

Jonah: The Angry Prophet

Introduction

The book of Jonah is short, compassing four brief chapters of 48 verses. Despite brevity, it is a powerful story of God's grace to Gentiles and a reflective study into God's character and mercy.

After having dealt with the entire human race for 2,000 years, God established a new program with Abraham, known as the Abrahamic Covenant. In this sovereignly enacted covenant, He declared His blessings to Gentiles would be mediated through a new race of people, the Jews. Few examples of Gentile salvation exist in the Old Testament. Exceptions are Rahab, the harlot, Naaman, the Syrian general, Ruth, the Moabitess, and Nebuchadnezzar. For the most part, Gentile salvation is rare. Jonah's ministry is the greatest exception.

Jonah is a story of contrasts. It reveals God's greatness and man's pettiness. God was gracious and Jonah peevish. It is a story of repentance. The sailors repented from following false gods to trusting the one true God. Jonah repented from fleeing God to obeying Him. The Ninevites repented from wickedness to righteousness.

Background

Jonah (his name means "dove") was a prophet from Gath-Hepher,¹ a town a few miles north of Nazareth (2 Kings 14.23-25). He belonged to the tribe of Zebulun and ministered during the reign of King Jeroboam II (c.786–746 BC). Nineveh was located on the eastern bank of the Tigris river, opposite the modern city of Mosul in Iraq. According to Genesis 10.11, Asshur, a son of Shem (Genesis 10.22) built it. One of the great cities of the ancient world, it was finally destroyed by a coalition of Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Chaldeans, Scythians and

Cimmerians in 612 B.C. Nineveh survived for another 150 years after it heeded Jonah's message. Two books of the Bible speak of Nineveh. The book of Jonah recounted its salvation. The book of Nahum prophesied and described its doom.

Some have doubted Jonah is history. Such objections fall outside the realm of serious scholarship for the Lord Himself attested to its historicity (Matthew 12.39-41; Luke 11.29-32) and removed all doubt of the record. Jesus referenced Jonah as a prophecy and type of His resurrection. To deny the historicity of Jonah is to deny Christ's resurrection. Jesus, declared, "for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12.40). Jesus told the Jews the Ninevites would judge them because they had repented because of Jonah's preaching and that He was greater than Jonah. Do those who doubt Jonah think the God who created the universe and raised Jesus from the dead cannot cause a sea creature to swallow Jonah? And if swallowed, revive him? Such objections impress only the weak minded.

Jonah as Literature: Art and Structure

Students of rhetoric can find no better example of the art than this literary gem. Charles Reade, the English novelist, wrote, "Jonah is the most beautiful story ever written in so small a compass."² The story has a clearly defined structure and is replete with figures of speech: puns, hendiadys, merism, chiasm, parallelism, etc.

The phrase, or like expression, "the word of the LORD came" governs the book's structure and occurs twice (Jonah 1.1, 3.1). This familiar expression is found in many books of the Bible, occurring 92x (e.g., Genesis 15.1; 2 Samuel 7.4; 1 Kings 6.11, 16.1, etc.) but Jonah is the only book of the Bible that begins with it. The book is divided into two sections: chapters 1 and 3 comprise one section and chapters 2

and 4 the other. One section involves Jonah, those with whom he had contact, and God. The other has Jonah alone with God.

The Beginnings of the First Section	
¹ Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ² Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.	Jonah 1.1-2
¹ And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, ² Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.	Jonah 3.1-2

Verse 2 of chapters 1 and 3 contain the same three Hebrew verbs: □□□□ (arise), □□□□□□ (go), and □□□□□ (cry). Some think God is absent from the world's affairs, that the world goes on unnoticed by Him. Jonah 1.1-2 should arrest one's attention. God is aware of all man does. In most cases, He allows man to do as he will and manages His plan behind the scenes. But on particular occasions, He reveals Himself and acts. In this case, He commissioned Jonah to address the evil of the Ninevites.

