show mercy to the undeserving. In short, Jonah stands in judgment over God, and arrogates to himself the right to decide who 'should' or can fittingly receive divine mercy – he may receive it, and non-Israelites may not. His arrogance is confirmed by his anger with God, probably an ironic subversion of the divine anger over Israel's idolatry at Sinai (Exod. 32:10–11), a passage to which Jonah refers in the next verse.

John Goldingay: God has given up his blazing anger, but he thus transfers the blazing to Jonah. **Why is it so?** It seems not to be that Jonah is simply against foreigners; he had fled to a foreign land and had quite a positive relationship with foreign sailors. There is no indication that he is against Nineveh because it is the imperial capital, though that attitude might be presupposed. But in Jonah's day Assyria was not Ephraim's oppressor, and in the Persian period relationships with the imperial power (the Assyria of the day) were good. There is no indication that it is because Nineveh's pardon will mean Israel's destruction nor that he is afraid of being judged to be a false prophet. There is more indication that it is **wickedness** that offends Jonah. "A colonial power (read: *Nineveh*) should not be let off the hook but called to account for its past and ongoing violent actions." It's hard to learn to love the bloody city. And it ill behooves readers from superpower/imperialist cultures to say that Jonah should do so. Such a city's dire action and its violence (1:2; 3:8) mean a dire fate should come upon it. Every prophet says so.

B. (:2) Justifying Rebellion -- Preferring Personal Agenda

"And he prayed to the Lord and said, 'Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.'"

C. (:3) Throwing in the Towel – Self Pity Party

"Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."

Daniel Timmer: This passage is without parallel in the Old Testament. A human being, and an Israelite prophet at that, rejects God's display of grace to those whom the prophet deems unworthy. More than that, Jonah somehow imagines once again that he can escape this God, whom he finds intolerable, in death! He has apparently forgotten (or misinterpreted) his earlier deliverance by means of the fish God 'appointed' and believes (at least in part out of sheer desperation) that God might end his life. Not only does this make clear that Jonah had never received and experienced God's grace himself, but it also pushes the reader to the conclusion that those who misunderstand and reject grace cannot enjoy life in relationship with God. The ghastly separation

between what Jonah knows to be true (that God is incomprehensibly and wonderfully gracious) and the realities and truths Jonah is willing to accept reveals an unprecedented egoism that sees him put God 'in the dock', so to speak. After these shockingly sinful responses, the unit's last verse provides an equally surprising but radically pleasant turn of events: true to his nature, God gently cross-examines the prophet-turned-accuser. God's patience and mercy truly know no bounds!

II. (:4-8) SHADE PLANT OBJECT LESSON DEMONSTRATED: DO YOU HAVE GOOD REASON TO BE ANGRY?

A. (:4) Fundamental Question

"Do you have good reason to be angry?"

B. (:5) Safe Vantage Place

"Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city."

Daniel Timmer: In this verse we see Jonah, unable to answer yhwh and unwilling to repent, simply turn his back and walk away. Although Jonah knows that God has decided to spare Nineveh, he may hope that God will change his mind, or that Nineveh's repentance will evaporate as quickly as the gourd will wilt under the rays of the sun. Both possibilities are compatible with his decision to erect a temporary shelter.

C. (:6) Shade Plant Provided – Liking the Circumstances

"So the Lord God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant."

John Goldingay: the description of his capacity to move from blazing anger to great delight on the basis of the growth of a shady plant makes fun of him.

D. (:7-8) Shade Plant Removed – Hating the Circumstances

"But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day, and it attacked the plant and it withered. And it came about when the sun came up that God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, 'Death is better to me than life.'"

III. (:9-11) SHADE PLANT OBJECT LESSON EXPLAINED: DO YOU HAVE GOOD REASON TO BE ANGRY?

A. (:9) Fundamental Question / Defensive Answer

"Then God said to Jonah, 'Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?' And he said, 'I have good reason to be angry, even to death.'"

Ron Ritchie: That's the way we react (at least I do) when God doesn't do it our way. This is called "biblical thumbsucking." "When God doesn't do it my way, I'd just as soon die. What is the use? I can't go on! This is not the way I planned it, and therefore, it is better to be home with the Lord. " (I suspect I am saying that for myself.) We all struggle with that, one way or another. Our children don't turn out exactly the way we want them; our marriages aren't exactly the way we want them; our jobs are not exactly what we prayed for, so we get angry with God and say we'd rather die. We'd rather give up, quit. What's the use?

