

Bible Stories

JONAH

Jonah 4:9-11

June 24, 2023

Jonah means “dove” – timid, fearful, senseless, and we will quickly discover that the character in our story fits his name.

Jonah was a real person. He lived in the Northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC)

- **2 Kings 14:23-25** - Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel became king in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years.....²⁵ He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher.

During that time Assyria was a major military power who harassed both Israel and Judah. At the peak of her power, Assyria stretched from Egypt to the Persian Gulf. The vast empire was built by terror and violence and her rulers were well known for their cruelty. Listen to the boastings of Ashur-nar-sipal II - 883-859 BC:

.... I flayed as many nobles as had rebelled against me [and] draped their skins over the pile [of corpses]; some I spread out within the pile; some I erected on stakes upon the pile ... I flayed many right through my land [and] draped their skins over the walls.

.... I cut off the heads of their fighters [and] built [therewith] a tower before their city. I burnt their adolescent boys [and] girls.

.... In strife and conflict I besieged [and] conquered the city. I felled 3,000 of their fighting men with the sword ... I captured many troops alive: I cut off some of their arms [and] hands; I cut off others their noses, ears, [and] extremities. I gouged out the eyes of many troops. I made one pile of the living [and] one of heads. I hung their heads on trees around the city. {From the book “Assyrian Royal Inscriptions, Part 2: From Tiglath-pileser I to Ashur-nar-sipal II”, written by Albert Kirk Grayson, 1976 - p.124-126}

In the book of Nahum, Nineveh is described this way, **“Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims!”** – Nahum 3:1

Our Story

Jonah didn't wake up that fateful morning expecting anything but an ordinary day – Nineveh wasn't even on his radar. Instead, he was probably minding his own business - doing his laundry or going to the market.... Then it happened - he heard Yahweh's voice: **“Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.”**

Living in Israel, Jonah would have had firsthand experience with the cruelty of Assyria, so you would think that he would have jumped at the chance to go into his enemy's camp and tell them their cup was full and that they were going to be destroyed..... However:

- **Jonah 1:1** - Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh.....

God said, **“Jonah go east.”** Jonah said, **“I'm going west.”** He went to Joppa, purchased a ticket on the first ship heading in the right direction, found his cabin and promptly took a nap.

Why did the world's worst missionary run from God? Because he knew what could happen. He knew that if he brought Yahweh's message to Nineveh, they might, horror of horrors, repent. And if they repented – Yahweh would forgive them - pardon them - extend them Grace.

And that is not what Jonah wanted – he wanted them to die in ignorance..... In fact, the very worst possible scenario Jonah could think of was Nineveh repenting and God forgiving them.

Safely tucked below deck, Jonah might have actually thought he had gotten away with it, but he forgot one thing:

- **Psalms 139:7-10** - 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. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

So, what did God do? He sent a great storm. It must have been a really bad storm because the professional sailors on the ship were afraid.

They had never seen anything quite like this storm and in response they did 2 things:

- They prayed to their gods.
- They lightened the ship.

Nothing worked. If something didn't happen quickly, the ship was going to sink. That's when the captain found Jonah sound asleep in his bunk.

"What is wrong with you?" he yelled, ***"How can you sleep at a time like this? Get up and pray to your god. Maybe He will take notice of our situation and save us!"***

Did Jonah pray? The Bible doesn't tell us. What it does say is that the sailors took matters into their own hands. They cast lots and the lots fell on Jonah. As one body the sailors turned toward Jonah:

"Tell us right now who is responsible for causing us all this trouble. What is your occupation? Where do you live? What is your nationality? Who are your people?"

Jonah didn't come clean until he had no choice ----

"I am a Hebrew," he said. ***"I fear Yahweh, the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."***

"How could you do such a thing?" they asked. ***"The storm is getting worse! What steps do we need to take in order for the sea to become calm once again?"***

Jonah responded, ***"Pick me up and throw me into the sea and the storm will stop. It is because of me this great storm has come upon you."***

But when Jonah said, ***"Throw me into the sea,"*** the sailors would not do it. Instead, they did their best to row back to land. But they couldn't because the storm intensified.