God prefers mercy to judgment. Our present age, the Church age, which has lasted for nearly 2,000 years since the Apostle Paul, exemplifies this fact. Our age is characterized by God's grace. God has restrained judgment for 2,000 years and given men and women an opportunity for eternal life by believing Paul's gospel of grace (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). However, God has declared, "vengeance is mine; I will repay" (Romans 12.19; 1 Corinthians 4.5). A day is coming when God's patience will end. This will be the Day of the Lord, first revealed in Psalm 2 and expanded upon in detail by the prophets. Jesus called this day the Tribulation (Matthew 24.21, 29). It will begin after God completes His Church, the body of Christ. During that time, which will last seven years (Daniel's 70th week,

Daniel 9.27), God will pour His wrath upon all mankind for its unbelief and evil (Psalm 2.5, 9).

Jonah's Response to the Two Calls	
But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.	Jonah 1.3
³ So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. ⁴ And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.	Jonah 3.3-4

In Jonah's responses, he encountered non-Jews: the sailors and the captain and the Ninevites and their king.

Responses to Jonah's Presence	
Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them.	Jonah 1.5
So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.	Jonah 3.5

Each response was internal ("were afraid," "believed"), spoken ("cried to god," "proclaimed a fast"), and active ("cast wares," "put on sackcloth").

Response of Those in Command: Captain and King	
if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.	Jonah 1.6b

Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

Jonah 3.9

In the second section, chapters 2 and 4, Jonah was alone with God.

Chapter 2 recounts Jonah in the belly of the sea monster where he prayed and gave thanks to God. God heard his prayer and delivered him. In chapter 4, Jonah was in Nineveh and in the desert. He pouted and expressed anger. God heard him and asked a question.

Chapter 1: Prophet on the Run



Jonah's attempted flight from God.

God does the unexpected. The Bible is replete with examples. Ask Jonah. Ask Nebuchadnezzar. Ask Saul of Tarsus. The last thing Jonah thought God would do was send him to the Assyrians (Jonah 1.1-2). The Assyrians were a fearsome people who worshiped false gods and idols. In Jonah's day, they were Israel's great enemy. God commanded Jonah to travel northeast to Nineveh. Jonah reacted by going to Joppa and fleeing west to Tarshish (Jonah 1.3, 10).

In response to Jonah's flight, God "hurled" (הִזָּק) a storm onto the sea. This word is used for God's hurling the storm, sailors tossing ballast from the ship, and Jonah being cast into the sea (Jonah 1.4, 5, 12, 15). That Jonah thought he

could run from God shows his foolishness, typifying man's foolishness in thinking he can escape God (Jeremiah 23.24). We are all fools. We run from God—just as our first parents did in the garden (Genesis 3.8-10). This is futility. God knows everything about us all the time (Psalm 139). As for escape by sea, God owns the sea and its lanes. The Psalmist wrote God founded the earth upon the seas (Psalm 24.1-2).

The mariners (☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐) “salts” were seasoned sailors. They were terrified. The storm was so violent they knew their ship was about to shatter. To lighten it, they began to toss cargo into the sea (Jonah 1.4-5). All but Jonah. He slept in the ship's hold. He was at such peace he was sleeping through a storm that had everyone else petrified with fear. Finding him asleep, the flummoxed captain 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” (Jonah 1.6).

Every crew member was praying to his god for deliverance. Except Jonah. Jonah slept. He was not helping to lighten the ship or praying for deliverance: a total slacker.

Jonah was an enigma. The captain and sailors could not comprehend how anyone could sleep through such a storm. Something was not right. As a result, they cast lots to learn about this strange man. We read:

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 cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ 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?” ⁹ He said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land” (Jonah 1.7-9).

Solomon wrote, “the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD” (Proverbs 16.33). In other words, man rolls dice but God makes the spots come up. God caused the dice reveal Jonah as the problem.³ The mariners demanded an accounting.

To his great credit, Jonah told the truth. He revealed he was a Jew and despite his disobedience, he declared he “feared the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land.”⁴ Jonah retained his testimony and witness.