B. (:10) Object Lesson of Shade Tree Reviewed

"Then the Lord said, 'You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work, and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.'"

C. (:11) Application to Lord's Compassion on Nineveh

"And 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, as well as many animals?"

Doug Goins: The expression refers to an inability to make moral judgments. That is how God views the wicked, evil, idolatrous citizenry of Nineveh. They are in the dark, blindly flailing around. They can't tell their right hand from their left, good from bad, right from wrong. They are in bondage.

Daniel Timmer: The point of the comparison, which takes for granted that reflecting the divine character is an ethical ideal, is that Jonah should be infinitely more concerned about the well-being of Nineveh than about his physical comfort. Jonah's response to yhwh's question should have been to affirm the perfect fittingness of yhwh's pity for the Ninevites and their cattle, praise yhwh for his countless displays of sovereign and unmerited grace, and pursue conformity to his character.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where do we try to control God and become angry when He refuses to conform to the image we have tried to create of Him? How does our anger manifest itself?
- 2) Why doesn't excellent theology regarding the character of God always translate into a heart that is consistent with God's heart?
- 3) List all of God's "appointment" (or sovereign acts) in chapter 4. What do we learn in this chapter regarding God's sovereignty and providence?

4) How do we attempt to hoard God's grace in a prideful or exclusivistic sense? Why do we harbor bitterness and vengeance towards certain individuals or groups and resent God's extension of mercy to them?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Doug Goins: It can't be understated; these are the strongest possible words. What Jonah has suspected all along---the reason he disobeyed God's call to go to Nineveh in **chapter 1**---actually comes to pass. We saw Jonah run away from God at his first call, run back to God in prayer when he was sinking to his death in the depths of the ocean, and run with God in obedience proclaiming the message to Nineveh. Now in **chapter 4** we will see him run way out ahead of God as he tries to usurp God's position of sovereign authority and questions God's mercy and forgiveness toward the Ninevites. You may wish that the story had ended with **chapter 3**, but chapter 4 continues to unfold God's tough love for Jonah. God continues to dialogue with Jonah and work on his behalf because he cares so much about him. God isn't satisfied with mere compliance, which is what he got from Jonah in chapter 3 when he preached judgment. What God wants is for Jonah to learn to value what God values. Jonah's heart has not changed since his original call in **chapter 1**. . .

He is calling this suicidal prophet to a self-examination of his willfulness. Think about it logically: If anybody has a right to be angry with the Ninevites, it is God; who hates sin, destructive evil, and violence. And yet he chose to offer them forgiveness. So implied in God's question is, who is Jonah to be angry when God chose not to destroy Nineveh? Remember, Jonah knows that it says in the Pentateuch, "*Vengeance is mine, and recompense*" (**Deuteronomy 32:35**). That is God's call, not Jonah's. We play God when we continue to be angry at individuals or groups of people whom God has forgiven, when we take their punishment into our own hands through a negative attitude; vindictive words; or even hostile, destructive actions. We are running out ahead of God in meting out what we think justice demands. God asks us just as he asked Jonah, "Is that your right?" Divine logic drives us to only one answer: "No, Lord, it is your right, not mine. I don't do well to be angry." . . .

When Mike Johnson was a pastor here he had a book on Vatican art with a number of photos of Michelangelo's paintings. On one of the walls in the Sistine Chapel Michelangelo has a painting called The Prophets and Apostles. He has tried to capture the faces of all the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. The art critics said in the text of the book that out of all the faces Michelangelo painted, none had a more radiant countenance than Jonah. Michelangelo was convinced that Jonah did accept God's merciful pity. Jonah became a communicator of grace to his own nation through his book and probably through his preaching as a prophet of God. . .

This book forces us to see our own power struggles with God. What has God called us to do that puts us into a contest of wills with him? What challenges to obedience in our

inner spiritual transformation have set us running away? Where are we right now---in a Tarshish of escape or in a Nineveh of obedience? And what about the hard inner core of ego that has never been given over to God's control? Was our conversion a radical transformation from self-centered willfulness, or was it an effort to recruit God to help us accomplish our goals? Have the painful and difficult experiences of life broken the inner shell of proud individualism, or are we essentially the same people we always were? After the crises are past, are we any more flexible or any more willing to discern and do God's will?

