

**A LOOK AT THE BOOK  
JONAH  
THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S MERCY**

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It seems hard to believe that one of God's choice spokesmen should seek to flee from His presence, doesn't it?

What could motivate a person to do a thing like that?

**AUTHOR AND DATE**

Jonah was from Gath-hepher in Israel.

He served during the reign of Jeroboam II (782-53 B.C.).

He was a contemporary of Hosea and Amos in Israel (N).

In addition to his mission to Nineveh, Jonah had previously helped regain some of Israel's lost territory by predicting the conquests of Jeroboam II (2 Ki. 14:25)

He was commissioned to take a special message to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.

**BACKGROUND**

Assyria was already causing problems for Israel.

To preserve them was to preserve a potential enemy.

God's judgment was coming against Nineveh because of their exaggerated corruption and perversion.

God sends His prophet to warn them of the danger they are facing, unless they change their lifestyle.

The result of Jonah's message was the preservation of Nineveh, and probably all Assyria as well.

Assyria was the nation later used by God to destroy Israel.

Jonah, as a faithful Israelite, living in a period of increasing nationalism, would not have favored the salvation of Nineveh.

His attitude is much like ours, under similar circumstances, such as our attitude toward Saddam Hussein, the Arab world, or even some politicians who support causes we oppose strongly.

## **PURPOSE AND THEME**

The purpose and theme of Jonah's messages were directed toward Nineveh:

Historical situation: Extreme perversion

Purpose: To call Nineveh to repentance from this perversion.

Message: Nineveh is about to be destroyed by divine judgment.

The theme of the book presents the judgment pronounced on a sinful city and their forgiveness as a result of repentance.

It teaches a practical lesson on the greatness of God's mercy.

The truth it teaches goes beyond his day to demonstrate that God's love and mercy are infinite.

God forgives repentant sinners who seek to obey Him.

God's mercy extends to rebellious preachers who repent, as well as to the pagan nations of the world.

He is no respecter of persons.

He seeks *sinners* who turn from their sin to Him.

## **WHAT LESSONS DOES THE BOOK TEACH US?**

The book should motivate readers to reflect God's love for all men to those around them, even those from pagan nations.

This should motivate us to care about the spiritual condition of the pagans who live around us.

It should call us to function as a light in the midst of the dark world.

## **ORGANIZATION**

Two distinct, yet similar, demonstrations of God's mercy develop the two main sections:

God shows mercy towards Jonah, His rebellious prophet (1-2)

Then God shows mercy toward Nineveh, the perverted pagan nation He later used to discipline His own people (3-4).

*The same merciful God shows mercy to both!*

## **ARGUMENT**

## **GOD'S MERCY TOWARD JONAH, THE REBELLIOUS PROPHET 1-2**

### **JONAH'S DISOBEDIENCE 1:1-16**

#### **Commission from God 1:1-2**

Jonah's orders are contained in the opening verses: proclaim judgment on Nineveh for its wickedness.

The source of the order is not in question; Yahweh sent him.

Introduction 1:1

Commission 1:2a

Cause 1:2b

*Why was God about to judge them?*

#### **Response by Jonah 1:3**

The prophet, wishing the destruction of the enemy, departs in the opposite direction.

*What was he hoping to accomplish by escaping? Did it work?*

*What does that teach us?*

*What does this section teach us about circumstances and God's will?*

#### **Correction from God 1:4-16**

As a result of the prophet's attempt to escape God's command, God executes a three step plan to halt Jonah's flight and return him to the original plan (1:4-2:10):

God's storm 1:4

**First corrective step:** God sent out a great wind (1:4-16)

The wind produced a storm which would have caused the destruction of the ship.

Sailors' fear 1:5a

*What did the sailors do about their problem?*

Jonah's solution 1:5b-12

*What did Jonah do?*

*How did they find out that Jonah was guilty? 1:7*

The result of the storm was that Jonah's guilt was revealed to the men on board.

*What was inconsistent about Jonah's testimony?*

*What would they have to do to save themselves?*

Sailors' efforts 1:13

*What did they want to do?*

Sailors' resignation 1:14-15a

*What did they ask from Yahweh?*

*What did they learn about God's will?*

After they tried everything else, they finally threw Jonah into the sea.

God's peace 1:15b

Once Jonah was off the ship, God calmed the sea.

Sailors' response 1:16

*What did their fear cause them to do?*

*Can you imagine what their future memories would cause them to say to one another about: "Do you remember that time when . . . ?"*

*What do you suppose they would say to each other about it?*

## **JONAH'S DELIVERANCE 1:17-2:10**

*What did God do about Jonah's predicament?*

### **God's fish 1:17**

**Second corrective step:** God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah and to save him from certain death in the sea. 1:17-2:9

### **Jonah's praise 2:1-7**

The result of this phase of the return was a psalm of praise.

*Where was Jonah when he made this prayer?*

Notice the time element in this psalm!