In order to save the ship Jonah must be sacrificed. Finally, they decided to throw him into the sea, but before they did, they prayed:

"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." – Jonah 1:14

Then they picked Jonah up and threw him overboard. Immediately, the storm was over.

While the sailors praised the God of Israel, Jonah was bobbing in the sea hoping to die.

But nooooo.... God had not changed His mind about Nineveh:

- **Jonah 1:17a** - The LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah.

Jonah remained rebellious. Three days in a fish didn't really change him. It took him three days to pray and he never repented in his prayer – he just acknowledged who God is - apparently that was enough.

On the third day the fish spit Jonah out onto dry land.

Maybe Jonah got a shower, had a meal and hoped that God had chosen someone else.

But nooooo....

- **Jonah 3:2** - Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you."

NEWMANNNN!!!! Jonah's disobedience had not canceled God's call. The word of God still needed to be preached in Nineveh and God still wanted Jonah to preach it.

This time Jonah did not argue or run. This time he obeyed.

Had his attitude changed toward this assignment? I don't think so and this will prove true at the end of the story. Jonah was simply remembering his disastrous first attempt to flee.

What he had realized was that he could not, in fact, outrun God. So, grudgingly and with a bad attitude, he headed for Nineveh - roughly 500 miles away.

- **Jonah 3:4** - Jonah began to go through the city – a one day's walk – crying as he went, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

It took Jonah 3 days to preach the world's shortest sermon. Going from neighborhood to neighborhood until all had heard the message.

He was more successful than he had hoped and the Ninevites did what he was hoping they would not do – REPENT. The whole city repented!!

- **Jonah 3:5-8** 7 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. 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. 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. 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.

The greatest spiritual revival in history happened because of a one-sentence sermon preached by the worst missionary in the history of the world - Billy Graham never had that kind of success.

- **Jonah 3:10** - When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

Jonah was **NOT** happy and began to pout. "LORD," he prayed, *"this is exactly what I said would happen while I was still at home. That's why I ran away, because I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. So, if it's all the same to You, just kill me now because death is more appealing to me than life."*

Yahweh replied, *"What right do you have to be angry?"*

Still downcast, Jonah went to a place east of the city, built himself a shelter and sat down to see what would happen. Hoping for destruction, but expecting salvation.

Yahweh caused a vine to grow up to provide Jonah shade because it was extremely hot - Jonah was pleased.

The next day, however, Yahweh sent a worm to destroy the vine – it withered and died. When the sun came up, Yahweh sent a scorching east wind and as the sun blazed down on him, Jonah grew faint.

"Just kill me now!" He cried.

Yahweh: *What right do you have to be angry about the vine?*

Jonah: *I have good reason to be angry, even to death!*

Yahweh: *You have compassion on a plant that you did not plant or tend or cause to grow. It came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have more compassion on Nineveh – a city with more than 120,000 people, who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?*

What do we do with this story?

This story reveals the heart of God and the lengths to which He will go to save people.

God was not just interested in saving the inhabitants of Nineveh. He was equally interested in saving Jonah.

What happened to Nineveh? Well, the conversion did not last.

The city was destroyed in 612 BC and the nation no longer exists.

God knew that would happen, but He went out of his way **ANYWAY** because God loves to save people. He's in the saving business.

What happened to Jonah? We don't know. Was he converted? We don't know but we are faced with the reality that Jonah doesn't look very good in this story.

He misrepresented God at every turn, he was rebellious and would rather have drowned than do what God asked him to do.

He was quick to accept God's Grace – but lacked the ability to extend that same grace to others.

He cared more about a plant – I would suggest that he did not really care about the plant but about the fact that he was inconvenienced – than he did for people. He did not love people the way God loves people.

God knew all that about Jonah, but He went out of his way **ANYWAY** to get Jonah's heart.

Here is a hard truth: God extends Grace better than we do.

We are perfectly happy to receive His Grace but we are reluctant to pass that Grace on or we extend it through gritted teeth. We hoard God's Grace, but God looks at **EVERY HUMAN** through glasses tinted with grace.

- **Isaiah 55:6-7** - Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.
- **Romans 5:6-8** - You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- **2 Peter 3:9** - The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.