Are there people we resist loving and caring for because their values, beliefs, or lifestyle contradict ours? Who are our personal Ninevites, our enemies? Do they belong to religious cults? Are they secular humanists? Are they homosexuals? Are they people who stand for pro-choice and pro-abortion? Do they worship Mother Earth? Are they those who advocate a left-wing social agenda? Do they embrace New Age spirituality?

John Piper: [God explains to Jonah His reasons for showing pity and mercy to Nineveh:]

1. And the Lord said, "You pity the plant." What did he mean by that? **Verse 9** said he was angry about the plant. But why? Because this worm had attacked the plant and killed it. Do you see what God is doing? He is helping Jonah see where his pity for Nineveh comes from. He says, You pity the plant, should not I pity Nineveh. But a worm destroyed the plant! Yes, Jonah, and a worm has been at work to destroy Nineveh ever since I planted this city. Reckon with the worm-factor, Jonah--the Satan factor. The god of this world is blinding the eyes of people in every city. Pity comes from reckoning with a worm factor when somebody--or some city--lets you down and falls short of God's laws.

2. The second reason God feels pity for Nineveh in **verse 10** is that he labored over Nineveh and made it grow. "*You pity the plant, for which you did not labor nor make it grow.*" The point is the contrast: I did labor over Nineveh; it was I who made it grow.

Here we need to see that our strong belief in the providence and sovereignty of God should give us a glimpse of God's pity for cities. Cities are not autonomous. They do not grow without God. Even though the people in them may think that they are building a monument to human independence, they aren't. They depend on God at every minute and not a single building in this city was built without God's work. The waterworks, the sewer system, the electricity, the traffic plan, the government structure, the laws and ordinances, the educational and cultural and technical and entertainment institutions--they are all there because God's gifts and God's power and God's wisdom have been used. Minneapolis is God's city. He has labored over it and he has made it grow. Cities are not any more autonomous than people are. They live and move and have their being in God. And so God does not quickly or easily destroy the work of his hands.

3. The third reason God gives Jonah for his pity in **verse 10** is that Nineveh is a very old city. Again the contrast with the plant is the point: "*You pity the plant, for which you did*

not labor nor make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night."
In other words, **its life was brief, unlike Nineveh.**

Nineveh is referred to in **Genesis 10**. It is a very old city. God has been involved with Nineveh a long time. Its institutions and buildings and laws bear the marks--no matter how distorted by sin--of God's image. All these humans who for centuries have planned and organized and built have been people created in the image of God, and what they have made carries the imprint of that image. . .

4. The fourth reason God gives to Jonah for pitying Nineveh is weakness of moral confusion. **Verse 11:** *"And should I not pity Nineveh that great city in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left?"* This might refer to little children who are not old enough to know right and left. But there's no other place in the O.T. where children are described like this, and the generic word for human (*adam*) is used, not a word for child.

This is what Jesus meant when he prayed, *"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they do"* (**Luke 23:34**). Yes, they were guilty. This ignorance does not make one innocent. It is owing to real corruption and sin. But there is also a **weakness** component. *"He knows our frame," Psalm 103* says, *"he remembers that we are dust."*

Knowing the right hand from the left is basic to **following the simplest instructions**. "Goto 11th Avenue and turn left; then right on Franklin, and right again on Park and right again on Eighth Street." So what God means is that **the people are so morally adrift that they can't even follow the most basic moral instructions:** like thou shalt not kill. God looks at the moral confusion and pities the city. . .

5. Finally, God closes his reasoning on an utterly unexpected note: besides he says, *"there are many cattle."* Now don't get the idea that this is the basis of some sentimental vision of animal rights. God ordains that cattle be killed for sacrifices every day. He ordained them for meat according to **Genesis 9:3**.

Then what's the point. I think the point is: God made cattle and hundreds of other things to be useful to man. And the tragedy of judgment is made worse **when things which are meant for good uses are simply swept away in judgment**. When fire and brimstone fell on Sodom and Gomorrah everything was consumed.

Ron Ritchie: In conclusion, I think there are three things to remember from this book.

- One, God desires for us to see the whole world as he sees it; to see that the people who don't know the difference between their right and left hand are the victims of the enemy, not the enemy.
- The second thing is that God's desire is for us to be available so he can express his compassion toward those people through us.

- And third, God desires for us to be a sign in our generation. We're to be men and women who have the resurrected Jesus Christ living within us, and the resurrected Jesus Christ is the One who brings life out of death, and he is willing to bring life out of death to everyone around you if you are available.