This revelation terrified the men even more. They now knew they were dealing not with nature alone but with supernature. They were aghast at Jonah’s behavior in fleeing God (Jonah 1.10). Consider their situation. A gigantic storm was raging. Waves roiled the ship, smashing into its sides and onto the deck. The sailors wrenched to and fro and the wind howled so that the crew screamed to be heard. In despair, the men shouted, “What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us” (Jonah 1.11)? Jonah responded:

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” (Jonah 1.12).

Jonah had a choice. He could have told the crew to turn the ship back to Joppa. Instead, he told them to throw him into the sea. Jonah would rather die than go to Nineveh. The sailors were noble. They refused Jonah’s solution and rowed with greater intensity. They tried to turn the ship to land but the storm only worsened. Why did the storm intensify if the men were trying to row to land? The *sailors* wanted to return to land but *Jonah didn’t*.⁵

The next few verses demonstrate God’s grace and power:

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; for You, O Lord, have done as You have pleased." ¹⁵ So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. ¹⁶ Then the men feared the Lord greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

What a change! Sometimes, to get a man's attention, God creates havoc. Each man had cried to his own god (Jonah 1.5). Their gods had failed. The men recognized they were in the grip of a different kind of God, an all-powerful God—Jonah's God—the one true God. They now prayed that He would spare them and not hold them guilty for shedding innocent blood by throwing Jonah overboard. They recognized God's sovereignty: "You, O Lord, have done as You have pleased." When Jonah hit the water, the storm ceased.

One cannot but be reminded of Jesus' disciples' experience in a storm on the sea of Galilee (Matthew 8.23-27; Mark 4.36-41; Luke 8.22-25). In that event, Jesus had slept through the storm. Terrified, His disciples woke Him to save them from sinking. After He calmed the storm, they had declared, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" Same power. Same God. The Lord upbraided their lack of faith (Mark 4.40; Luke 8.25) but Jonah's sailors became believers. The text reads they "feared the Lord greatly," "offered a sacrifice to the Lord," and "made vows" (Jonah 1.16). Though battered and exhausted, this was their day of salvation—the best day of their lives.

Jonah is remarkable in that wherever he went, in obedience or disobedience, people were saved. Despite his rebellion, Jonah kept his testimony and spoke the truth: "I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land." God honors His word. When spoken, it brings men to salvation. The virtue of obedience is it allows one to *enjoy* God, to celebrate His

work. Disobedience does not.

Chapter 2: In the Belly of the Beast

Chapter 1 ends, “And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights” (Jonah 1.17).⁶ This verse fits more appropriately as the beginning of chapter 2 which contains Jonah’s prayer to God. Jonah thought he would drown when thrown into the sea. He expected to die. Better that way. He would not have to go to Nineveh. But God is tricky. He plays with loaded dice. The last thing Jonah imagined was that God would bring a great sea creature to swallow him!

Jonah prayed:

² *“I called out of my distress to the Lord, and He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice.*

³ *“For You had cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the current engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me.*

⁴ *“So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.’*

⁵ *“Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, weeds were wrapped around my head.*

⁶ *“I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, but You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.*

⁷ *“While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple.*

⁸ *“Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness,*

⁹ *But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation*

is from the Lord.”

Jonah had gone down (□□□□□) to Joppa (Jonah 1.3), down to the ship (Jonah 1.3), down to the hold (Jonah 1.5). Now he had gone down into the sea monster to the depths of death (Jonah 2.6). Jonah knew he had lost. He had experienced peace, fast asleep in the hold of the ship, pleased with his decision to sail to Tarshish. No worries. But God would not leave him alone. He created a storm to ensure the ship never reached Tarshish and arraigned a great fish to swallow him. God would not let him die. Jonah could not win.



Jonah Freed

Jonah's experience in the sea-beast, this living submarine, must have been terrifying. Coming to his senses he declared, "I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple" (Jonah 2.4). He realized he could not escape God and looked to Him for deliverance. He said, "While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple" (Jonah 2.7). His words revealed his change of attitude: "That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the Lord" (Jonah 2.9). We are all runaways. God pursues each of us to restore our broken relationship with Him (Genesis 3.8-10).

