

Jonah - Chapter 1 - Commentary By Mike Wells

Chapter 1 Overview:

The first chapter of Jonah is the story of Jonah's run from God's call, followed by the storm sent by God, and finalized in his encounter with the 'great fish.'

Jonah 1 : 1-2 - I 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.

- The call and commission of God upon Jonah is clear.
- He was called by God to go and preach to Nineveh.
- So you could basically say that Jonah was an Old Testament missionary, sent by God to a sinful nation.
- The parallels between his ministry and that of modern missionaries is evident.
- The target of his ministry was to be Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian empire, located on the east bank of the Tigris River, about 250 miles northwest of Babylon.
- The time was approximately one-hundred years prior to Assyria's invasion and deportation of the northern kingdom of Israel.
- In that era of history, Assyria was the rising super power of the known world.
- Why God chose Nineveh for the preaching of repentance is unclear.
- Certainly, other gentile cities were wicked before God as well.
- Yet God gave Nineveh an opportunity for repentance.
- The mercy and grace of God are apparent.
- In His grace, God sent a prophet to preach repentance, offering Nineveh a way out of impending judgment.
- That is a clear illustration of God's grace.
- Little is known of Jonah other than his father's name— Amittai—and that his hometown was Gathhepher (II Kings 14:25).
- His ministry was to "*cry against*" the sin of Nineveh, a city hundreds of miles distant from Israel.
- What is your ministry?
- God calls us all to do something for Him.
- What is he calling you to do and are you listening?

Jonah 1 : 3 - 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.

- It is clear that Jonah did not want to go into the ministry.
- It may have been that he had other plans for his life and was unwilling to preach.
- Or he may have been against preaching to pagan gentiles especially in a distant land.
- Whatever the reason, Jonah was trying to run from the call of God upon his life.
- Men do strange things in fighting God's will.

- Did Jonah really think that by fleeing in the opposite direction that he could remove himself from the call of God upon his life?
- Don't laugh that is exactly what so many people do today as well?
- When God calls them to do something, they head the exact opposite direction.
- He went down to the seaport at Joppa, on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and bought "a ticket" if you will to ride on a ship headed for Tarshish.
- The location of Tarshish is not clear.
- Theologians have beliefs that have ranged from Cyprus, to Tarsus of Cilicia (where Paul would later be born) to Spain.
- The important part is that Tarshish was far from Nineveh where he was supposed to go.
- In fact, it was basically the opposite direction of Nineveh.
- Jonah was running from God's call upon his life and he was running from God's will.

Jonah 1 : 4 - But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

- Running from God is a dangerous thing to do.
- God sent a powerful storm
- Soon Jonah's ship was in danger of shipwreck because the storm was so great.

Jonah 1 : 5 - 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. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.

- As the fury of the storm mounted, the crew of the ship were terrified and began praying to their pagan gods.
- They also began throwing over cargo to lighten the vessel.
- Meanwhile, Jonah had gone down into the hold of the vessel and was sound asleep.

Jonah 1 : 6 - So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

- The captain of the vessel awoke Jonah and directed him to begin to pray to his God.
- Little did he know that it was Jehovah God who had sent the storm in the first place.

Jonah 1 : 7 - And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

- The pagan mariners decided that the fury of the storm was directed against someone on board.
- This is one thing they were right about.
- They then "*cast lots*"
- The lot somehow pointed to Jonah as the source of their trouble
- The practice of casting lots is mentioned 70 times in the Old Testament
- In spite of the many references to casting lots in the Old Testament, nothing is known about the actual lots themselves
- They could have been sticks of various lengths, flat stones like coins, or some kind of dice or pebbles; but their exact nature is unknown.
- The act certainly is related to some kind of game of chance

- The closest modern practice to casting lots is likely flipping a coin.

Jonah 1 : 8 - *Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?*

- They immediately began to interrogate Jonah.
- They wanted to know who he was and why the storm was against them.
- They wanted to know what his occupation was, where he was from, and what nationality he was.
- They had correctly determined that Jonah was the source of their crisis and they wanted to know why!