Paul Decker: (sermoncentral.com)

Be willing to act on God's passion...even if you find His calling difficult, perhaps even distasteful; realize that the people that you struggle over are no more and no less God's concern than you are.

Reflect God's passion...there are people lost all about us and their rejection of the Creator breaks His heart; it should break ours as well.

Share God's passion...let God move you toward the unbeliever, and as He does, tell the good news of God's passion for them.

Mark Beaird: (sermoncentral.com)

- I. HE WAS A MAN FILLED WITH HATE—PREACHING GOD'S LOVE.
- II. HE WAS A MAN SEEKING JUDGMENT—PREACHING GOD'S MERCY.
- III. HE WAS A FAILURE EVEN IN HIS SUCCESS.

Mark Leiter: (sermoncentral.com) – **How God Corrects a Bad Attitude:**

- I. He gives us challenging experiences. (v.1-3)
- II. He asks us challenging questions. (v.4)
- III. He teaches us challenging lessons. (v.9-11)

Donnie Martin: (sermoncentral.com) – **When God's Doings Disappoint Us**

I find that most of our disappointment in God stems from two basic things:

- (1) Impatience with God's timetable, and
- (2) Displeasure with God's system of justice. . .

JONAH'S NASTY DISPOSITION

- A. Jonah Was Displeased.
- B. Jonah Was Disappointed.
- C. Jonah Was Depressed.

JONAH'S NEEDED DISCIPLINE

- A. The Delight Of Jonah.
- B. The Discomfort Of Jonah.
- C. The Defiance of Jonah.
- D. The Discernment of Jehovah.

Pastor Leake: Coming to Grips with the Mercy of God

Introduction: Mary Magdalene – initially inhabited by 7 demons; delivered; had led a sinful life; experienced the mercy of God; ended up following Christ with great

devotion; Have you tasted the mercy of God? The more sinful, the sweeter the taste of God's mercy; Why would anyone have trouble accepting God's extension of mercy to certain sinners?

3 Stages in Coming to Grips with the Mercy of God:

I. Stage #1 – God Demonstrated His Mercy (3:10)

God testifies that the repentance and faith was genuine; He retracted His own wrath; “*God relented*” = to regret doing something; **Gen. 6:7** – to pull back from something; **Job 42:6**; Don't translate as “repent” when applied to God – because there is no connotation of turning from evil; God is not ashamed of His burning anger; Changed His mind about destroying the city of Nineveh

Presents 2 Difficulties:

1) God is described as responding to man rather than initiating salvation

But we know that God always initiates salvation; “*Salvation is from the Lord*” –

Chap. 2:9; Eph 2; Rom. 9; Prov 16:4; Eph 1:4

But there are also many passages which portray God as granting help not at His initiative but in response to man – **John 5:40**

Answer: God's elective purposes work through man's will – not against or around his will; We did really choose Christ; We did really believe; God did not believe for us; Must maintain the balance which the Scriptures represent

2) How can God change His mind?

Some people explain it away as simply an anthropomorphism – but that only explains it in part; don't let your theology cause you to deny the text under consideration; danger of systematic theology; **Num 23:9** – God doesn't repent; **Mal 3:6** – I do not change;

1 Sam. 15:29; Ex 32:14

2 seemingly irreconcilable truths are taught in Scriptures

Jer 18:7-8; God's prophetic pronouncements of judgment against nations were never meant to be irreversible – dealing out consistent mercy to a changing mankind; Gives us Hope = when we change our hearts, God will change in how He deals with us – **Nahum 3:15ff**

II. Stage #2 – Jonah Despised God's Mercy (4:1-4)

Jonah was greatly angered that God would withhold His judgment – **Ex. 34:6-7**; Revengeful heart brought Jonah into Depression; we try to get God to do what we know He should be doing and then God doesn't cooperate; we get depressed and angry = depression because we don't really love God's actual will for our life;

We criticize Jonah here – but we must understand his difficult mission – we most likely would have failed as well; Jonah figured that God needed to be straightened out; Assyria had a long history of shaming Israel; attacking her borders and subjugating them; Why should God have mercy on them?

