

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

Jonah: Man On The Run

Jonah 1:1-17

2000

Introduction

Background on Jonah:

1. He was a prophet of God during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (793-753 B.C.) mentioned in 2 Kings 14:23-25. It was during this period that he wrote the book bearing his name.
2. He was the son of Amittai - Jonah 1:1
3. He was from Gath Hopher, a town in Zebulun in the northern kingdom of Israel (4 miles NE of what was later Nazareth in Galilee) - 2 Kings 14:25
4. He wasn't always a reluctant spokesman for the Lord. To the contrary, he boldly predicted the remarkable expansion of Israel's territory during the reign of Jeroboam II in 2 Kin. 14:25.

Fact or fiction?

Some critics view the book as a either legend or myth, but:

1. The storm, Jonah's being swallowed by the fish, the conversion of the Ninevites are no more incredible than the plagues of Egypt, the dividing of the Red Sea, manna from heaven, or the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
2. Jesus Christ quoted the book a number of times in the NT and understood the account of Jonah to be historically true and literal (Matt. 12:39-41; Luke 11:29-30).

I God Commissioned Jonah To Preach

A. God cared about the unbelievers in Nineveh

1. He initiated a plan to reach them - Jn 3:16

Jn 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Rom 5:8 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Amazing fact:

God doesn't want "anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." 2 Pet 3:9

2. He chose a messenger - Rom 10:14-15

Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul, etc.

He is still choosing men and women to share His message:

Rom 10:14-15 "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?"

So Jesus Christ sent us in His name and authority:

Matt 28:19-20 "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

B. God sent Jonah as His ambassador

1. "[Arise,] go to Nineveh"
 - a. It was founded by Nimrod - Gen 10:8-11
 - b. It was located on the Tigris river near the present day city of Baghdad, Iraq 500 miles NE of Gath Hopher
 - c. It was the capital of the Assyrian empire -- the enemy of Israel
 - d. It had a population of 120,000 people (twice that of Kauai)

The command of God was clear! Jonah was to go to the "great city" of Nineveh, and ...

2. "Preach against it"

The prophet was to call Nineveh to repentance, warning the nation of its approaching doom unless it turned to God.

Nineveh's sins:

1. Pride - Is 10:5-19; 36:18-20
2. Plotting against the Lord - Nahum 1:11
3. Cruelty in war - Na 2:12-13; 13:1,19; 2 Ki 15:29; 17:6; Is 36:16-17
4. Prostitution - Nahum 3:4
5. Witchcraft - Nahum 3:4
6. Commercial exploitation - Nahum 3:16

Important point to remember:

Jonah was not called to save anyone. His simple task was to preach. Their response to the message was their responsibility!

2 Cor 2:15-16 "For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are **the smell of death**; to the other, the **fragrance of life**. And who is equal to such a task?"

C. God's heart was moved to action

1. Its wickedness had come up before Him

How did their wickedness come up before God?

The phraseology suggests the possibility that God's attention was drawn to Nineveh's sin by the prayers of the saints.

Gen 18:20-21 "Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."

Application:

The difference between our hearts and God's heart:

1. We want our enemies destroyed.
2. God wants them redeemed.

Thank God that he didn't treat *us* as we deserve!

II Jonah Rejected God's Commission

A. Jonah ran away from the Lord

Instead of obediently following God's instructions, he went AWOL, catching a ship heading in the opposite direction.

He ran away from the Lord = "He fled from the presence of the LORD."

To stand in the presence of someone is often used in the sense of acting as one's official minister.

To flee from His presence = "To refuse to serve Him in this office."

Jonah was basically quitting the ministry God had given him without notice!

Why did he run?

He hated the Ninevites and didn't want them to repent and be saved.

Jonah 4:1-2 "That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."

1. He went down to Joppa

The major Mediterranean seaport about 5 miles from Israel.

2. He found a ship sailing to Tarshish

a. A Phoenician outpost in southwest Spain -- the farthest city to the west in the known world.

b. Approximately 2,000 miles west of Joppa (2,500 from Nineveh)

3. He paid his fare and boarded

You can run, but you can't hide!

Ps 139:7-9 "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

III God Pursued Jonah

A. Through natural elements

1. God sent great wind

Ps 135:7 "He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth; he sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses."

2. God sent a violent storm

The ship begins to show signs of breaking up!

Application:

God has a way of turning up the heat and increasing the pressure in order to bring us into alignment with His will. Even nature and the "circumstances of life" become His servants to accomplish -- in and through us -- His perfect plan.

B. Through unbelieving sailors

1. They were afraid

This storm was so violent that these veteran sailors were terrified!

Illustration:

Sailing between Oahu and Kauai in 1980 in storm conditions.

2. They cried out to their gods

Observation: You have to give these guys credit. At least they acknowledged their powerlessness and their need for divine help!

