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C0818 – May 14, 2008 – Jonah 1:4-16 – The Lord Hurls Discipline

Alright, last time we said that we're dealing not with a parable, we're not looking at an allegory, we're not reading a fanciful story but an actual historical account in the life of Jonah. Such that when Jesus predicts His own burial and resurrection He cites it as parallel to Jonah's three days and nights in the great sea monster. So it logically follows just as night follows day that if we mythologize Jonah we mythologize Jesus. That's not an option for belief. So we're proceeding with the Counterattack Strategy of interpretation. This man Jonah was an 8th century BC prophet who lived in Gath-hepher, a city in the heart of the northern kingdom, up in the Galilee region, the Pharisees erred when they forgot that Jonah was from the Galilee (John 7:52). His popularity in the northern empire soared because he was a good news prophet. One of the prophecies that brought him fame is recorded in 2 Kings where he told Jeroboam II to extend the eastern border from the northern city Lebo-hamath to the Sea of Arabah, that's the Dead Sea. This broad extension of the northern empire encompassed several trade routes and resulted in economic prosperity. People were getting rich off of his prophetic ministry so of course this bolstered his popularity. He probably enjoyed a relaxed, wealthy, aristocratic lifestyle until he got this mission to the Ninevites. This was not exactly what Jonah was interested in doing, these Assyrians' were Israel's enemies and Jonah wanted God to punish them, not to save them, having no desire to love his enemies he fled the presence of the Lord. The idea here comes from ancient culture, the king would have servants standing in his presence and when the time came he would send out a servant on a mission expecting to receive a report on the success or failure of the mission. In like manner Jonah stood in the presence of the Lord of heaven, earth and sea and in v 2 he's given a mission, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it..." V 3, "But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish," a city on the southeast coast of Spain, about 2,500 miles from Joppa, the port

city here near modern Tel Aviv. Nineveh, on the other hand is about 550 miles to the northeast. So, the text is obviously pointing out that Jonah's spiritual rebellion has geographical repercussions. He travels in the opposite direction. These phrases indicate a rejection of the prophetic office. He no longer wants to stand in the presence of the Lord so he officially resigns. The other thing from ancient culture that casts light on this text is that if a servant did not carry out his mission then he was under the death penalty. This is essential to understanding Jonah's instruction to the sailors in v 12, "hurl me into the sea," for the death penalty would be fulfilled and thus the sea would calm down. So Jonah knew very well the consequences of fleeing. So Jonah portrays a believer trying to avoid the difficulties of the Christian life. No one said every mission was going to be a pleasant one, nobody said the Christian life was going to be easy. In fact, Jesus said "In this world you will have tribulation but take courage, I have overcome the world." So we are commanded not to flee but to take courage. The idea of courage means to be resolute in the face of danger. Surely Jonah's preaching to the Assyrian enemy would be a dangerous situation. But rather than taking courage he fled the will of God for his life with the result of suffering. So the lesson of vv 1-3 is one of negative volition to the word of God.

Tonight we want to see God's response to that in vv 4-10. So what we have is a sequence, first, a believer goes negative volition and second, God sends divine discipline. Alright, so we want to look at the Doctrine of Suffering for a minute. What are our two basic categories of suffering? Direct and indirect. What's the difference? Alright, one is due clearly to creature choices and the other is not due to a particular creature choice. Which category does Jonah fit into? Alright, he's in the direct suffering category isn't he? That's implied from what verse? Verse 3. Okay, so we have six categories of direct suffering. You want to train yourself to see this not only in your own life but in Scripture. Now, if you do this in your own life or the life of others you want to be very careful, this is not always cut and dry, there are other things going on, reasons people suffer that we don't have access too. All we're looking at are general trends that can be identified from Scripture. So let's see if we can figure out from the text which pattern of suffering Jonah is experiencing. We've already isolated it to the direct category. Now we want to identify the individual pattern or patterns. What do you think?