God had his man back. We read,

Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land (Jonah 1.10).

Notice the fish obeyed God. No argument.

Chapter 3: God of the Second Chance

¹ Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ² “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you” (Jonah 3.1-2).

God repeated his command to Jonah. This time, Jonah obeyed. Thank God for second chances! Who could endure without them? We read:

So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days’ walk (Jonah 3.3).



Nineveh the Great on the Tigris

Nineveh was probably the greatest city in the world in Jonah’s day. A normal reading of “three days’ walk” indicates the time to cross Nineveh’s metropolitan area. This would mean the metroplex was about 60 miles in diameter (comparable to modern

Dallas-Ft. Worth). The city walls did not encircle this entire area—as archaeology has discovered. They were further in.⁷ The last verse of the book provides additional information about Nineveh's size. The text states 120,000 did not know their right hand from their left (Jonah 4.11). This idiom indicates a child under the age of two. Under normal population distribution, this would mean a population of about 3,000,000. This number is reasonable. Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.), king of Assyria, invaded Israel during Hezekiah's reign about 50 years later. The angel of the Lord killed his expeditionary force of 185,000 soldiers (2 Kings 19.32-6; Isaiah 37.36-37). This was a large army, even by modern standards. But Sennacherib's entire army would have been much larger.⁸

Jonah's evangelistic message was brief. We read:

Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3.4).⁹

The power of God's word is revealed by the people's response. We read:

⁵ Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. ⁶ When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes (Jonah 3.5-6).

Implicit in Jonah's message was that God was displeased with their behavior. Jonah provided no details of the nature of their impending destruction but history records this was a period of Assyrian weakness. Externally, Assyria was threatened by Arameans and Urartians and suffered famine and revolts internally. The kingship was weak and the provinces

maintained a large degree of independence. Such conditions may explain the phrase “king of Nineveh” rather than “king of Assyria” and the fact the king’s decree was issued in concert with his nobles. On the other hand, the proclamation, which included the nobles, may have been issued in that way to indicate that all the leadership was agreed. Jonah had appeared during a time of national distress and its rulers could ill afford divine wrath by an invading army, famine, earthquake, epidemic, or flood. What they feared is unimportant. What is important is they *believed God*.

Abraham bargained with God not to destroy Sodom if the city had ten righteous people (Genesis 18.32). There were not. But the entire city of Nineveh responded to Jonah’s message. Everyone from the street sweeper to the king heeded Jonah’s warning. For the hesitant or doubters, the king issued an executive order for fasting, dressing in sackcloth, prayer, and repentance. The phrasing of the order emphasized individual accountability and personal responsibility: “that each may turn from his wicked way.” The text reads:

⁷ He issued a proclamation and it said, “In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. ⁸ But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands (Jonah 3.7-8).

This order extended to humans as well as animals. Every living thing was clothed in sackcloth (□□□□) and every living creature fasted (□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□). The king hoped for survival. Being a king, he understood authority and sovereignty (cf. Romans 9.15-16). Ultimately, a king forgives because he chooses to forgive, not because of the actions of a subject. Thus, he said:

⁹ Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish" (Jonah 3.9)?

The king's proclamation indicated that like Jonah's sailors he had abandoned his gods and recognized Jonah's God (יְהוָה). The repeated testimony of the Scriptures is that God delights in mercy (Psalm 86.15, 145.8; Jeremiah 33.26; Ezekiel 39.25). God revealed His mercy not only by His words and actions but in the architecture of the Tabernacle. The central and most important piece of furniture in its design was the ark of the covenant. The ark's lid was called the mercy seat (Exodus 25.17-22; cf. Exodus 25.9; Hebrews 8.5). It represented God's throne, where the Almighty sat, as the Tabernacle represented God's throne complex. This is mercy's abode.

When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it (Jonah 3.10).