3. They jettisoned cargo

a. Meanwhile, Jonah slept below

Fast asleep = "To be in a deep, stupor-like sleep"

Why was he sleeping?

1. Exhaustion -- from running away from God?
2. Depression at having disobeyed God?
3. Suicidal fatalism -- he just didn't care?

4. The captain called Jonah to action

a. "[Arise] Get up and call on your god!"

Mark 4:37-41 "A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

Imagine! An unbelieving sea captain, commanding a prophet of God to pray. Surprisingly, everyone but Jonah is praying.

No wonder! If you were Jonah and stubbornly refused to repent, what would you have to say to God?

Jesus' deep sleep that came from absolute peace with God.
Jonah's deep sleep that came from a hardened heart and a seared conscience.

b. "Maybe He will:

1. "Take notice of us and save us from death"

Similar to the prayer of the King of Nineveh in Jonah 3:9

5. They identified Jonah as the cause

The seamen conclude that the reason why their prayers were not answered was due to some unidentified sin. So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

Application:

Jonah's sin endangered the entire ship and its crew. The sin of a believer can endanger and corrupt the body of Christ. As Paul put it, **"a little leaven leavens the whole lump"** (1 Cor. 5:6). A little gossip -- a little slander -- a little immorality can have an adverse and sometimes a spiritually deadly impact on the work of God in the church.

a. Jonah identified himself as a Hebrew

The usual term by which Israelites were known to foreigners.

b. Jonah identified himself as a worshipper of God

With this statement, everything suddenly came into focus for the sailors: Jonah was a Hebrew prophet who had fled from God and has caused the storm.

Application:

I can claim to be a believer -- a servant of God.

I can claim to be a worshipper -- having an intimate relationship with God.

Yet, if at the same time, I refuse to hear and obey the commands of God, I deceive myself.

John 14:21 "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me."

What should have Jonah done at this point?

Repented and cried out to God for deliverance -- both for himself and his companions. God would have undoubtedly rescued them. But he doesn't -- his heart is still hard!

c. Jonah identified the solution

1. "Throw me in the sea"

Why didn't Jonah just jump into the sea?

Fear, weakness, cowardice? He preferred death to obedience!

Application:

7 warning signs of spiritual trouble:

1. Lack of prayer

2. Absence of joy and praise

3. Lack of appreciation for life -- death looks good

4. Lack of sensitivity to sin in one's life

5. Lack of sensitivity to consequences of one's sin for others

6. Lack of compassion for others

7. Disobedience to the clear commands of God

6. They responded in a godly way - Rom 2:14-15

a. They treated Jonah with compassion

You would think that the sailors would have just thrown Jonah in the drink! But these unbelieving seamen are nobler than the prophet of God and they make one final effort to save Jonah's life by rowing to shore.

7. They acknowledged God's judgment

Ps 135:6 "The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths."

a. Jonah was thrown overboard

But not before crying out the Lord in prayer:

Jonah 1:14 "O LORD, please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O LORD, have done as you pleased."

Look how far these heathen sailors had come:

1. They acknowledged that sin brought divine judgment

2. They abandoned their "gods" for the one true God

3. They acknowledged God's sovereignty over all

8. They witnessed the calming of the sea

Matt 8:24-27 " Then [Jesus] got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

a. They greatly feared the Lord - Ps 107:23-32

- b. They offered a sacrifice to the Lord
- c. They made vows to the Lord

Despite himself, Jonah was an instrument in bringing these sailors to faith in God.

Contrast between Paul and Jonah: Acts 27:1-44

Paul was a godly influence in an equally bleak situation.

C. Through a great fish

- 1. The fish was provided by God

Probably was not whale. More than likely, the fish was of the shark species called a "sea dog." It weighs 13 tons and grows to a length of 40 feet. Its mouth is wide enough to swallow four men at the same time. Entire human bodies have been found in some fish of this kind.

- 2. The fish was obedient to God [vs. Jonah's disobedience]

Aqua Man! "Using his power of mental telepathy, God called to the great sea creature of the deep to swallow Jonah."

- a. To swallow Jonah for 3 days and nights

It is prophetic of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and the consequent blessing upon the Gentiles.

Matt 12:39-41 "He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here."

Conclusion

- 1. God loves unbelievers -- no matter how bad or sinful they might be!
- 2. God chooses to send believers to share His message of reconciliation to men and women through the preaching of the Good News of Jesus Christ.
- 3. Jonah failed to obey God in two crucial areas:
 - 1. He didn't love God
By his disobedience, he demonstrated his lack of love for God.
"If you love me, you will obey what I command." John 14:15
 - 2. He didn't love others
Jonah lacked a compassion for the sailors.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Jn 13:34-35

*Copyright, Bob Hallman, 1996-2020, All Rights Reserved.
Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the
New International Version ©1984 by International Bible Society.*