

**Jonah**  
**“Introduction to Jonah”**

**Introduction to the Book of Jonah****February 01, 2004**

This is lesson number one in our exposition of the Book of Jonah.

Today we begin a series of studies in the book of Jonah and I am excited about this study. I want you to enjoy the study of the Bible.

Briefly skim over Jonah and notice:

The Sovereignty of God over storms and fish and gourds and worms.

The mercy of God for all people.

The missionary mind of God.

The goal of a good Bible teacher is to help you learn how to study the Bible for yourself. So part of this study will be to show you how the Scripture supports itself. Learn how to connect one thing with another: Compare Scripture with Scripture also called the Analogy of Scripture, or Biblical Theology. The only way that you can learn how to compare Scripture with Scripture is to know your Bible. And the only way you will get to know your Bible is to read it through and then start over and keep reading it over and over again.

This is not to boast in any personal intelligence but when I saw the movie, The Gospel of John, I knew what chapter they were in and what was supposed to come next in the presentation because I have read the Gospel of John more than 50 times and have taught it several times.

We should never reach a point in our Christian growth where we think that we can't be taught anything new. If a preacher becomes unteachable he will be worthless as a teacher because he has stopped learning.

So, let me tell you about a question posed by Sister Theresa Bunger. Theresa asked her dad, Brother Bob, an excellent question: **“Do you think the Holy Spirit speaks to us as individuals?”** Brother Bob asked Brother Craig and I to comment on this question. Bob had already prepared an excellent answer to Theresa's question to which I gave a hearty “Amen”. In fact, it occurs to me that Bob's reflections would be instructive for the church at large, perhaps a Theology Night study.

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My answer to the question: **“Do you think the Holy Spirit speaks to us as individuals?”** was “Yes” and “No”.

**“Do you think the Holy Spirit speaks to us as individuals?”**

“No,” in the sense of direct extra-biblical communication, as in “God told me to tell you to give me a hundred thousand dollars.”

A well-known religious figure is going around telling people that God told him who was going to win the election for President in 2004. If the man he says God told him would win actually wins does it prove that God spoke to him? If the person he says will win does not win, does that mean that God was wrong? He claims to have extra-biblical revelation direct from God. I heard him say so myself during an interview on TV.

Excuse me, but this man is an idiot!

**“Do you think the Holy Spirit speaks to us as individuals?”**

“Yes,” in the sense of Romans Chapter 8 where we are told that the children of God are led by the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit. And the Holy Spirit leads and bears witness through the **written Word of God** and Holy Spirit’s leading and witness is always consistent with the written, infallible, inerrant, and **sufficient** Word of God. That, in summary form is what Brother Bob answered.

**What has Theresa’s question got to do with this series on Jonah?**

**How did I decide to preach Jonah?**

**Well, the Holy Spirit led me to prepare for this series.**

Now I did not close my eyes and point my finger to a list of books in the Bible and open my eyes to find my finger on Jonah. Neither did I have a vision nor did I hear the voice of God speak to me in audible form.

This is how I came to know that I must preach Jonah as soon as we completed Romans.

As I studied and preached through the Book of Romans I saw where Paul frequently reminds us that the **Gospel is based on the Old Testament Scriptures**. Paul quotes the Psalms and the prophets.

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Then coincident with Romans on Sundays I taught lessons from Matthew on Wednesdays and we saw where Jesus, when confronted with a demand for proof of His authority, told the **scribes and Pharisees**:

### Matthew 12:38-42

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.

Later, in our study of Matthew on Wednesdays, as I was about to conclude Romans on Sundays, we saw again where Jesus was confronted with the same question about His authority, this time by the **Pharisees and Sadducees**:

### Matthew 16:1-4

Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. **2** He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; **3** and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. **4** A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." And He left them and departed.

### What was the sign of the prophet Jonah?

The death, burial, and resurrection of the Christ!  
God's love for the nations!

**The Gospel of God from the prophet Jonah!**

### 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, **2** by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you — unless you believed in vain.

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**3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, NKJV**  
 This is Paul’s chief argument in all of his letters.  
 The Gospel is according to the OT Scriptures!

#### Luke 16:19-31

**"There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. 20 But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, 21 desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.**

**24 "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' 25 But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. 26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'**

**27 "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' 29 Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' "**

Moses and the prophets: the sign of the prophet Jonah, One raised from the dead, the Gospel: and so I was led by the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel to you from Jonah.

Another thing that further assured me that Jonah was needed came toward the end of my studies in Romans where I saw more clearly than ever that the Gentiles [nations] were always in the heart of God.

The Jews were blessed with the possession of the Scriptures and they were told by God to bring light to the Gentiles but they failed miserably as missionaries to the nations.

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Isaiah was startled, Paul says Isaiah “**cries out**”, when God revealed to him His love for all people and that only a remnant of the Jews would be saved. Paul and the other apostles had to be taught that God had always included the Gentiles in the number of His elect children. And that “For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.”