1. The Fall of Man

2. Self-Induced Misery
3. Sin Patterns
4. Rejection of the Gospel
5. Discipline for Spiritual Rebellion
6. Bad Works
7. Identification with Jesus Christ

Alright, pattern 5, Discipline for Spiritual Rebellion. How did you figure that out? Alright, verse 2 is God's command and verse 3, Jonah rebelled. Anything else that might apply? What about pattern 2? He's made a bad choice, this is just foolish, you don't disobey a direct order from God. So, I think that about covers Jonah. Now ask yourself, "What kind of suffering are the sailors experiencing?" See how we do this? Don't forget about the other people involved here. What we're doing is learning how to evaluate our own suffering situations. Why Lord, why is this happening? Is there a pattern here? Is this due directly to one of my choices or is something else going on. So let's look at the sailors on that ship? Are they suffering because of their choices? No, then is their suffering in the direct or indirect category? Indirect, they haven't done a thing to deserve suffering. So let's put out those categories and see if you can identify the reason(s) they may be suffering.

1. Wake-up Call
2. Prepare for Future Service
3. Example to Unbelievers
4. Edification of other Believers
5. Resolution of Angelic Conflict
6. Association with Unbelievers or Carnal Believers

Okay, we see several possible reasons don't we. What do you see? For one it could be a Wake-Up Call. God could be trying to wake these Phoenician sailors up to the truth of the gospel. Is there anything in this chapter that might indicate it worked? What about verse 14, who are they praying to? Yahweh, the divine name. They're not calling on their gods anymore. What about verse 16? Who do they fear now? Yahweh. So the suffering they faced did Wake them Up to the truth of Yahweh. Is there anything else, any other reason they may have suffered? What about pattern 6? Could they be suffering because of Carnal Jonah? Sure. What verses verify that they've come to this conclusion themselves? Verse 7, that's their first inclination, one of you on board has done something, now let's have it, come out with it, who

is it, what have you done, why are you imperiling us all? Verse 11 is another indication. And, looking at verse 12, who else realizes this? Jonah. Jonah knows there suffering because of him. And verse 14 they directly state it in their prayer, “do not let us perish on account of this man’s life.” So, pattern 6 is involved. Now, that’s how you apply this in a suffering situation. Do you realize you can generate whole prayer strategies out of this? Prayer should be strategic, we saw the early church in Acts 2 gathering for prayer and the idea there was they got together to think through issues and develop a prayer strategy, how are we going to encompass this problem or that problem, how can we pray for this person. Take an example, so and so is sick. What’s the first question you ask? Are they a believer or an unbeliever? The answer to that narrows things down because some of the suffering patterns are for believers only. So that’s the first question. Then, lets say they’re an unbeliever what are your options?

1. The Fall of Man
2. Self-Induced Misery
3. Sin Patterns
4. Wake-up Call
5. Association with Unbelievers or Carnal Believers

So, then you develop how you’re going to pray for that person. And then you have all sorts of other things going on beyond that, who are they related to? Are they a believer? What role could they play in this if they are? How can I pray for them? How are they suffering? What is God doing in their life through this? The possibilities are endless. So that’s some application to the patterns of suffering we face in the area of prayer.

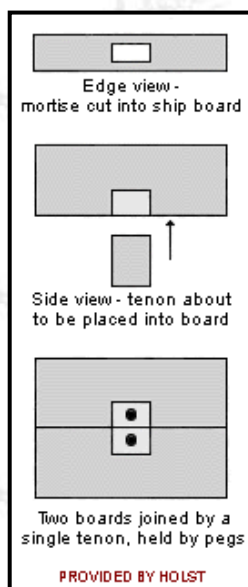
Jonah is suffering primarily because of Spiritual Rebellion therefore Divine Discipline, so let’s look at the discipline in verse 4, **The LORD hurled a great wind on the sea**, now the same verb there, **hurled**, is used later in the story, skip down to verse 15, see how they picked up Jonah and “hurled him into the sea,” same verb. That’s interesting, we’ll come back to that, but the significant thing here is “Who or what is in control of the wind? Who controls nature?” We just had a big rain last night, why did that happen? Is just that water vapor formed into drops that got too heavy and fell? Is this just a physical process? Or is it personal? Is there a person who controls that? If this is Jonah’s discipline then we’re talking about a very personal storm.

