

# INTRODUCTORY MESSAGE TO THE BOOK OF JONAH

## **TEXT: JONAH 1**

### **Introduction:**

1. We know very little about the prophet Jonah. He is mentioned in II Kings 14:25. "He (King Jeroboam II, the king of Israel) restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which He spake by the hand of His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher."
2. The book of Jonah has been viciously attacked by liberal critics. They say it nothing but a "fish story." When they belittle the book of Jonah, they are really attacking the Lord Himself, because Jesus referred to Jonah as a literal prophet swallowed by a literal whale.
3. Our Lord said in Matthew 12:39-41 "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here."
4. Our Lord referred to the people of Nineveh and how they repented at the preaching of Jonah. Our Lord rebuked the scribes and the Pharisees (Matthew 12:38). He called them "an evil and adulterous generation" (Matthew 12:39), and a "wicked generation" (Matt. 12:45).
5. The modern day scribes and Pharisees do not like the story of Jonah. And by questioning the historical accuracy of the book of Jonah, they are questioning the credibility of the Lord Jesus Christ.
6. Also, our Lord used the story of Jonah as a picture of His death, burial, and resurrection (Matt. 12:40). This is another reason why the liberals despise the book of Jonah. They are apostate.
7. Referring to the book of Jonah, J Vernon McGee said, "This book is the spot where the enemy has leveled his heaviest artillery" (*Thru the Bible*).
8. Though the book of Jonah has been viciously attacked by wicked sinners; it has been a great blessing to God's people.
9. And it has been greatly appreciated by lovers of great literature. Charles Reade, the English literary critic and author, wrote, "Jonah is the most beautiful story ever written in so small a compass."
10. Conservative scholars disagree over when the Book of Jonah was written. The Scofield Study Bible says 862 B.C. It was the period when Nineveh, founded

by Nimrod, was in its heyday, when the Assyrian nation was the great world power of the day.

11. Nineveh was a great city, and the book of Jonah verifies that (Jonah 1:2). But like all the great cities of antiquity, it eventually was destroyed (by the Babylonians in about 606 BC).

## **I. GREAT DOCTRINAL TRUTHS TAUGHT IN BOOK OF JONAH**

Bible teacher J Vernon McGee says there are six significant subjects which are suggested and developed in the Book of Jonah, and which make it very relevant for us today (from *Thru the Bible*):

1. This is the one book of the Old Testament which sets forth the resurrection of Jesus Christ... The little Book of Jonah illustrates and teaches the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. If this book does not teach the great doctrine of resurrection, then this most important doctrine of the Christian faith is not illustrated by a book in the Old Testament. For this reason alone, I would say this is a significant book.

2. The Book of Jonah teaches that salvation is not by works, but by faith which leads to repentance. This little book is read by orthodox Jews on the great Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. The way to God is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by the blood of a substitutionary sacrifice provided by the Lord. The most significant statement in the Book of Jonah is in the second chapter. "Salvation is of the LORD" (Jonah 2:9). He is the author of salvation.

3. The third great purpose of this book is to show that God's purpose of grace cannot be frustrated. Jonah refused to go to Nineveh, but God was still going to get the message to Nineveh. The interesting thing in this particular case is that Jonah was going to be the witness for God in Nineveh—he didn't know he was going there, but he did go.

4. The fourth great truth in this book is that God will not cast us aside for faithlessness. He may not use you, but He will not cast you aside. There are a lot of football players sitting on the bench; in fact, more sit on the bench than play in the game. A player is called out to play only when it is believed that he can make a contribution to the game. If you and I are faithless, God may bench us; but we are still wearing our uniform, and He will not cast us aside. Anytime we want to get back in the game of life and do His will, He will permit us to do it.

5. The fifth great truth is that God is good and gracious. Read Jonah 4:2 for the

most penetrating picture of God in the entire Bible. It is wrong to say that the Old Testament reveals a God of wrath and the New Testament reveals a God of love. He is no vengeful deity in the Book of Jonah.

6. The sixth and last great teaching is that God is the God of Gentiles... God has a salvation for all mankind. I have written Romans 3:29 over the Book of Jonah in my Bible. Paul writes, "Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also." The Book of Jonah reveals that even in the Old Testament God did not forget the Gentiles. If He was willing to save a woman like Rahab the harlot, and a brutal, cruel nation like the Assyrians, including inhabitants of Nineveh, its capital, then I want to say to you that God is in the business of saving sinners.