**And so Jonah was the first missionary to the Gentiles!**

If I have not confused you, I hope you can see how the Holy Spirit gently but firmly led me to preach the Gospel through Jonah: **the Word of God.**

Jonah is one of the twelve “Minor Prophets”. These twelve prophets are not called “minor” or “lesser” because what they wrote is less important than what the other prophets wrote.

They are called “minor prophets” because of the length of their writings. Jonah is only **four** short chapters compared to the 66 chapters of Isaiah, the 52 chapters of Jeremiah, the 48 chapters of Ezekiel, and the 12 chapters of Daniel: the so-called “Major Prophets.”

Recently I learned from a commentary on The Minor Prophets by John Phillips that in all Hebrew manuscripts and printed Hebrew Bibles these twelve prophecies appear in unbroken sequence.

From the earliest times the twelve prophecies were regarded as one book and were bound together in a single volume because they were so small. As separate scrolls some of them might otherwise have been lost.

But it was **Jonah** that the Lord Jesus Christ said was the only sign of His being the Messiah that the scoffers would be given.

**'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' Luke 16:31**

Jesus did not mean that Jonah is the only OT prophet that spoke of Him. All the Scripture is about Christ. Jesus told the Pharisees that the reason they did not believe Him was because they did not believe Moses for, “Moses wrote about Me!”

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But it was **Jonah** that was the only sign that these scoffers would be given. Deny the historicity and truthfulness of the Book of Jonah and you deny the veracity and the intelligence and the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

My plan for this series is to give you an introduction to the Book of Jonah today and then take sections of the book to bring out the details in a proper exposition. I do not yet know how many messages the Lord will give me in Jonah. Hugh Martin’s commentary on Jonah takes 359 pages. R.T. Kendall’s 22 sermons on Jonah are 269 pages. My estimate is that I am good for about 10 or 12 sermons in Jonah.

Please read through Jonah several times each week and it will greatly enhance your appreciation of this series of messages.

### **Introduction to the Book of Jonah**

#### **From the Narrated / Chronological Bible:**

Sometime around 780 to 760 B.C., during the reign of Jeroboam II, God selects a man from southern Galilee by the name of Jonah to take a message of repentance to the heathen Assyrians living in the great metropolitan area of Nineveh.

Nineveh is one of the most ancient of the large cities, having been established by the great warrior Nimrod back in the days of the patriarchs. Located east of the Tigris River, it is the royal residence of the Assyrian kings.

Jonah's mission takes place between the reigns of Shalmaneser III (860-824 B.C.) and Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.) during the reign of a lesser-known king, Jeroboam II.

The basic improbability of the mission, as viewed through human eyes, is underscored when Jonah attempts to evade his special responsibility and is swallowed by a large fish, which God miraculously provides for the occasion.

Thereby convinced of God's limitless power, Jonah proceeds to deliver the message that Nineveh is about to be destroyed and that repentance is in

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order. It is interesting that Jonah did not mention repentance, only destruction, but God granted repentance anyway. To his surprise, and even bitter disappointment, Nineveh's inhabitants repent and are saved from the threatened destruction.

All in all, the account is an amazing demonstration of God's universal grace and concern at a time when a rather exclusivist Israel is in great need of a reminder that, despite being God's chosen people, their failure to repent actually lowers them to a level of spirituality beneath even the penitent pagans.

[From the Narrated / Chronological Bible]

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### **Man by Nature and Grace; or Lessons From the Book of Jonah.** **W.K. Tweedie, Edinburgh, 1850**

Jonah is perhaps the earliest of the prophets who wrote a book. His life is contemporary with Elisha and it is possible that Jonah was one of the "sons (pupils) of the prophets" referring to Elisha's school. The idea that he could evade the Lord's command by avoiding going to Nineveh is evidence that the best instructed minds, in the presence of corrupted religion, will lower the concept of the power of the Lord. He was, however, doomed to learn something more of God than he had known before.

It is not worth discussing whether a fish (whale) could swallow a man. It was the Lord's doing and evidently miraculous. If one disbelieves miracles altogether, it is useless to contend with him about this one; but if he does believe in miracles, he will see nothing too hard for the Lord in all this; and he will not suppose it more difficult for Him to preserve Jonah from suffocation in the stomach of a fish, than to preserve the three Hebrews from harm "in the midst of the burning fiery furnace."

It is largely improbable that a Jewish Book, written in such a plain way, is a fabrication or a fable, and then that Jesus Christ should speak of it as history.

Nineveh was about sixty miles in circumference. It would be a "day's journey," 20 miles across. The population based on "120,000 persons that cannot discern between their right and left hand," that is children, will yield a number of 600,000 people. Children are usually one-fifth of the population of any city.

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The depth of Nineveh’s paganism is seen in the carvings and paintings discovered by explorers. Everywhere was scenes of licentiousness. They deify themselves; they were inflated with vanity while they trampled underfoot those they had conquered. They made lions and bulls their gods. They reversed God's holy order. The inferior creation, which they were meant to rule, they worship. The true God they ignore.

Jonah had no doubts about the ability of God to grant repentance; that's why he avoided Nineveh in the first place. Notice that the prophet does not call them to repentance, but only warned them of impending doom. It was not too late; all was not yet lost. God saw that the Ninevites turned from their evil ways, and saved their city.

