

When we think of Jonah, we often think of the account as a children's story, a fantastical moral story that could never have really happened. But the historical book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings tells us that Jonah was a prophet under the reign of Jeroboam II who reigned from 793 to 753 BC. Jonah predicted the restoration of the boundaries of Israel which was fulfilled. The verse tells us that Jonah lived in Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14:25<sup>i</sup>). Jesus refers to Jonah as an actual person and to the account of the great fish as an historical event (Matthew 12:39-41<sup>ii</sup>; Luke 11:30<sup>iii</sup>). Skeptics enjoy telling us that a man surviving in a fish is impossible. But that is because they do not believe Jesus is the Creator, the author of DNA, therefore when the text tells us a great fish was prepared for this, they will not believe it. Yet they will believe we are the accident of DNA mutation. I think they may have more faith than I do. The author of DNA could certainly create a fish that in which a man could survive.

Most prophetic books focus on the prophet's message. The book of Jonah, however, focusses on the prophet. We can learn from his fallen nature about the tendencies of our own fallen natures. We will see in the story how God uses hardship to teach us and give us heaven's perspective. Most importantly, Jesus tells us it foreshadows His resurrection!

*<sup>1</sup> Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,* Jonah 1:1  
Jonah is Hebrew for dove. As the Holy Spirit is represented as a dove, we will see some things about Jonah that foreshadows Christ both by contrast and similarities. Jonah's father's name Amittai means stability and truth.

God sent his word to Jonah. We are not told how Jonah heard from God. We are told that God spoke in many ways to His prophets (Hebrews 1:1<sup>iv</sup>). This was the call of God to be a prophet and deliver a message from God. Though we are not told the method in which God spoke to Jonah, we can be sure Jonah knew it was God who was calling him.

*<sup>2</sup> "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." Jonah 1:2* Nineveh was the capital of the world in that day. God gave an imperative command to Jonah to go there and cry out against it. Historians believe that Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was the largest city in the world at the time, with 100 foot high walls forty feet thick. The prophet Nahum decried it in chapter 3:1-4. *<sup>1</sup> Woe to the bloody city, all full of lies and plunder—no end to the prey! <sup>2</sup> The crack of the whip, and rumble of the wheel, galloping horse and bounding chariot! <sup>3</sup> Horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, hosts of slain, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end— they stumble over the bodies! <sup>4</sup> And all for the countless whorings of the prostitute, graceful and of deadly charms, who betrays nations with her whorings, and peoples with her charms.*

Later we will see that Jonah's message is a one sentence warning, "Forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4<sup>v</sup>)! He did not announce the sins of which they were guilty as some prophets did but left it to the conscience of each person. Perhaps he knew that declaring their sin of pride and brutality (Isaiah 10:13<sup>vi</sup>) would stir resentment rather than conviction. We also will see that Jonah knew it was a message of mercy and grace because God did not want them to perish (Jonah 4:2<sup>vii</sup>). If you wonder if God could

love you, consider the fact that He sent Jonah to the Ninevites who were a brutal and evil people because He did not want them to perish (2 Peter 3:9<sup>viii</sup>).

This is not the only time God had prophets warn nations of the need to repent. These nations did not know of the gospel that would later be revealed, but then neither did Abraham or David fully understand the gospel (See Romans 4.). It was sufficient for them to repent of their sins and place their faith in God who would later provide Jesus as an atonement for the sins of all who place their faith in Him (Psalm 32:5<sup>ix</sup>).

Jonah going to the world capital foreshadowed God sending Jesus to deliver a message to mankind with the same message Jonah would deliver, “Repent!” (Matthew 3:2<sup>x</sup>) How would you feel if God told you to book a plane to Beijing and call out against it because it is so evil? Daunting? Well, that is how Jonah must have felt. He may have thought it was a death sentence. But later he declares he did not want to go because he feared they would repent. He may have feared that Nineveh would be used as a judgment tool against Israel as previously predicted by Elijah and which came to pass in 722 BC.