Let's keep reading, **there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up.** So the great wind God hurled transferred energy to the waters generating this **great storm.** So we have a dangerous situation here for everyone involved. This was most likely a Phoenician ship, in the Bible called the Ships of Tarshish eleven times (1 Kgs10:22; 22:48; 2 Chron 9:21;



20:37; Ps 48:7; Isa 2:16; 23:1, 14; 60:9; Ezek 27:25; Jon 1:3).

The Phoenician's were the great seafaring peoples of the ancient world, they built beautiful and magnificent ships; warships, merchant ships, cargo ships, you name it they built it. They're shipbuilding was undoubtedly the best of the ancient world.ⁱ Probably Jonah was on a merchant or cargo ship. The amount of work that went into one of these ships was astounding.



What they would do is carve mortises along each board and then place tenons in the mortises so you had each board with a long set of teeth on one side, then they would insert the tenons into the mortises of the adjacent board, drill two holes and drive a wooden peg into each hole. When the boat was put in water the wood expanded making it water-tight.ⁱⁱ Where did they get this technology? These are incredibly strong ships. This is an advanced

technology. Where did this come from? Scholars cite Phoenician ship-building as far back as 2,000BC. Did they get it from Noah' and His sons who built the Ark? This and other design features suggest they did. So when the text says **the ship was about to break up** you have to have a very **great storm**, this is not the average storm these sailors faced. That's clearly conveyed in v 5, **Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried to his god.** Now these were Phoenician sailors. These were men who lived at sea. They were the most skilled seafaring peoples in the world. You think they'd seen a few storms? Yet they're **afraid**? These are men who are used to stormy weather. Yet here we see them fearing the storm and crying to their **god** or "gods," it's the Hebrew plural *elohim*, some god or gods who are in control over this domain. The people of the ancient near east were polytheistic and thought different gods ruled over different domains; the god of the mountains, the god of the plains, the god of the sky and of course the god of the wind and god of the sea. So they're hoping that someone on board has enough knowledge of the gods to appease the right one. So at this point they fear the storm and are polytheists. Glance down at v 16 and ask, "What's changed? Who do they fear now? Are they still polytheists? See the shift. This is going to turn into an unsuspecting Gentile evangelism. Jonah tried to avoid Gentile evangelism but even while rebelling against God's command to evangelize Gentiles another group of Gentiles gets evangelized!

But we're not there yet, so verse 5, what measures did they take? **and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them.** So this is a rescue mission; life and death, nobody cares about the economic losses. **But** and here's the contrast, **Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down and fallen sound asleep.** He could care less as long as he doesn't have to go preach to those nasty Ninevites. What do depressed people do? A, they don't care about anyone else but self and B, they sleep a lot, just sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep, because as long as I'm asleep I don't have to think about my pain and guilt. So Jonah has also fallen into spiritual depression.

Verse 6, **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."** Now we don't know if Jonah did or not but at least now he's awake. Verse 7, **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 associated the calamity with what someone had done. This was an accurate analysis of the situation. Apparently it was common for people of the ancient near east to associate all calamity with an angry god or goddess. So while they stumbled onto the truth this time they were wrong about their understanding of God, that had to be corrected, and often times they were wrong about why some calamity was occurring of course, we know there are many other reasons. One being used here they are unaware of is an Evangelistic Wake-Up Call.

So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. Now this was a common technique for deciphering the will of God for both pagans and Israel. It was authorized for Israel but not for the pagans. But God sovereignly used the casting of lots to identify Jonah as the one who brought the whole ship into peril. You can see God’s grace extended to these sailors. Had God not directed the lot to Jonah then the ship would have broken apart and everyone would have died.

Verse 8, here’s the interrogation, **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?”** These are broad strokes trying to get to the bottom of the problem. **On whose account has this calamity struck us?** Have you done something to someone? Who are they? Apparently it was on God’s account, Jonah had disobeyed the Lord God. **What is your occupation?** He was a prophet of the Lord God, His servant. **Where do you come from?** He came from Gath-hepher. **What is your country?** His country was the northern kingdom of Israel. **From what people are you?**