It seems a remarkable circumstance that the Ninevites should have extended their acts of fasting and humiliation to their cattle. We find nothing of this among the Hebrews; but it was custom among the ancient heathen nations to withhold food from their cattle, as well as from themselves, in times of mourning and humiliation, and in some instances they cut off the hair of their beasts as well as their own.

It is hard to think well of Jonah. There seems to be in him few of the signs of grace, which we expect to see adorning the servants of God. “It displeased him exceedingly” that Nineveh with its many persons - men, women, and children - had been spared destruction. Furthermore, “He was very angry.”

Jonah's prejudice as a Jew against the Assyrians as well as his fear that they would take him for a false prophet was more important to him than the saving of many lives. Here the Lord, being merciful unto him, purposed to give him a lesson salutary to him, and fitted to impress his willful but not hardened mind.

Jonah had made a booth, and rested under its shade to enjoy as much comfort as a sullen and discontented man, who was dissatisfied with divine dispensations, and scarcely satisfied with himself, could be supposed to enjoy.

But his comfort diminished as the foliage with which he had constructed this green booth began to wither as the extreme heat and dry climate extracted



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the moisture from its leaves. Soon his external circumstances were as uncomfortable as was his state of mind.

The Lord then “prepared a plant [gourd]” to come up over Jonah and of this relief the prophet “was exceedingly glad.”

But God prepared a worm, which smote the plant [gourd], so that it withered in a night. Then the Lord sent a vehement east wind, and the sun beat fiercely upon the prophet's head until he fainted, and wished he were dead. Now the Lord speaks to Jonah. [There are several possible ways to translate God's words to Jonah, the most literal being “You are angry aren't you?” The ESV translates it “Do you do well to be angry?”]

God taught Jonah that he [Jonah] had more compassion for a gourd vine that he had nothing to do with than a whole city of people. We are not told how Jonah reacted to the Lord's rebuke.

We can hope that he profited by it; and we should hope that we might.

The prophet trusted in his gourd. He rejoiced in it; but he forgot the God who sent it. The gift was, therefore, taken away; and where was Jonah then?

Precisely where the sons of men are now, when their refuge of lies are swept away from around them. It was only for a single day that Jonah enjoyed the gourd; but that was enough to unveil the condition of his heart, when the thing in which he trusted withered before his eyes.

It is in miniature, or in compend, the history of man. By nature we all have some gourd under which we sit - we all have something that we put in the place of God. His gifts are preferred to himself; for we all think it better to have a creature for our portion than 'God over all, blessed forever.' ... Had not the gourd withered, the soul would have not been saved; and the withering of the gourd, therefore, makes the anthem of the saved the louder.”

[Man by Nature and Grace; or Lessons From the Book of Jonah.  
W.K. Tweedie, Edinburgh, 1850]

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**John Kitto, 1845**

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Another point to remark is the assertion of the Lord's providence in the frequent intimation that the Lord prepared all the material and circumstantial agencies that wrought the history of Jonah.

In his first adventure, the Lord prepared the storm, the Lord prepared the great fish; and in the second, the Lord prepared the gourd, the Lord prepared the worm, the Lord prepared the east wind: all is of the Lord's preparing.

This accounts for everything; and we are not bound, in the case of the gourd, for instance, to find a plant, which, without the special ordinance of the Lord's providence, should attain such growth in a night as to provide adequate shelter to the prophet's head.

“Elijah,” says St. James, “was a man subject to like passions as we are.” So was Jonah. So were all the prophets. The fact of their divine commission and divine inspiration did not make them perfect in temper or spotless in character. The prophetic call was something apart from, and altogether independent of, the intellect, and the will of man.

Man was made, in some mysterious way, the instrument of the divine will. He was forced to execute the divine commission, and inspired to declare the divine message. Jonah, as it appears, was no willing agent. His stubborn will was made to bow to a superior, a heavenly power. His lips were compelled to utter words which of himself he would never have uttered. It was all the Lord's doing; and it has in every age been wondrous in the eyes of man. The plan and purpose of the Book of Jonah can only be understood when studied in the light of our Lord's statement regarding the prophet, and of the whole plan of divine grace. Jonah was a historical type. Every incident of the narrative as recorded is true; but there is evangelical truth, deeper far and more glorious, embodied in the historical.”

[John Kitto, 1845]

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We will conclude today's lesson with this Introduction to the Book of Jonah but I ask you again to read the small Book of Jonah several times in different translations.

There is much to be learned from the Book of Jonah.

The sovereignty of God;  
The mercy of God;

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The missionary mind of God.

Jonah was a child of God but he tried to run away from God.  
Every one of us is a Jonah!

Do you personally know the merciful God that called Jonah?

Do you trust the Jesus who said that Jonah was the sign of His authority?

**The elders of this church are available to counsel with you at any time.**  
**If you are troubled about your soul do not suppress what may be the**  
**drawing of the Father to show you your need for Christ.**  
**The message is the invitation.**

Jim Gunn

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