God ordered Jonah to go there, which was unusual for the prophets of that era. Most of the prophets ministered within Israel or Judah. Some had short predictions of other nations futures, but they stayed within Israel. God is telling Jonah to go to this huge city that is so wicked. This tells us that God cares about the wicked (Acts 10:34,35<sup>xi</sup>). Cities infested with evil are not comfortable places to go. People are robbed and sometimes killed. It is because of all the pain that comes from the result of wicked behavior that God wants to warn them of the consequences and give them a chance to change their ways before He sends judgment.

Today in our own violent cities like St. Louis, Baltimore, Chicago and many more, there are bold preachers who proclaim the gospel and the need for repentance. They are modern day Jonahs. We need to pray for them.

<sup>3</sup> *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 “But Jonah...” When you read in Scripture, “But God...” you find God is about to act in mercy or grace or correction or even in judgment. It is always the right response to the situation. When you see “but man...” it is usually followed by some failure to do what should be done. In this case he makes a run for it. He heads for a city in what is now Spain near where the Mediterranean meets the Atlantic Ocean. Nineveh was east of Israel. That was probably the farthest city from Nineveh he had heard of. One reason Jonah might have fled was that the Assyrians were great at psychological warfare. They would skin their captives alive to make their enemies feared them. They had been brutal to their enemies.

Did he really think he could get away from God? As a prophet, he probably knew he could not escape the presence of God. Psalm 139:8<sup>xii</sup> tells us that is not possible. If we ascend into heaven, He is there. If we make our bed in Sheol, He is there. Perhaps he thought if he was far enough away, God would call someone else.

If God asked you to go Tehran and call out against them for the evil they were doing, you would expect to die a horrible death. That may be how Jonah felt. He wanted to live. To obey God may have been in his mind been a painful death sentence. The things God usually asks of us are rarely as challenging to our faith.<sup>xiii</sup> We are going to see how God revealed to Jonah His love for the Gentiles, but also His love and patience for Jonah and for us (Psalm 52:1<sup>xiv</sup>).

There are ways to run from God other than traveling to some distant land. We run away most frequently in our minds. **Busyness can be and often is our ship to Tarshish.** We get so occupied with things to do that we do not open our Bible or be still enough in prayer to hear what He would speak to our hearts. That is the way our sinful nature keeps us in charge of our day as we fulfill *our* desires.

When was the last time you stopped all your activity and just asked God to speak to your heart and then waited until you heard from Him? Or when was the last time you read your Bible until some passage spoke to your heart? We can run from God without being aware we are. Even busying ourselves with good deeds can be running from His presence. If we are avoiding doing what we know God is leading us to do, we can come up with all kinds of justifications. Our evil hearts and the subtle serpent work together to give us a “good” reason to do something else. We can even imagine something to be a sign from God when it is really fleeing to Tarshish. That ends up being more costly than we could have imagined.

I hope this morning you are not running from God. I talked myself into trying to run from God when I was young. It put me in a foreign hospital where the only person who spoke English was a British missionary. It is a lot less painful to just let Him lead. It is more joyful too. It may not be easy, but it is good.

The passage says “*he paid the fare.*” In Hebrew it is “He paid *her* fare.” Some Jewish exegetes believe that means he paid the entire price for the ship to go to Tarshish. The crew brought goods to trade or sell and earn some extra profit. The fare to Tarshish would have been many times more than the cost to travel to Nineveh. Does that tell us something? You can always be sure sin will cost you more than obeying God. As you flee from God’s will, your shipmates will not even be able to tell that you are a believer. They will have no clue who your God is, for you will be just like one of them. After all, how can you be a witness to them when you are fleeing from God’s will for your life?

*<sup>4</sup> 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 In verse 3 we have “But Jonah...” and in verse 4 we have “But the Lord...” If God calls you and you run, He does not always step in to stop you. He may give you another chance to obey, or He may not. We are the ones losing out. Serving God is a privilege and an adventure.

Jesus can calm our storms, or He can send them to us. When God does intervene to send a storm our way, we often see it as punishment. We should see it as grace saving us from our stupidity.