Verse 9, **He said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God.** Does it strike you as odd that Jonah would say that? It does me. He claims to **fear the Lord God** but is he acting like he fears the Lord God? No. Sometimes we make the profession and God can use that (as He did here) but we don’t live like it. Sometimes we claim to be a Christian but we live like a pagan. That’s the tension between our position in Christ and our experience. Jonah as a prophet faced the same tension. So he identifies **the Lord God** here as **the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land.”** And how does he do that? What event in Scripture does Jonah refer back to? We’ve got to get back to who and what God is and that’s defined at Creation. The Lord **who made the sea and the dry land.** So he’s setting Yahweh

elohim apart from the pagan gods and goddesses. They were a part of the chaos, part of the universe, back behind them was the mysterious unknown, the Continuity of Being, so what does Jonah do, he separates the Creator from the creation and identifies the Creator with His Personal Sovereign name, Yahweh elohim. So he's painting for them a different worldview, a biblical worldview in opposition to their pagan worldview. This has to be dealt with. It had to be dealt with by Jonah with the Phoenicians and it has to be dealt with by us to our culture.

Verse 10, **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.** So there was more to the discussion than was captured. But what we have is sufficient because whatever Jonah told them he got God right and they understood who God was because **the men became extremely frightened.** They had been afraid of the sea now they are afraid of *Yahweh elohim*. **And they said to him, "How could you do this?"** They seem to be more spiritually with it than Jonah. If Yahweh elohim is who you say He is then "What are you stupid? You can't flee the presence of the Lord. This God you're talking about is Lord of all, He's everywhere, where do you think you're going to go Jonah?" This is an ironic demonstration of the fact that as much doctrine as we may have, when we get out of it spiritually we can make some pretty stupid choices. This just shows the effects of sin on the mind. You see this with Adam and Eve in the Garden, after they sin they immediately make fig leaf coverings and hide from God? And you look at this thing from the outside and you say, "Where are you going to go? What are you doing?" And what they were doing was re-engineering their view of God, that's what sin does to the mind, it darkens the mind and corrupts right vision so we see things funny. So Jonah's been pretty busy re-engineering his view of God and while he can talk the talk, he can repeat all the things he's learned, there's no practical application

Verse 11, **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.** Alright, so the storm intensity is escalating and they ask an odd question here, **"What should we do to you?"** So they see themselves in some role of carrying out divine justice but they go to Jonah who knows what will appease Yahweh. And ¹²**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.*” And I’ve associated this response with the fact that Jonah knew he was under the death penalty. He’s sinned a sin unto death for spiritual rebellion and therefore, when that is accomplished **the sea will become calm.** Verse 13, they didn’t follow the advice, no doubt for fear that they will be guilty of murder, ¹³**However, the men rowed *desperately* to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming *even* stormier against them.** So that didn’t work, apparently they must not have been too far from the port at Joppa to give this a shot. But the sovereign Creator of the sea rejected this course by making the sea become even stormier against them. So if that did not please Him than what will? Verse 14, **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;** They apparently have a high regard for human life and they do not want to either perish because of Jonah or to be guilty of spilling innocent blood, if Jonah is innocent. **for You, O LORD, have done as You have pleased.” So the only thing that will** please the Lord is hurling Jonah into the sea, that and that only will please the Lord. Remember, v 4, The Lord hurled the great wind upon the sea as divine discipline and the only thing that will please the Lord is hurling the prophet Jonah into the sea. So there’s a particular providential plan the Lord has in mind and all must take place precisely as He wants. We’ll see this has to happen, just turn quickly over to Luke 11:30. Jesus reports on the significance of this in the gospels. What Jesus is getting at is that this event of Jonah in the great fish becomes front page news that travels to Nineveh ahead of Jonah. What news would have arrived? Namely the entire story as far as the sailors knew it. That they tossed this Jonah into the sea and the sea went dead calm. Did they know he survived? Probably not, they may have seen him get swallowed but there’s no way they could have known he survived. So their report ends with Jonah being tossed into the sea, that’s it, end of Jonah. Then, unbeknownst to them Jonah survives, okay, that’s the whole point, think of the gospels, Jesus kept saying, “I will give you one more sign,” the sign of who? Jonah, which is the sign of resurrection. Okay, so everyone thinks Jonah is dead. What did everyone think about Jesus Christ after the cross? He was dead. Now that’s what Nineveh thinks of Jonah and then you have Jonah march in a month later with all the details leading up to that event plus the rest of the story, plus how he was three days and three nights in this fish and how he got vomited

