

Jonah, Part 1 of 4

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Overview of Jonah

- Minor prophets, shorter than major prophets, but still important
 - Written by — probably Jonah
 - Historical book. Its not an allegory, nor a symbolic story. It is history. Jonah is a real guy.
 - Jesus mentions him. (Matthew 12:41; Luke 11:32)
 - **Jewish tradition:** Jonah was a contemporary with Elijah. Many believe he was a disciple of Elijah. In fact, an unverifiable Jewish tradition says Jonah was the son of the widow of Zarephath whom Elijah raised from the dead (1Kings 17:8-24).
 - According to 2Kings 14:25, Jonah came from Gath-hepher near Nazareth.
 - The context places him during the long and prosperous reign of Jeroboam II (c. 793-753 B.C.), making him a prophet to the northern tribes just prior to Amos during the first half of the eighth century B.C., c. 760 B.C.
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Ninevah

- **Jonah 1:1-2**
Now **the word of the Lord** came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for **their wickedness has come up before Me.**”
 - Nineveh is an ancient city located on the east bank of the Tigris River, opposite the modern city of Mosul in Northern Iraq.
 - It was the oldest city of the ancient Assyrian empire, and its capital until it was destroyed by a coalition of Babylonians and Medes in August, 612 BC.
 - From the ruins, it has been established that the **perimeter of the great Assyrian city wall was about 7.5 miles long** and in places up to **148 feet wide**; there was also a great unfinished outer rampart, protected by a moat.
 - The Bible describes it as an “exceedingly great city of three days journey in breadth,” whose population at that time is given as “more than 120,000.” Not only did Nineveh have massive walls, it had an aqueduct that brought water from the mountains more than 35 miles away.
 - Nineveh is huge! The people are wicked!
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Jonah goes in the opposite direction — toward the other end of the Mediterranean

- **Jonah 1:3**
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.**

- God speaks to us in a variety of ways...
- Word, circumstances, friends, God's character, leading of the Holy Spirit
- God often surprises us with plans that we would NEVER have come up with
- Sometimes a word from God is exciting, a blessing! Sometimes it's a gentle correction or a promise of his love, often it is a still quiet voice saying, "I am with you."
- But sometimes — it makes no sense at all!

The presence of the Lord

- First occurrence of the phrase **the presence of the Lord** was in Garden of Eden
- **Genesis 3:8**
And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from **the presence of the Lord** God among the trees of the garden.
- Why do we run from **the presence of the Lord**?
 - We doubt that God is good. We think he is holding out on us.
 - We want a more manageable God.
 - We want to be in control.

We all want to create manageable systems to make life work without God

- **Jonah 1:4**
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.
 - **God will thwart** our plans when they are outside of his will for our lives.
- **Jonah 1:5**
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.**
 - When we are running from God's presence, we will find ourselves going to the lowest possible point of the ship. This is a spiritual death spiral. **It harms you, and everyone around you.**
- **Jonah 1:6-7**
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." 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.

- Why was he sleeping?
 - Paralyzed? Exhausted? Playing games? Satisfied with his decision?

Another story of someone asleep in a boat in a storm

- **Mark 4:38**
But He (Jesus) was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” Jesus said... “Be silent, be still!” The waves obeyed Him!
- **You don’t want Jonah in your boat. You want Jesus in your boat.**

Back to Jonah

- **Jonah 1:8**
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?**”
- **Ever wonder...**Why is this happening? Where am I? How did I get here? Who am I?
 - Sometimes we are lost and disoriented
 - Sometimes we are in direct disobedience to God’s word to us
- **Jonah 1:9**
So he said to them, “**I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.**”
 - His answer is spot on. He knew who he was. He knew exactly what he was doing. He even knew that God was not happy.
- **Jonah 1:10-16**
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. 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. 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.**” Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. 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.” So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows.
- **Jonah is surrendering his life to God.**
 - He didn’t know what would happen. He probably thought he would drown. But he got to the end of his plan, he took responsibility for the storm, and he threw himself into the hands of God.

- **Who do you relate to?**
 - Maybe you feel like God doesn't speak to you.
 - Maybe you are Jonah right now. Running from God's presence.
 - Maybe you feel paralyzed like Jonah in the bottom of the boat
 - Maybe you feel like the men in the boat — by no fault of your own, you are in the path of the storm, because of the sin of someone else.
 - Maybe you need to surrender someone else into God's hands? Stop rowing! Put them into Gods hands!!!
- **Regardless — is Jesus in your boat?** Are you at sea? Are you rowing in the wrong direction? Maybe you need to surrender your life to Jesus.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you always thought the story of Jonah was a “children’s fable”?
Knowing that it is true — how does it change the way that you perceive it?
2. Is there a “Nineveh” circumstance or person in your life that seems insurmountable?
3. Can you sympathize with Jonah? Would you be tempted to “say no to God”?
4. Why do we run from the presence of the Lord?
5. What happens when we run from the presence of the Lord?
6. Regardless of your circumstances, is Jesus in your boat?