How do the storms come our way today? The Lord caused an illness that made me be still. The Lord let my employer fire me and I had to search for God’s direction. My spouse was not speaking to me, so I had to listen to God as to how to change my behavior. My child started using drugs, so I had to learn to intercede for him or her by going to the throne of God in prayer. Storms are often blessings in disguise. They make us stop our busy routines and do what we have been avoiding. They cause us to realize that we are not in control and cannot deal with situations without divine direction.

Did Jonah have free will to choose to disobey? Was he free to go to Tarshish? Here is Spurgeon’s comment on this verse. “*I can go to Tarshish if I want to. I paid the fare. I’m not a stowaway.*” Yet, “**Apologies for disobedience are mere refuges of lies.** *If you do a wrong thing in the rightest way in which it can be done, it does not make it right. If you go contrary to the Lord’s will, even though you do it in the most decent, and, perhaps, in*

*the most devout manner; it is, nevertheless, sinful, and it will bring you under condemnation.*"<sup>xv</sup>

*<sup>5</sup> 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. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.* Jonah 1:5 Because they believed in gods of families and different regions of the earth, they each called out to the god of their area and wanted Jonah to do the same. But it was Jonah's God who caused the storm. Jonah knew it. How could he call out to God from whom he was fleeing?

I know a young man who is at present in the Jonah's situation. He is fleeing from God, but the Lord sent a great calamity his way. Yet, he is still trying to flee. Following God does not mean trials will not come your way, but it does mean He is with you through them. You can surrender to God's will, pray for the storm to cease, and know you are heard. But while fleeing from God, you know your prayer will not be answered. That is because it is the love of God that sent the storm. It is the love of God that desires you to surrender to His will, for that is the best thing for you, both in the present and throughout eternity.

To lighten the load so that the ship would not take on water, they threw the cargo they had hoped to make a profit on into the sea. When we disobey God, it not only costs us a great deal, but others' lives are affected as well. We do not intend to harm them, but it is a by-product of our rebellion. When we selfishly run from God's call, it not only shows we put self above the people to whom we are sent, but others in our lives as well. We rob them of the blessing we were meant to be to them. We may think we are the only ones who are affected by our sin, but it will always affect others. We cannot be an island unto ourselves.

This account reminds us of Jesus asleep in the boat during a storm - only Jesus was heading off to do God's will rather than fleeing from it (Mark 4:37-39<sup>xvi</sup>). Jesus was exhausted from doing the will of His Father and was sleeping the sleep of the righteous. Jonah was exhausted from resisting God's will and sleeping the sleep of those who wrongly think they are escaping God's will. Jesus was headed to the other side of the lake which was Gentile territory. That resulted in the faith of the disciples being increased and many hearing the good news (Matthew 8:23,24<sup>xvii</sup>). It also reminds us of the time that Paul was shipwrecked on Malta which may have been in the same area as this storm. That storm also resulted in the salvation of many souls (See Acts 27:39-28:1). Paul eventually went to Spain to spread the gospel to those who had not heard, while Jonah was fleeing to the same region to *keep from* sharing with those who had not heard.

Pastor David Guzik wrote the following regarding Jonah sleeping in the storm:

*The nature of Jonah's sleep is also instructive, and too much like the sleep of the careless Christian*

- *Jonah slept in a place where he hoped no one would see him or disturb him. "Sleeping Christians" like to "hide out" among the church.*
- *Jonah slept in a place where he could not help with the work that needed to be done. "Sleeping Christians" stay away from the work of the Lord. Jonah slept while there was a prayer meeting up on the deck. "Sleeping Christians" don't like prayer meetings!*
- *Jonah slept and had no idea of the problems around him. "Sleeping Christians" don't know what is really going on*

• *Jonah slept when he was in great danger. “Sleeping Christians” are in danger, but don’t know it*

• *Jonah slept while the heathen needed him. “Sleeping Christians” snooze on while the world needs their message and testimony*

iv. *Some sleeping Christians protest that they are not asleep at all.*

• *“We talk about Jesus”—but you can talk in your sleep “We have a walk for Jesus”—but you can walk in your sleep*