*When did the different parts take place?*

HIS PETITION 2:2 & 7

- *"In my distress I called out to Yahweh."*
- *"From the depth of Sheol (the grave) I called for help."*
- *"While I was fainting away, I remembered Yahweh."*
- *"My prayer rose to You."*

GOD'S ANSWER 2:2 & 6

- *"He answered me."*
- *"You heard my cry."*
- *"You brought up my life from the pit."*

DESCRIPTION OF HIS PROBLEM 2:3-6

This description fits his situation while in the sea—NOT in the fish.  
He almost died there and then he called out to God for salvation.

He praises God for having saved him from the sea.

He is praying from inside the fish (1) and praising God for his *past* salvation from the sea.

It seems apparent that Jonah views the fish as God's means of salvation.

Jonah recognizes his dependence on God, praises Him for His deliverance, and promises to fulfill his commission.

### **Jonah's promise 2:8-9**

Now, safe in the belly of the fish, he makes a promise to God.

He contrasts those who cling to empty, worthless things and himself.

*He isn't going there!*

The "*worthless things*" could refer to idols, or maybe the foolish thought that you can get away from God and avoid His plans or His commands)

2:8 *"Those who cling to empty, worthless things, . . ."*

2:9 *"But I . . ."*

He makes two promises: *What are they?*

He promises to offer sacrifice with thanksgiving.

He promises to fulfill his vow—the praise of his testimony.

*What is his testimony? "Salvation is from Yahweh!"*

*What did Jonah learn about God's mercy and love?*

### **Jonah's liberation 2:10**

*Then*, following his prayer, the fish vomited him up.

**Third corrective step:** God spoke to the fish.

It vomited him out on dry ground.

*How far will God go to get us back in line with His plan?*

He creates a great storm.

He creates a hungry fish.

He gives the fish indigestion.

*How far does the grace of God extend? In Jonah's case? In ours?*

## **GOD'S MERCY TOWARD NINEVEH, THE DEPRAVED PAGAN PEOPLE 3-4**

### **JONAH'S PREACHING 3:1-4**

#### **Repetition of the commission 3:1-2**

*What's the commission?*

His attempt to escape having ended, Jonah is once again instructed to go to Nineveh.

God's plan hasn't changed – He keeps insisting until He gets His way.

*What does that teach us about God's revealed will and His plan?*

#### **Response by the prophet 3:3**

*How does Jonah respond this time?*

*What has he learned?*

Jonah obeys this time and delivers God's message.

#### **Message from the prophet 3:4**

### **NINEVEH'S REPENTANCE 3:5-9**

*How did they respond to his message? The people? The king?*

The result is repentance by the people of Nineveh.

People's repentance 3:5

King's response 3:6-9

### **GOD'S RESPONSE 3:10**

*What three things did God do?*

Because of their repentance, God is merciful, forgives them, and stops the judgment.

## **JONAH'S REACTION 4:1-11**

*How does Jonah, God's servant, react to Nineveh's repentance and salvation?*

*Was he excited about the thrilling response to God's message?*

### **Jonah's anger 4:1-3**

Jonah reveals his anger and protests God's deliverance of Nineveh, his "*pagan*" enemy.

Description of anger 4:1

Cause for escape 4:2

Jonah isn't surprised at the result of his preaching.

*What's his view of God?*

That's why he tried to escape in the first place!

Desire to die 4:3

*Why was he angry?*

He's angry because of his view of pagans.

They are abominable; they're not worth saving

He's angry because of his historical context

*How do we respond when God extends grace to our "pagan" neighbors?*

*When He works a miracle for criminals, murderers, adulterers, homosexuals?*

*When He's gracious to people whose lives are a mess—people who don't deserve it?*

### **God's answer 4:4-11**

God's question 4:4

Jonah's shelter 4:5

God's lesson 4:6-11

God then gives Jonah an object lesson.

He "*prepares*" some other things for Jonah!

*What did God prepare for him?*

Vine enjoyed 4:6

**A gourd is prepared** over Jonah's head to give shade from the sun.

*How did Jonah respond to the gourd?*

Jonah is pleased with it because of *its value to him*.

Vine destroyed 4:7-8a

**God then prepares a worm to kill the gourd, and a sultry wind and hot sun to bother Jonah.**

Vine lamented 4:8b-9

*How did Jonah respond to the new development?*

Again Jonah is angry.

*What does God ask Jonah?*

*How does Jonah respond to God's question?*

Vine explained 4:10-11

*What's the lesson God wants Jonah (and us) to learn?*

Jonah delighted in the gourd—he really cared about it.

But he hadn't made it—he just got the benefit.

God invested a great deal in making and loving this people.

*Shouldn't HE care even more about 120,000 people and animals?!!*

***God uses the object lesson to teach Jonah that if he's concerned about a gourd he didn't make, God rightly is more concerned about people and cattle that He has created and loved.***



### **What is the book trying to teach us?**

- *God is still no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35)*
- *God still cares about the lost around us.*
- *It should call us to function as a light in the midst of the dark world we live in!*

### **What is God like? 4:2**

- *God is still merciful–He is “not willing that any should perish, but wants all people to come to repentance.” 2 Pet. 3:3-9*
- *He’s still gracious*
- *He’s still compassionate*
- *He’s still slow to anger*
- *He’s still abundant in lovingkindness*
- *He still relents concerning evil (calamity)*

*This is just as true whether the object is a rebellious people or a rebellious prophet!*