

Jonah

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Synthetic reading

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The Wayward Prophet

Jonah is a fascinatingly distinctive prophetic book. We often hear people outline the book by saying:

1. God Calls Jonah but Jonah Cuts & Runs
2. Jonah's Prayer in the Big Fish Belly
3. Jonah Prophecies to Nineveh
4. Jonah and the Plant

Understanding Jonah requires us to recognize that not only is this a narrative book, it is narrative satire spiced with heavy doses of irony. When we take off our own hermeneutical lenses that expect God's prophets to be honorable and the book's ending to be more comedic than tragic, then we can better understand the book of Jonah.

Chapter 1: Jonah does receive a call from God, but instead of running for God in an obedient direction, decides to run in the opposite direction from God. He goes down on a boat with supposedly hardened sailors, and we see these sailors more astute to the moving of God, more compassionate about the disobedient, more humble to the ways of God, and more worshipful than the prophet of God.

Chapter 2: Jonah's suicide by sailor doesn't work as God sovereignly swallows him. Jonah does pray and seems to declare his willingness to surrender, but we are hard-pressed to see actual repentance and submission.

**Rev. White's reading notes
based on synthetic reading of the book**

Chapter 3: Jonah ends up at the place where he was running from and preaches a 5-word sermon in Hebrew – only 5 words! None of these 5 words include typical ABC's of prophetic content like a) **who** sent the prophet, b) **how** had they transgressed, and c) **what** were they to do about it? Despite Jonah preaching a sermon that would have flunked if graded, the people (and even the cattle) of Nineveh repented, God relented, and (as we will see in chapter 4) Jonah resented it!

Chapter 4: Jonah is angry because God is gracious & merciful. We saw Jonah's outward rebelliousness displayed in chapter 1. Now we see his inward rebelliousness on full display in chapter 4.

This is a message of the God of grace who is the creator not only of the children of Israel and of Judah but of all the world. This book is a challenge or an indictment on people who are resentful that the God who has shown grace to the Israelites so often and so long would also show it for the Ninevites. However, God indicates God's willingness to show love and grace towards anyone who operates with humility and submission to the God of creation!

The timing of this work would be interesting. This is before or after the Assyrians take the Israelites into exile? Is this a pre-exilic work or a post-exilic work? Is God asking for grace and compassion even when those who are the target or recipients of such have been the tools of trial and trouble and tribulation previously? If the last answer is an affirmative, it also speaks of the importance of recognizing the sovereignty of God even in the midst of the suffering of God's people!

Certainly, some additional aspects include the way that the Hebrew recognizing that he lived in covenant relationship with God could both ignore God and reject God while pagans who purportedly had no access

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or opportunity to walk with God are sensitive to God's moving. Persons who are sensitive to the sovereignty of God can respond more appropriately to God than those who have the privilege of being God's people and who claim to know and love God, yet whose actions belie their assertions and whose hearts seem too calloused and hardened to respond to God in awe and reverence!

Here's another question: can you handle it when God shows mercy, grace and love to your enemies? If hating your enemies is more important to you than responding to your God, doesn't that make the hate of your enemies your idolatrous God?

Last but not least, sadly there are times when people who claim to know and love God are more concerned about inanimate objects and property more than they are about the people that God made and loves and cares for!

Jonah as a prophet is a symbol & a type of antihero. Rebelling against the Lord's Word outwardly, he runs from God in chapter 1. Then despite his prayer in chapter 2, he rails against the Lord inwardly in chapter 4 when God shows mercy to *evil Ninevites* who repent in chapter 3. If wicked Ninevites can repent thru the hellfire and brimstone preaching of a prophet who came from out of nowhere and was visiting for a few days, why don't God's people repent when they have:

- Prophets for Decades
- Promises & Threats
- Word of Lord
- Signs & Wonders