

Lessons from Jonah

Background: Jonah is identified in vs. 1 as “the son of Amittai.” The only passage outside of Jonah that mentions this prophet is found in 2 Kings 14:25. Here, we learn that Jonah prophesied around the time of Jeroboam II, stating Israel’s borders would be restored due to God’s goodness (2 Kings 14:23-27). Jeroboam reigned 41 years and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Interestingly, Amos also prophesied during Jeroboam’s reign, but delivered the opposite message (Amos 6:13-14). Therefore, God has blessed Israel, but His blessings would not last forever due to their lack of faith. All the land gained during Jeroboam’s reign would be lost (around 40 years later).

What we'll see in this brief narrative is a comparison and contrast between Israelites and Pagans, God and people. Those who should turn to God and those who actually repent. People who turn on one another, and a God who seeks to save all parties. Ultimately, I think you're supposed to see God vs you. Vengeance, brutality, and a lack of sympathy contrast with forgiveness, tenderness, and loving attitudes. What we see is a God who is merciful to the merciless.

Jonah 1: Swallowed Whole

- 1-3: We’re not told why Jonah fled from God, but we find out by the end (he knew God would be merciful to the Assyrians).
 - Keep in mind how Jonah didn't run from God when he had a message of blessing (although Jeroboam was evil and caused Israel to stumble). However, when it's Israel's enemy (and the Assyrians were at the top of the list), Jonah was a different man.
- 4-17: I thought about Jesus calming the storm this time through. Both were sleeping on the boat, but boy, are they different. Jesus put His faith in God and had power over nature. Meanwhile, you have Jonah running away, which is not helping the situation.
 - Have you noticed how the pagans acted in more faith towards their gods than Jonah did?
 - How genuine is Jonah? If you really care, throw yourself into the sea. I don't buy the commentary of Jonah doing a humble thing and offering himself. Seems like he's dragging his feet. It's like pulling teeth with him. This theme is evident throughout the Bible. Those you expect to honor God, and those you don't, do. Saying you're a follower of God doesn't mean you're heading His direction!
 - Jesus will reference Jonah's time in the belly of the great fish for three days and nights. He taught that He would be in the heart of the earth for three days and nights.

Jonah 2: Plea For Help

- 1-10: Jonah’s prayer of thanksgiving comes from the belly of the fish. It’s interesting how Jonah never confesses any wrongdoing in this prayer. So, he’s happy for being delivered, but is he sorrowful for his sin?
 - This is probably a coincidence, but it’s interesting how a couple of phrases in this prayer mirror those in Psalm 31, which Jesus quotes from on the cross, “Father, into your hands I commit My spirit.”

Jonah 3: Take Two

- The following pattern has been observed: Jonah is called to preach, Jonah and the pagan sailors are contrasted, and Jonah responds/prays with thankfulness. We'll see this repeated, though the details change. Jonah is called to preach, Jonah and the pagans of Nineveh are contrasted, and Jonah responds with a prayer of anger.
- 1-10: Jonah has a very brief message (or at least that's what's recorded): "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Based on the rest of the account, I believe his message wasn't heartfelt, or at least, he didn't want it to impact theirs.
 - Wouldn't you know it - the whole city (including the King) repents! Even the beasts are covered with sackcloth!
 - God chose not to destroy Nineveh since they turned towards God.

Jonah 4: Plants or People

- 1-4: Jonah responds with a prayer of anger. He just knew that God would be merciful! God asks if it's right for him to be angry. Other prophets are begging God to help the sinner. Not Jonah. He wants to die; he's so angry.
- 5-8: He flees east of the city and sets up a booth to see what God would do. God provided a plant for shade, which made Jonah happy. Aren't you so glad Jonah isn't uncomfortable anymore! But God causes a worm to destroy the plant, which leaves Jonah wanting to die. Aren't you glad Jonah isn't dramatic!
- 9-11: God engages Jonah once more and asks if he's right in being so upset over a plant. Jonah is stubborn and confirms, stating he's angry enough to die. God points out the unreasonableness of Jonah. You pity a plant, but not people! Should God mold to Jonah's likeness, or Jonah's to God's?

What Can We Take Home?

- Convenient Faith vs. Covenant Faith
 - Jonah shares the word if it's the right message and/or people.
 - Jonah prays when he needs help.
 - Jonah expresses joy when he gets his way.
- Wrath vs. Mercy
 - Jonah can put up with his own, but not his enemy.
 - God is patient with difficult people.
- Image Bearers
 - The sailors honored God while Jonah dragged his feet.
 - The people of Nineveh repented while Jonah pouted.
 - Jonah was an Israelite, but as others have said, he seems to be the only atheist in the story.
- Ending Is Optional
 - The book is meant for Israel to look inward. Yes, God was displeased with Nineveh's evil, but He still wanted good for them.
 - How did Jonah respond? We don't know. How will we?