

LESSONS FROM JONAH

JAMIE MCNAB

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Jonah is a short book ... but there are some good lessons for us as to how God works. We saw recently how He worked behind the scenes in the book of Esther.

We'll pick up the lessons as we go through Jonah.

The Basic Story: Jonah was sent by God to Nineveh with a message to repent.

Background: Circa 760 BC (plus or minus 20 years). Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. Noted for being warlike ... brutal — and is a threat to the House of Israel (conquers it 30-40 years later). Jonah sees Assyria and Nineveh as a threat and would prefer God to destroy it.

Let's have a brief look at the background.

2 Kings 14:23-28

23 **In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, became king in Samaria, and reigned forty-one years. (*This is Jeroboam II*)**

24 **And he did evil in the sight of the Lord;** he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin.

25 **He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hopher.**

26 For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter; and whether bond or free, there was no helper for Israel.

27 And the Lord did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven; but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.

28 Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did—his might, how he made war, and how he recaptured for Israel, from Damascus and Hamath, what had belonged to Judah—are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? (*He was quite a successful king*)

- Jonah was a prophet

- To Israel
- From Galilee (despite the Pharisees opinion — “no prophet ever came from Galilee”)

Due to the incident with the great fish ... many commentators — even Biblical ones — believe Jonah never existed. Just a story written hundreds of years later. No fish ever swallows someone and then spits him up. Right? Well — look at the next few verses.

Matthew 12:38-41

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, “**Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.**”

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

40 **For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish,** so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

41 The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, **because they repented at the preaching of Jonah;** and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.

So. Was Jonah a real person? Jesus acknowledges Jonah and Nineveh — and He endorses the Book of Jonah. And ... Jesus tells the people that the people of Nineveh all repented at Jonah’s preaching.

All scripture is profitable ... which would include the Book of Jonah. ☺

Jonah 1:1-3

1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,
2 “**Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.**”

3 **But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.** He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

Nineveh was a great city ... capital of the Assyrian Empire with up to 1 million residents — maybe the biggest in the world at that time?

This is a “Gentile” city. Wicked. It deserves judgment. Jonah would prefer that Nineveh be destroyed. But God is gracious — He wants to give them the opportunity to repent — despite the bad press.

Remember the next verse:

Lamentations 3:33

**33 For He does not afflict willingly,
Nor grieve the children of men.**

Ezekiel 33:11

**11 I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn
from his way and live. (Repent)**

God takes “no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should repent”.

LESSON: God is patient ... slow ... gives opportunity.

But: there is a time limit — a window of opportunity. Don’t wait too long!

However ... Jonah flees west! Rather than 500 miles North-East.

It is quite daunting to carry a message to 1 million people ... but most likely Jonah doesn’t want to give them the opportunity to repent.

Nobody can outrun God!

Psalms 139:1-3, 7-10

1 O Lord, You have searched me and known me.

2 You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.

3 You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways.

7 Where can I go from Your Spirit?

Or where can I flee from Your presence?

8 If I ascend into heaven, You are there;

If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.

9 If I take the wings of the morning,

And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

10 Even there Your hand shall lead me,
And Your right hand shall hold me.

God can protect us anywhere. Wherever you are. God can preserve us.
There was no chance for Jonah to outrun God.

Jonah 1:4-16

4 **But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.**

5 **Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.**

6 **So the captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish."**

7 And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.

8 Then they said to him, "Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?"

9 So he said to them, "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, (*Jehovah*) the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

10 **Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, "Why have you done this?" For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.**

11 Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?"—for the sea was growing more tempestuous.

12 **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 this great tempest is because of me."**

13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them.

14 Therefore they cried out to the Lord and said, "We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You."

15 **So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. (*The sea stood still*)**

16 **Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows.**

When Jesus stilled the waters on the Sea of Galilee — it wasn't the first time.
☺

Jonah 1:17

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

In the KJV of Matthew Chapter 12 ... the word is “whale”. Contradiction? Some accuse Jesus of a mistake ... or ignorant of biology (a whale is a mammal not a fish).

In Matthew Chapter 12 ... it is not the usual Greek for fish (Ichthys) ... but the Greek word “ketos”. Ketos is used by many Greek authors (Homer ... Euripides ... etc) — as a sea-serpent or sea-dragon.

Ketos is used in the Greek translation of Jonah 1.

No point trying to identify today? The safest translation is: “great sea creature”.

Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and 3 nights. The only sign Jesus gave — He'd be 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth.

It's so amazing ... much of churchianity denies the only sign that Jesus said He'd provide! Good Friday to Easter Sunday doesn't work!

Grace Communion International (WCG) says Jesus' words are probably a figure of speech ... not to be taken literally. That's a dangerous route to go down! Don't worry about what the words of the Bible say?

