

# Jonah

## Introduction

- I. Written in the mid 7<sup>th</sup>-century BC (roughly same time as Hosea and Amos)
- II. Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrians: Israel's enemies who would later conquer the northern kingdom of Israel
- III. Jonah reads like a parable: a story in which the moral punch-line comes at the end

## The Passage

### I. Chapter 1: Jonah at Sea

#### A. The command and the disobedience (v. 2-3)

--v. 2: Imagine getting that command: go preach doom in the heart of your enemies

--v. 3: Joseph goes in the opposite direction (Tarshish is probably in Spain)  
We'll find out why he didn't want to go to Nineveh in 4:2

#### B. The response of the pagan sailors (v. 5-16)

In the beginning they are full of fear (of the sea) praying to their gods  
In the end they are full of fear (of God) sacrificing and making vows  
God has used this experience to bring them to faith

v. 9-10: Joseph's confession and acknowledgment of God marks the turning point in this chapter

#### C. God protects Jonah

v. 17: God "appointed" a fish to protect him from drowning and deliver him safely back to Israel

### II. Chapter 2: Jonah in the Belly of the Fish

#### A. A psalm of praise and thanksgiving to God from inside the fish (v. 1-9)

His experience matches the sailors':

He cried out for mercy, was saved by God, and responds with a sacrifice (of thanksgiving) and making vows (v. 9)

#### B. God miraculously delivers Jonah back to his homeland (v. 10)

### III. Chapter 3: Jonah and the Ninevites

#### A. The command and the obedience (v. 1-4)

Same command as before; this time Jonah learns his lesson (or has he?)

#### B. The response of the pagan Ninevites

= massive and total repentance!

1. The people (v. 5)

2. The king (6-9)

3. The cattle (v. 8)

- C. God's response to their repentance: he relented from judgment (v. 10)  
Exodus 34:6: God is "gracious, merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love"
  - 1. God has had mercy on a group of pagan sailors in the west
  - 2. God has had mercy on a disobedient prophet from Israel
  - 3. God has had mercy on an evil nation in the east

#### Chapter 4: Jonah and God

- A. Jonah's anger at God's mercy (v. 1-4)
  - 1. Jonah is "exceedingly" angry because he doesn't want God to have mercy on his enemies (angry enough to die)
  - 2. God's response: "is it really appropriate for you to be angry?" (v. 4)
- B. Jonah and the Plant (v. 5-11)
  - 1. God "appointed" a plant to protect Jonah from the sun just like he "appointed" a fish to protect him from the ocean (v. 6)  
Jonah is "exceedingly" glad
  - 2. God "appointed" a worm to eat the plant and an east wind  
Jonah wants to die
  - 3. God's response: "is it appropriate for you to be angry with the plant?"
- C. The moral of the story (v. 10-11)
  - 1. The contrast between Jonah's heart and God's heart
    - a. Jonah only cares about a plant because it gives him comfort, but he doesn't care about 120,000 Ninevites because they are his enemies. He is selfish and self-absorbed
    - b. God has a huge heart of love and mercy for the world: even those outside of his chosen people who are spiritually lost
  - 2. God is saying "put yourself in my shoes"
    - a. God did "labor" for Nineveh and "cause it to grow" (v. 10)
    - b. Nineveh did not "come to being in a night" (v. 10): God has been involved with it for thousands of years
    - c. The Ninevites "don't know their right hand from left" (v. 11) they are spiritually and morally lost. Shouldn't God have pity?
    - d. There are many "cattle" (v.11): God cares for them too

#### Conclusion

Question: What prevents us from more faithfully obeying the call to preach the gospel to the world and how can the message of Jonah help us?

- I. We have a heart problem: our hearts are more like Jonah's than God's
  - A. We care more about our own life (comforts, needs, desires) than the world
  - B. Jonah serves as a warning to us about what happens when our lives get too narrow and self-centered in focus

- II. We are elitist like Jonah
  - A. There are people we don't like and don't want to share gospel with  
Who is your "Nineveh?"
  - B. The Jonah story serves as an encouragement
    - God is involved with that person and has been for years (just like he had been with Nineveh)
    - Knowing God's involvement with them, affects are perception of them
- III. We are cynical and don't think our witness will make an impact
  - A. We think people have already made up their minds
  - B. The Jonah story serves as an encouragement  
You never know how God is working: who would have thought Nineveh would repent?
- IV. We don't have confidence in our ability to share the gospel
  - A. We feel ill-equipped, our lives don't live up to the gospel
  - B. The Jonah story serves as an encouragement  
God can use anyone—even people (Jonah) who don't want to be used!

### Discussion Questions

1. Opening questions: What struck you most about the sermon/the passage? What surprised you? What confused you? What did you disagree with?
2. What do you make of the extraordinary events in the book of Jonah? The swallowing of the fish, the massive repentance of the Ninevites, etc? How have you heard those various details explained over the years?
3. The book of Jonah reveals a very different angle on God's heart for the pagan nations than some of the other Minor Prophets (see God's anger and judgment against them in passages such as Habakkuk 2:6-20). How do we reconcile these two views of God?
4. What is the most significant barrier that keeps you from more freely sharing the gospel with nonbelievers around you? A self-centeredness like Jonah's? Fear? Embarrassment? Your approach to evangelism? Lack of passion? Lack of opportunity? Etc.
5. What current opportunities has God opened in your own life to share the gospel to unbelievers? How might God be calling you to widen your perspective and heart for the lost in the next months?