## **II. THE DISOBEDIENCE OF JONAH (1:1-3)**

1. Jonah knew the will of God, but he disobeyed the will of God (cf. 4:2). God told him to go to Nineveh, but he disobeyed God and tried to "flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD" (Jonah 1:3).
2. Of course, it is impossible to flee "from the presence of the LORD," but people try to do it nevertheless.
3. Many Christians are like Jonah – when it is convenient to obey God, they will obey. But if it is inconvenient to obey God, they often choose to disobey.
4. When God calls us to do something or go somewhere, we must do what God tells us, and go where God sends us, whether we think it is convenient or not.

## **III. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD**

1. The book of Jonah illustrates the providence of God.
2. Jonah was given a commission from God, but he disobeyed God. But God providentially saw to it that Jonah fulfilled his commission.
3. Jonah was a Hebrew prophet and the people of Nineveh were archenemies of the people of Israel. The Israelites were regularly invaded and attacked by Assyria. The capital of Assyria was Nineveh.
4. The Ninevites were cruel heathen people, and they were enemies of Israel. But the Bible says, "For God so loved the world..." "And he that winneth souls is wise" (Proverbs 11:30).
5. But Jonah did not love the people of Nineveh (4:10, 11). And Jonah was not being wise by fleeing from God. But God providentially saw to it that Jonah went to Nineveh.
  - "But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea..." (1:4).

- “And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah” (1:7).
  - “Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah” (1:17).
6. We see from these Scriptures that the Lord intervened powerfully and changed Jonah’s direction. Jonah, by his own stubborn will, was determined to disobey God and go to Tarshish (1:3) – in the opposite direction (on the southern coast of Spain).
  7. God graciously allowed Jonah to board the ship. (I say “graciously” because God could have killed the stubborn and disobedient prophet.)
  8. But God, by His sovereign will, prevented Jonah from going to Tarshish (1:4).
  9. The mariners were afraid (1:5). But rather than help them, Jonah “was fast asleep” (1:5b).
  10. The shipmaster had to tell the backslidden, indifferent prophet to pray (1:6). It is a bad testimony when an unsaved man has to tell a preacher to pray!
  11. The mariners cast lots because they did not know any better (1:7). As Christians we can pray. We have the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to lead us and guide us.
  12. Proverbs 16:33 says, “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.” The LORD providentially saw to it that “the lot fell upon Jonah” (1:7b).
  13. “The lot fell upon Jonah” (1:7b). God was in this, and God used this, but that does not mean God approved of it. There are many things that God allows, and God uses, but it does not mean God approves of it.
  14. Do you remember in Judges 14, when Samson told his parents that he wanted to marry a certain Philistine woman in Timnath? His parents objected. They did not want him to marry a heathen girl.
  15. But Judges 14:4 says, “But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.”
  16. God was in the casting of the lots (Jonah 1:7). But this does not mean that God approves of gambling.
  17. Jonah acknowledged that the storm had come from the LORD, and he asked the crew to throw him overboard (1:8-12).
  18. But the unsaved mariners had more concern for Jonah than he had for the citizens of Nineveh. They did their best to save Jonah (1:13, 14).
  19. After praying to the LORD, and acknowledging God’s hand in all of this, the mariners finally threw Jonah overboard. “And the sea ceased from her raging” (1:15).

20. It appears that these Gentile mariners came to know the LORD (1:16, cf. 1:5). This reminds us that God can use anybody – even a backslidden prophet.

### **CONCLUSION:**

1. We see in the book of Jonah a conflict: the will of God with the will of Jonah.
2. God sent a tempestuous storm, and God sent a whale, until Jonah finally realized that God's will would prevail (1:11, 12).
3. When we insist on doing things our way (rather than God's way), we are actually fighting against God's will.
4. This is one of the lessons of Jonah.
5. The book of Jonah is not so much about what happened inside of a whale. Rather, it is about what happened inside of Jonah.
6. This book is not about a big fish; it is about a conflict between the will of Jonah and the will of God.
7. Do not wait till God sends a big tempestuous storm into your life. Obey God now.

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