



“God disciplined Jonah”

Review

Jonah teaches us both about God and ourselves. We learn about the love of God, the sovereignty of God, the forgiveness of God, the persistence of God. God’s name appears 32 times in 4 short chapters. We learn about people; their disobedience, their repentance, their fears and prejudices, their self-centeredness and yet God’s willingness to utilize them in His eternal purposes. Jonah lived sometime during the period of the divided kingdom of Israel. The only other reference to Jonah finds him prophesying God’s undeserved favor to Israel’s disobedient King Jeroboam II. Jesus referred to Jonah as a prophet recorded in both Matthew 24 and Luke 17 including a reference to his stint in the “fish house” divinely validating the historical nature of the events described in Jonah. Jonah was neither a missionary or an evangelist. He had no interest in winning people to God. Jonah held no desire to see mercy granted to the wicked Assyrians.

Jonah balances the dual revelation of sovereign but merciful God. It reveals both His sin triggered wrath and His compassion for sinful people. As mentioned last week, there are many ways to organize the information in the book. I have chosen to organize the content of the book around the actions of God recorded there. I will explore the information recorded and seek to discern any timeless principles regarding people and God suggested there.

I. God called Jonah

A. God called Jonah

The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me." Jonah 1:1-2

God speaks directly throughout the book of Jonah. The phrase “the word of the LORD” appears seven times in this short book. He called Jonah to “arise and go.” The command inspires action and direction. Move from a stationary state to an active state. Go to a particular place and carry out a specific task. God’s assignment was not evangelistic. He didn’t send Jonah as a missionary but to announce Judgment. God called Jonah to go to Nineveh and “cry against the city.” The city was Nineveh one of the chief governing locations of the Assyrian Empire. God included the reason for such judgment in His call.

“their wickedness has come up before Me.”

Historical documents revealing the depth of their wickedness have been discovered. The prophet Nahum later details some of the sins of Nineveh cataloged by God. Nahum announce God judgment on those sins later in history. God will implement final national and individual judgment one day.

B. Jonah refused God’s call

You would have thought that Jonah would have been happy to announce judgment to the evil Assyrians but instead of heading to Nineveh, Jonah headed in the opposite direction.

But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. Jonah 1:3

Jonah chose to travel 2200 miles west in the opposite direction to Tarshish. He tried to escape the responsibility of following God’s directive. I believe he knew he could not actually escape God’s omnipresence but hoped to run as far from the area of God’s work as possible. Nineveh was on God’s agenda. Jonah fled to Tarshish. Jonah obeyed the first part of the command “arise” but rose quickly to flee. Jonah himself tells us later why he ran.

Jonah prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Jonah 4:1-2

Jonah ran the opposite direction because of his hatred for the Assyrians. He wanted no part in any mercy plan. He would have been delighted to see destruction come upon them all.

Possible pertinent principles to ponder

- **Our Omniscient God is fully aware of the wickedness of people and nations.**

Don't assume God doesn't see.

- **God must and will deal with sin both individually and nationally.**

Keep short accounts.

- **God utilizes individuals to communicate His message.**

What has He asked you to share?

- **Sometimes God calls us to cry out against sin.**

Just be sure it is Him asking you to

- **God calls us into action from inaction.**

Is there something God is calling you to "Arise" and do?

- **Seek to be sensitive to the "word of the Lord".**

Our responsibility is to hear and obey the word of the LORD.

- **You can't escape God's presence**

Stop running from God

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

- **Bitterness and prejudice blinds us to opportunity for effective ministry.**

Seek to see people as God sees them.

Today we follow God's action to literally get Jonah turned around. Remember, he ran the opposite direction God told him to go. Jonah booked a boat, God chartered a fish.

II. God disciplined Jonah

Jonah soon found out that there is no escaping God's call. God has a way of getting us back in the game. There are examples however where He simply chose to take people home.

A. God hurled a great storm

But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Jonah 1:4

Notice the distinctive contrast. "Jonah fled to Tarshish **BUT** the LORD hurled a great wind." We have our idea about how things should go BUT God has a different idea. We want our way BUT God gets His way. As we mentioned before, God is intentionally active all through this narrative.

God ultimately gets His way.

Don't fight it, embrace it.

God doesn't always use direct intervention but employs secondary intervention. In this case; a great wind. Not every wind storm is a direct action of God for a specific purpose. Sometimes a storm comes about through the natural course of nature. Could some of the extraordinary environmental activity be a direct action of God? He has definitely used nature to execute judgment all through history. Floods, earthquakes, storms, famine, disease...

Catastrophic judgment fell the day Adam rebelled against Him. Paul told the Romans that the earth was subjected to futility. Nature no longer functioned the way God originally designed it. All creation groans longing for the restoration of all things. Jonah thought he was home free. Clear skies, calm sea, Nineveh in the rear-view mirror.

BUT GOD

That phrase introduces either a terrific truth or a terrifying truth. Ephesians states we were dead in sin BUT GOD made us alive in Christ. We were alienated from God BUT GOD brought us near.

In this passage, Jonah was running from God, BUT God intervened. Three clear principles emerge here.

God deals with rebellion

God sometimes stirs up a storm to get our attention.

He disturbs the calm to incite forward progress; action.

Our disobedience adversely affects those around us.

How many other ships in the area encountered this sudden storm? Jonah put all the sailor's lives and their livelihood (loss of cargo) in jeopardy. How many suffer because of our intentional disobedience?

Family? Neighbors? Coworkers? Friends?

Jeremiah suffered greatly because of God's discipline on the Israelites.