Chapter 4: Jonah's Anger, God's Mercy

¹ But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. ² He prayed to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. ³ Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."

The passage reveals Jonah's thinking and motivation in fleeing God. Jonah's great fear was God would show mercy to Nineveh. That fear had been realized. Could God not leave well enough alone? The Ninevites were pagan, idolatrous Gentiles. They

were enemies! They were threats! They needed to be destroyed! Now, God had blessed them—and used him to do it. Jonah’s prayer was bitter: “I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.” I knew it. I just knew it. I knew You would find a way to spare and bless these pagans.

Jonah could not understand God’s mercy to Israel’s enemies. He was a hard case, preferring death to life (Jonah 4.3, 1.12). God replied to Jonah: “Do you have good reason to be angry” (Jonah 4.4)? God planted this question in Jonah’s mind to try and bring him to the divine viewpoint (Isaiah 55.8). God didn’t pursue the question; He gave Jonah time to reflect.

Jonah left the city and sat east of it. He constructed a shelter and watched to see what would happen after 40 days (Jonah 4.5). Maybe, just maybe, God would change His mind and destroy the city. During this time, God prepared (□□□□) a gourd to grow and shade Jonah from the sweltering Mideast sun.¹⁰ The gourd made him happy (Jonah 4.6). Then, God prepared (□□□□) a worm to eat the gourd which killed it (Jonah 4.7). The sun arose and God prepared (□□□□) a violent, withering east wind (□□□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□). Water, whale, withering wind: Jonah wished to die (Jonah 4.8 cf. Jonah 1.12, 4.3, 9).

The gourd was God’s mercy to Jonah. The worm’s destruction of the gourd was a picture of God’s potential destruction of Nineveh. Jonah was angry over God’s destruction of the gourd—he lost his shade. When God questioned Jonah over his anger about the loss of the gourd he responded: “My anger is justified—even to death” (Jonah 4.9). Sigh. A tough case.

The book of Jonah ends with God having the last word:

¹⁰ *Then the Lord said, “You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow,*

which came up overnight and perished overnight. ¹¹ Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals" (Jonah 4.10-11).

God's statement to Jonah reminds one of Jesus' parable of the laborers of the vineyard (Matthew 20.1-16). In that story, a landowner contracted with laborers early in the morning to pay a denarius for a day's work. Later, about 9 a.m. he hired more workers. These would be paid "whatever was right." At noon and 3 p.m. he did the same thing. Finally, at 5 p.m. he hired the last group. At the end of the day, 6 p.m., his foreman paid each man a denarius. When all the paycheck so were handed out the men hired earliest were unhappy because those who worked only an hour received the same pay as those who worked all day. The owner replied he had done no wrong. He had kept the contract they had made with him. The other worker, with whom he made no contract ("whatever was right"), received pay according to the landowner's heart. He then asked the laborers if he did not have the right to do what he wanted with his own money. He asked them if they were evil because he was good. God is sovereign. All things are His. He is good and acts accordingly. He has declared "the first shall be last, and the last first (Matthew 20.16)." The point of Jesus' parable and the point of Jonah is that grace is greater than law. God's mercy trumps every time. Make a deal with God and He will keep it. But leave the deal to God and you will prosper much more.

Jonah did nothing to merit the gourd. He did not plant, water, or fertilize it. He did not provide sunlight for it. He did nothing. Yet he became angry when God removed it. Like the laborers who complained, Jonah could not accept God blessing the Ninevites. Jonah cared for his gourd. He did not care for the hundreds of thousands of Ninevites, their children, or their animals. His eye was evil but God was good.

Conclusion: Lessons From Jonah

Jonah provides instructive lessons. The story has four parties: the sailors, the Ninevites, Jonah, and God.¹¹ How God dealt with each demonstrated His nature and character.