ANOTHER LESSON: Look out for Typology.

Jonah's experience is a type of Jesus.

There are many types:

- Joseph (betrayed by his brothers ... but saves them) — Jesus

- Passover Lamb
- Egypt — a type of sin
- Melchizedek — Priesthood of Jesus
- Moses — mediator and That Prophet
- Manna — and Jesus as Bread of Heaven
- King David

Some say the types of Jesus can be found in every book of the Old Testament.

Jonah 2:1-10

1 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly.

2 And he said:

**"I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction,
And He answered me.**

**"Out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
And You heard my voice.**

3 For You cast me into the deep,

Into the heart of the seas,

And the floods surrounded me;

All Your billows and Your waves passed over me.

4 Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight;

Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.'

5 The waters surrounded me, even to my soul;

The deep closed around me;

Weeds were wrapped around my head.

6 I went down to the moorings of the mountains;

The earth with its bars closed behind me forever;

Yet You have brought up my life from the pit,

O Lord, my God.

7 "When my soul fainted within me,

I remembered the Lord;

And my prayer went up to You,

Into Your holy temple. **(He repented — to an extent)**

8 "Those who regard worthless idols

Forsake their own Mercy.

9 But I will sacrifice to You

With the voice of thanksgiving;

I will pay what I have vowed. **(GNB: I will do as I promised)**

Salvation is of the Lord."

10 **So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.**

Was Jonah dead and “resurrected”? Or unconscious?

Our fellowship was torn apart over this issue!

It is strange the way that fellowships can split over fairly minor areas? It would be awkward to fellowship with someone who didn't accept the Sabbath ... or didn't believe Jesus was going to return — but ... whether duck is unclean meat or not ... was Jonah dead or not???

An Important Principle:

Romans 14:1-4

1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.

3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

4 **Who are you to judge another's servant?** To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

Romans 14:10-12

10 But **why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother?** **For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.**

11 For it is written:

“As I live, says the Lord,

Every knee shall bow to Me,

And every tongue shall confess to God.”

12 **So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.**

Some areas are less clear. We see through a glass darkly. We need to bear with one another at times.

Jonah 3:1-9

1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying,

2 **“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.”**

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

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

5 **So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.**

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

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

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

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

Why did they repent? Probably the only nation ever to repent?

It sets an interesting example! Jesus criticised towns in His day — "even Nineveh repented at Jonah"!

Why would the people of this city repent so quickly at this foreign prophet's message?

There is a suggestion that Jonah arrived at the time of a total solar eclipse (June 15 763 BC). Assyrian writings say that if there is a total solar eclipse: "the king will be deposed and killed, and a worthless fellow will seize the throne ... rain from heaven will flood the land ... the city walls will be destroyed".

As per Donald Wiseman — Assyriologist at the University of London — and former curator at the British Museum.

Jonah 3:10

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

God relented!

LESSON: Prophecy is conditional.

Jeremiah 18:7-8

7 The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it,

8 if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.

It's not just "down to God". God will warn — and if people listen and respond — God is delighted. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

Presumably even prophecies or revelation at the end-time. The warnings of the 2 witnesses? If people were to have a change of heart — God would back away. But — they probably won't.

So — God's delighted by Nineveh's repentance. Jonah isn't!

Jonah 4:1-3

1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.

2 So he prayed to the Lord, and said, "Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.

3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"

Jonah 4:1

1 Jonah was furious. He lost his temper.

Jonah knew God's nature. Merciful ... gracious ... loving-kindness. Lots of churches today think that the God of the Old Testament is judgmental ... wrathful ... angry.

Not so! And Jonah knew it. And so now did the Ninevites. And so should we.

The "Sadomasochist, capriciously malevolent bully" of Richard Dawkins is WILDLY INACCURATE — and insulting.

Jonah 4:4-11

4 Then the Lord said, “Is it right for you to be angry?” *(The answer is no)*

5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.

6 And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant.

7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered.

8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah’s head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”

9 Then God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” And he said, “It is right for me to be angry, even to death!”

10 But the Lord said, “You have had pity on the plant for which you have not laboured, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night.

11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?” *(GNB: Innocent children. AMP: 120,000 persons [not yet old enough to] know their right hand from their left)*

Jonah was more concerned about his own creature comforts ... than the lives of 100,000’s of people living in darkness? What about us?

SOME CONCLUSIONS:

- God cares for the nations
- He made sure they got a good warning
- He gives a second chance
- God postponed judgment — and He will if He can
- This is a great example for other nations including Israel/Judah
- It will bear witness at the Great White Throne Judgment
- The God of the Old Testament has always cared — has always wanted to bless
- The limitations are on the human side
- Prophecy is conditional — if you hear and respond and God will back off and bless

And ... thankfully ... God is patient and long-suffering — with us too!