Moses suffered because of God's discipline on the faithless Israelites.

Achan's sin after Jericho affected the whole nation and brought destruction on his entire family.

Saul's sin affected the nation with a three-year famine many years after his death.

David's sin of numbering the people cost the lives of 70,000 people (2 Sam 24:14)

We seem to always think in terms of the individual. God operates in terms of the family, the group, the nation.

B. The sailors responded to the storm

The sailors tried to adapt to the crisis.

Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them.

This storm presented more powerful than normal. They were seasoned sailors used to storms at sea. This one triggered a level of fear stirring them to cry out to whatever god they trusted. Most likely they prayed to the "sea god" for mercy.

The normal reaction to danger, even among pagans, is to seek divine intervention, but this is precisely what Jonah wanted to avoid. Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible

Sometimes it takes a serious situation to finally cry out to God. Jonah didn't pray because he was avoiding God's answer. Since the sailors received no response to their prayers, they resorted to a practical solution. At least these guys started with prayer even though it went nowhere. Lightening the cargo in a storm was a common tactic to avoid disaster. Ever since the original rebellion, man has tried to adapt and even eliminate the consequences of his rebellion through natural means.

C. Jonah slept through the storm

I observe another striking contrast. The sailors did everything they could to adapt "but"...

But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish." Jonah 1:5-6

Jonah hid in the deepest part of the ship he could find and fell into a deep sleep.

Our sin numbs us to the trouble we are causing others.

While the sailors struggled to save the ship, Jonah slept. Many Christians are asleep while people are dying all around them. Jonah checked out. He attempted to numb the pain of rebellion and distance from God through sleep. Again, we hear the call to get engaged; “arise”. The captain called on Jonah to arise and pray to his God since theirs hadn’t worked. The captain hoped Jonah’s God would think about their plight and smooth the storm. He did not presume to demand anything of God but expressed a hope of help. We have no indication that Jonah ever complied with the captain’s request. It appears he didn’t pray until encased in the belly of the great fish.

Our sin adversely affects our prayer life.

D. God exposed Jonah’s rebellion

And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. Jonah 1:7-10

God exposed Achan by the casting of lots. Jonathan’s action got exposed by lot casting. The Disciples cast lots to determine Judas’s replacement. Here, God exposed Jonah by the casting of lots.

The truth eventually comes out.

- Try to *disguise* it, it will show through the disguise.
- Try to *deodorize* it, its smell will reek through eventually.
- Try to *drown* it, it will float to the surface.
- Try to *decorate* it and make it look pretty, the decorations will rot, wrinkle and fall off.
- Try to *detain* it and lock it up, it will escape.

Mattoon's Treasures - Mattoon's Treasures – Treasures from Jonah.

Jonah was the one responsible for the storm. Jonah responded to their probing questions by revealing his Hebrew heritage. He claimed to fear the LORD but not enough to obey His commission.

Sometimes God uses pagans to call Christians to accountability.

Interesting that God promised the original Hebrew Abraham that through him all the world would be blessed. Now Jonah is responsible for a calamity on Gentiles. The sailors became even more afraid realizing they were up against the God over all creation not just the land or the sea. They seemed incredulous that someone would try to defy the true God. Isn’t it strange that some who give their lives to a false god sometimes show more diligent service and devotion than those of us who serve the living God.

E. The pagan sailors doubled their efforts to save Jonah

Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.” Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Jonah 1:11-13

The contrast here glares in your face. We have Jonah the holy prophet of God running from helping pagans. Then we have godless pagans doing everything they can to help the prophet. They wanted to know what they should do. Even though Jonah was clearly the cause of the calamity and guilty of defying God, they were not willing to be the ones to carry out justice. I am not sure Jonah agreed to be thrown overboard out of repentance but resigned himself to the consequences of his disobedience. He figured God was out to kill him so he may as

well get it done and avoid collateral damage on the others. Jonah seemed more willing to die than see pagan Assyrians escape judgement. Even in his disobedience, Jonah expressed confidence that God would calm the storm if they threw him into the sea. In this case God is not out to kill Him but commission him so God turned up the consequences.

God sometimes increases the pressure to achieve His purposes.

It is futile to resist the purposes of God.

F. The pagan sailors begged for mercy

Therefore they called out to the LORD, "O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you." 1:14

The sailors finally prayed to the right God. They recognized the true God's sovereign hand in their crisis and that it was useless to fight against His will, so they begged for mercy for what they were about to do.

G. The pagan sailors hurled Jonah overboard

So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea... 1:15a

Even though the sailors did the hurling, Jonah recognized God as the one who threw him overboard.

For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all Your waves and Your billows passed over me. Jonah 2:3

H. God calmed the storm

and the sea ceased from its raging 1:15b

God is the Lord of all creation.

Jesus directly demonstrated the power of God over nature.

I. The pagan sailors became worshiping sailors

Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows. 1:16

Fear of the LORD is a common theme throughout the Old Testament. It is synonymous with trust in the true God. Their fear shifted from fear of the storm to fear of the God of the storm.

Our discipline can result in other's salvation

J. God appointed a great fish

And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. 1:17

It will take a stint in the belly of a fish to bring Jonah to a place of obedience. Again, we see God's absolute authority over nature. He appointed a great fish. Taxi anyone?

God employs whatever means necessary to bring us to repentance

God used the fish to get Jonah back on course spiritually and geographically. Consider the crises in your life. They may be there for your growth. They may be there for your discipline.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and

chastises every son whom he receives.” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:3-11