Cf. older brother in the account of the Prodigal Son; cf. **Hosea 9:3** – Jonah might have known of this prophecy = how God would use a pagan nation to discipline His own

people; 722 B.C. was a major event = dragged into captivity to Assyria just 40-50 years after time of Jonah -- We can understand Jonah's bad attitude; but never excuse it; it must be exposed

III. Stage #3 – God Defends His Mercy (4:5-11)

Jonah takes up his theater seat and watches the drama unfold; hoping still to see major fireworks; Jonah was extremely pleased with his comforts vs. the fate of these people; when his circumstances changed, he begged to die; He's had it; nothing to live for; but God wanted Jonah to learn the lesson; We always feel we are justified in our anger when we are angry; **v.10-11** = the Lord brings the lesson home – a lack of joy in our hearts when God shows mercy to someone we have a problem with reveals a problem with our heart; we need to be loving and compassionate; Who is your enemy? Your boss at work?? Do you pray and love them? When they are bothering us and our peace is upset then we know what it is like to offer mercy to others; Have you been saved by the mercy of God? **God wants to broaden our hearts**; Is your heart cold or warm towards others?

Trent Butler: Principles:

- God's world is bigger than ours. God's love is bigger than his wrath.
- God wants to cure our prejudice and greed.
- God wants to use us in his mission if we will love people as he loves them.
- God accepts repentance and obedience from even the worst of sinners.

Daniel Timmer: Jonah exemplified attitudes and values that were at least real dangers to, if not characteristic of, a sizeable portion of ancient Israel's population, and this brought the book's message home very directly to its original audience. yhwh's election of Israel was for their good, but it was not an end in itself: blessed by yhwh, they were to become a source of blessing to the nations around them (**Gen. 12:1-3**) by transmitting to them their knowledge of yhwh and modelling for them a lifestyle that revealed his wisdom and goodness as Creator and King (**Deut. 4:6**). The message is the same for any individual or group, no matter how orthodox in belief, that has tasted God's mercy and grace. With this immense privilege comes the temptation to mistake God's unmerited grace to them as an authorization of their values, plans, and the means they use to achieve them.

Profound gratitude for salvation should leave an indelible imprint on the heart, will, priorities and actions of every believer. The humble disposition and love for others that faith in Jesus Christ produces will, moreover, drive the church to fulfil its mission to the world as it increasingly reflects the gracious character of the God it worships.

John Goldingay: Well before the end of the Jonah story we have discovered that Jonah is a **conflicted person**. On one hand, he runs away from God's commission and struggles against what he knows to be the truth about God. While God does succeed in getting him to go to Nineveh, God does not succeed in shaping his graceless message (**3:4**), the belligerent anger with which he responds to Nineveh's deliverance (**4:1**), or even his failure to recognize God's graciousness toward him (**4:6-11**). On the other

hand, Jonah gives profound testimony to what God has done for him and accepts God's commission the second time. It fills out this picture that many other acts can be read either in a negative or a positive way. There is a dominant side to his person but also a shadow side. God's commitment to him is to work with him to bring the two together. One can't fault him for being conflicted, any more than one can fault someone who has been bereaved for being depressed. He is "a mass of nonsensical contradictions. The prophet whose nation has known the ravages of imperialistic power and been the victim of an empire engorged with violence and self-interest has no interest in seeing them spared what he must think to be a horrible fate." The man who in a mysterious way was the object of God's patience is slow to understand it. He simply doesn't understand the message he is commissioned to give, even when he is himself on the receiving end of both aspects of the message (the chastisement and the forgiveness). Yet "the truth of God's patience with Nineveh and with himself for his own salvation is the ultimate message of this Scripture. And in this way does it not express, more powerfully than any picture of judgment and punishment on the city and the prophet could ever do, the omnipotent holy and righteous Godhead of God?"

Lloyd Ogilvie: How did Jonah end up?

Jonah's biographer left that question for Israel to answer. It is obvious that the author focused Israel's exclusivism and blind nationalism in the prophet. He wanted the people of Israel to take an honest look in the mirror he provided and see themselves. Their own idolatry made them no better than the polytheistic Assyrians. They were blessed to be a blessing to the nations. They were denying both.

The Book of Jonah deserves its place among the books of the Minor Prophets. Many of the same themes are declared: Yahweh is Sovereign of all the nations. His *hesed* is not just for Israel. Nor is His judgment limited to other nations. Israel's syncretism is as abhorrent as Assyria's polytheism. And yet, to know Yahweh and not obey Him would seem to deserve a greater punishment and deeper repentance. The more profound the confessed sin, the more abundant would be the pity and mercy. That is what Jonah refused to acknowledge and what his biographer did not want Israel to miss.

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