Jonah 1 : 9 - *And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.*

- Jonah confessed that he was a Hebrew—of the seed of Israel.
- He further testified that he feared Jehovah God—the God of the heavens.
- It was He who had created both the land and the high seas.
- It appears as though Jonah was starting to realize that God was dealing with him.
- So, he gave a clear testimony of Jehovah his God.

Jonah 1 : 10 - *Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.*

- Jonah also mentioned that he was running from God.
- Even the unsaved men of the world realized the implications of that.
- It was clear to them that the storm at hand was God's work.
- They thus suddenly got a dose of the fear of the Lord.
- The power of Jehovah in the raging storm was apparent.
- So, they demanded to know why Jonah had so endangered them.
- People in the world can often see the working of God when rebellious Christians cannot.

Jonah 1 : 11 - *Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.*

- Few things are more terrifying than being on a floundering ship on a raging sea.
- The captain and crew of the ship demanded an answer of what needed to be done to pacify the wrath of God.

Jonah 1 : 12 - *And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.*

- Jonah was convicted in his heart.
- He knew what was going on.
- He had tried to run from God and found out that he could not.
- He knew the storm was sent from God to deal with him.
- Running from God is a dangerous place to be and Jonah came to realize that the hard way.

- So, he told the sailors on the ship to just throw him overboard.
- He correctly presumed that the storm would go away as soon as they had done so.

Jonah 1 : 13 - *Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.*

- To their credit, the crew of the ship tried to return to port to deposit Jonah on shore.
- Sailing vessels of the day often also had sets of oars which could be manned by the crew.
- They tried to row back to port, but could not.
- The seas were running against them.

Jonah 1 : 14 - *Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.*

- In desperation, the ungodly crew began to pray to Jehovah to spare their lives.
- They also pled with Jehovah to not charge them with taking an innocent life as they now realized that they were going to have to throw Jonah overboard.
- They had tried their best to bring Jonah ashore.
- They asked God to spare their lives and do as He saw fit with Jonah.

Jonah 1 : 15-16 - *15 So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. 16 Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows*

- In desperation, the sailors threw Jonah overboard.
- **Immediately**, the seas calmed down and the storm ceased.
- The ungodly crew of the ship had witnessed first hand the fury of the storm sent by God and now saw it miraculously calm.
- On the sea, even after a storm passes waves do not immediately go calm.
- Swells continue even in the aftermath of the storm.
- Yet, this sea ceased its raging immediately.
- This wasn't some storm that had just passed on by.
- These sailors had witnessed a miracle of God and they knew it
- And it brought deep conviction and fear of the Lord.
- So, they offered sacrifices to Jehovah God onboard their ship and made promises to God—presumably to serve Him, believe in Him, and worship Him.
- Sounds a lot like us doesn't it?

Jonah 1 : 17 - *Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

- Meanwhile, God had further plans for Jonah.
- He had prepared a “**great fish**.”
- Critics have claimed that whales cannot swallow something so large as a man.
- Their throats are designed for small sea creatures.
- However, the Bible says it was a “**great fish**.”
- In Matthew 12:40, the word **whale** is used.
- However, in the Greek tongue, the word again refers to a great fish.

- The word translated as *whale* {ketos} literally refers to a ‘great fish’.
- Fish or Whale what ever it was it is clear that God worked miraculously.
- Jonah now faced another problem.
- If the storm and being cast overboard were not enough, now a huge creature of the deep proceeded to swallow him whole.
- I can only imagine what went through the mind of Jonah.
- God was not finished working on him.
- Note that God has ways to change a person’s will.
- It is very clear that Jonah was in the belly for “*three days and three nights.*”
- Jesus verified the same in Matthew 12:40.

Matthew 12 : 40 - *But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: 40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

- Jesus is referring to His resurrection here.
- The Lord made it clear that Jonah’s stay in the belly of the “great fish” was a illustration of His burial in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.
- Jonah to this degree was a type of Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.
- The greater point is that one definitive sign Jesus would give to that generation (and to this day) was His resurrection.
- That is the singular sign which proved Him as Deity, Saviour, and Lord.