Salvation of Gentiles

Jonah is the great story of Gentile salvation in the Old Testament. It provides a foretaste of the fullness of Israel's destiny to bless Gentiles anticipated in the great Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12.1-3 cf. Isaiah 2.2-3, 49.6; Zechariah 8.23). God promised that the covenant line, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through whom came the Jews, would bless Gentiles. Jonah prefigured the fulfillment of this promise which will culminate in the Messianic (Millennial) kingdom. Through Jonah, the sailors experienced salvation. Through Jonah, the Ninevites received salvation. Jonah's problem was he could not see beyond his hatred of the Assyrians and his patriotism. He was God's channel of blessing but he refused to celebrate his ministry. Jonah was a typical Jew who wished to have no dealings with Gentiles. Such was the case of Peter who reluctantly went to Cornelius' house (Acts 10.28). When Paul made his defense before the Jews in Jerusalem they listened to him until he uttered the words, "And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles'" (Acts 22.21). When they heard these words they began to scream, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live" (Acts 22.22)! That was Jonah.

Response to God's Mercy and Grace

The sailors, captain, king, nobles, citizens of Nineveh responded to God's mercy. They were saved. Jonah pouted. The sailors, captain, king, nobles, etc. recognized God's mercy. Jonah became angry. The challenge of the book of Jonah for unbelievers is to trust God and believe the gospel. The challenge for believers is to rejoice in God's salvation and

His goodness. God demonstrated His ultimate mercy and grace in sending His Son to die for our sins and rising from the dead so we might have life and enjoy His fellowship forever. This mercy is available for nothing. The Lord Jesus Christ picked up our tab and paid it all. Responding to God's grace begins by believing Paul's gospel of grace (Acts 20.24): that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). Thanks be to God!

¹ The etymology of the name is literally "wine-press of the digging" and is mentioned in Joshua 19.13 and 2 Kings 14.25.

² The book of Jonah has received numerous accolades for its literary artistry. K. M. Craig, Jr. stated it was "enormously varied, rich, and complex" (*A Poetics of Jonah: Art in the Service of Ideology*). L. C. Allen wrote it was a "model of literary artistry, marked by symmetry and balance" (*Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*) and H. C. Brichto described it, "from beginning to end, in form and content, in diction, phraseology, and style, a masterpiece of rhetoric" (*Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics*). Another revealing study of the rhetorical aspects of Jonah is *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* by Phyllis Tribble.

³ Albert Einstein said, "God does not play dice with the universe." He hated the notion of a universe governed by probability, a fundamental concept of quantum theory. Einstein was wrong. God not only plays dice, His dice are loaded—and invisible. Gamble against God and you'll lose. Guaranteed.

⁴ The "God of heaven" was a term known to Gentiles (cf. 2 Chronicles 36.23; Ezra 7.21; Nehemiah 2.20; Daniel 2.18-19, 37, 44).

⁵ This raises interesting questions about the nature of reality.

⁶ The Hebrew reads, דג גדול, a great fish. The word means "fish" but the scope of meaning of דג is unclear. Jesus used the word [κῆτος](#) to refer to the sea creature which swallowed

Jonah (Matthew 12.40).

⁷ Charles Halton. *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 18.2 (2008) 193–207, [How Big Was Nineveh? Literal vs. Figurative Interpretation of City Size](#). One problem with analyses of the size of Nineveh is to assume the city was only within the city walls. Extra-biblical sources such as Diodorus Siculus (1st century B.C.), and Herodotus (4th century B.C.) wrote Nineveh was about sixty miles in circumference and twenty miles across.

⁸ Sennacherib boasted he made Hezekiah “a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage” (Magnus Magnusson, *Archaeology and the Bible*, 1977, p. 186). Since the Assyrians did not record military defeats, Sennacherib did not record his failure to destroy Jerusalem or capture its king (Hezekiah). The reason: God destroyed his army.

⁹ The message was certainly longer, but this was the central message.

¹⁰ God prepared (יָרָא) a fish (Jonah 1.17), a gourd (Jonah 4.6), a worm (Jonah 4.7), and a violent east wind (Jonah 4.8). God controls and uses nature to achieve His ends.

¹¹ While given star billing, the sea creature was a prop, not an essential player in the drama.

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