up on the beach and so forth. And what does Jesus say this was? Verse 30, “For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.” So it was a sign, a sign that prepare the way for the preaching of the gospel and of course, we’ll see that the Ninevites did respond to the message but the generation that saw the sign of the Son of Man did not respond. Therefore the Ninevites will stand up in the day of judgment and condemn that generation of Israel. So everything has to happen like this, rowing back to shore won’t work because then there’s no sign see. Now maybe you can see that in the mind of God, in the omniscience of God every event is connected with every other event, there’s a complete permeation of each truth with every other truth in Scripture, that’s why we keep saying the Bible is interrelated, every truth is interrelated to every other truth, we may not see it now how one little passage or note is related to something else but if we had god-like omniscience we’d see that they do. So this has to happen this way, Jonah has got to be tossed in the sea, so verse 15, **So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging.** The idea of that word **stopped** is it stood still, Jonah hit the water and the water went dead still. That’s the opposite of what normally happens, when you hit the water you transfer energy to the water and cause ripples, so this is the most perfect dive in history, the guy hit the waters of a raging storm and they went dead calm. **16Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.** Now obviously they’ve spent quite a bit of time on those Mediterranean waters and they never saw anything like this. Storms just don’t do that. But they realized that when Jonah told them that “the Lord God of heaven made the sea and the dry land” and the sea went dead calm that Jonah was dead right. The wind and the waters obey their Creator instantly. So they’ve just experienced not only the sovereign power of God but also the grace of God, He spared their lives. What’s interesting is you never hear about this successful evangelistic encounter in the story of Jonah, you always hear about the Ninevites, but think of it, hasn’t God taken a rebellious Jonah, put him under divine discipline and used it as an evangelistic wake-up call to these sailors?

Verse 17, **And the LORD appointed a great fish**, that verb “appointed” is the only *Piel* verb in the whole section, almost every other verb is a *Qal* stem, just a simple action, but the *Piel* is an intensive action. The ancient Jewish tradition felt that the word...meant that God created this particular fish at creation and kept it in reserve until the day of Jonah when it fulfilled its

particular mission.”¹ While that is doubtful what is undoubtedly true is that God created this kind of great fish and assigned it the particular function of swallowing **Jonah**. So from Creation to this time this great fish was reproducing after its own kind so that at this particular time and at this particular place in the Mediterranean Sea this fish would **swallow Jonah**. That’s the idea of the intensive *Piel*. Next time we’ll deal with the rest of this verse, the kind of fish, it’s relevance to the NT burial and resurrection, the three days and three nights and so forth.

So we’ve said that in vv 1-3 we have Jonah’s Spiritual Rebellion, in vv 4-16 we have Divine Discipline. There are lots of elements in the text, you can look at Jonah’s suffering, why he’s suffering as well as the Phoenician sailors and you can see the grace of God extended to these sailors even during Jonah’s rebellion, the evangelistic strand, it’s a rich history.

ⁱ The structure of 1:4-16 is a chiasm, as seen in the following chart (adapted from Yehuda Radday, ”Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Literature,“ in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*. Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981, p. 60).

a. The sailors’ fright (vv. 4-5a)

b. The sailors’ prayer to their gods (v. 5b)

c. The sailors’ unloading the ship (v. 5c)

d. The captain’s speech to Jonah (v. 6)

e. The sailors’ word to each other (v. 7a)

f. The sailors’ question to Jonah, Who are you? (vv. 7b-8)

g. Jonah’s confession (v. 9)

f’. The sailors’ question to Jonah, What have you done? (v. 10a)

e’. The sailors’ question to Jonah, What shall we do? (vv. 10b-11)

d’. Jonah’s words to the sailors (v. 12)

c’. The sailors’ rowing of the ship (v. 13)

b’. The sailor’s prayer to the Lord (v. 14)

a’. The sailors’ fear of the Lord (vv. 15-16)

¹*KJV Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1994), 1726.

ⁱ http://www.ovayonda.org/boating/history_pg1.htm

ⁱⁱ http://www.phoenician.org/ancient_ships.htm

[Back To The Top](#)

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