• *“We have passion for Jesus—I just wept in worship the other day”—but you can cry in your sleep*

• *“We have joy and rejoice in Jesus”—but you can laugh in your sleep*

• *“We think about Jesus all the time”—but you can think while you are asleep; we call it dreaming.<sup>xviii</sup>*

What does it mean to be a Christian who is awake? The Apostle Paul wrote **“Awake O sleeper and rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you!” (Ephesians 5:14<sup>xix</sup>)!** It was thought to be sung at baptisms in the early church. It means you are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17<sup>xx</sup>). The power of resurrection is at work transforming you. You believe every word of God is true. You know this world is perishing and the kingdom of God is forever. You know there is a heaven and hell, and you live accordingly with the fear of God restraining you from evil and the Holy Spirit empowering you to obey God. The spiritual is more real to you than this passing world (Colossians 3:1,2<sup>xxi</sup>). What we live for is in the unseen eternal realm, for our Savior and Lord (2 Corinthians 4:18<sup>xxii</sup>).

*<sup>6</sup> 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 1:6 The pagan captain had truer theology than Jonah at that moment. He was right to say, “Call out to your God...that we may not perish!” God sends the storm to bring us to the place of calling out to Him, to acknowledge that He alone can save.

We have a captain too. Joshua called Him the Commander of the army of the Lord (Joshua 5:14<sup>xxiii</sup>). He calls out to us, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to Me, that I might save those who are perishing!” Are we sleeping through our days or are we calling out to our God that He might save those who are perishing?

It is strange that Jonah could sleep through that storm, but it is just as strange that so many are sleeping in our day. There is certainly a spiritual storm in the world today. It is becoming so obvious. Some Christians are sleeping through it instead of joining those on the deck who are praying.

There are souls whom God has put on my heart to pray for their salvation. Some are my relatives, and some are yours. Some have just come by Jesus in the House, and I had a sense that they I need to call out to God, so they do not perish.

Sometimes I get to see the answer. I will not know what happened to others till I am home in heaven. Allow me to tell you of one to give you hope for those who seem hopeless. I had the opportunity to share quite a lot with one person. She seemed to be overcoming the indoctrination she grew up with and accepting Jesus and the truth of Scripture. One day she reverted to her old mindset. She let me know it too, telling me my old fashioned belief was bondage and she was not falling for it. It hurt me so much to see her forsake the Lord. Then I heard she was going to one of those churches that ignores biblical truth. But I kept her on my prayer list. I believe in a miracle working God.

One day I had to go to a certain office to pick up a paper. There she was behind the counter. She was so happy to see me, which was a shock to me. She came out and gave me a hug. With tears in her eyes, she apologized for that incident, told me she had left that church and was following Jesus. In another week she would be moving to another state and had been longing to tell me how sorry she was before she moved. Then I was crying with joy! I told her I had been praying for her on an almost daily basis. We hugged again and praised God before saying goodbye.

I share that to say that our Captain pleads with us to not go through life sleeping, but instead to intercede for the ones He puts on our hearts so that they do not perish. Sometimes you will even get to see the results of those prayers in this life. Jonah had to die to himself to save the men on board that ship. We have to die to ourselves to spend time in prayer for others or to share the gospel when given the opportunity (Matthew 16:24<sup>xxiv</sup>). “Call out to your God,” that they may not perish.

The prince of preachers Charles Spurgeon commented on this passage. *How can you know that you are not asleep? “Then, what do you mean by a man’s being really awake?” I mean two or three things. I mean, first, his having a thorough consciousness of the reality of spiritual things. When I speak of a wakeful man, I mean one who does not take the soul to be a fancy, nor heaven to be a fiction, nor hell to be a tale, but who acts among the sons of men as though these were the only substances, and all other things the shadows. I want men of stern resolution, for no Christian is awake unless he steadfastly determines to serve his God, come fair, come foul.*<sup>xxv</sup> May we ever be awake to serve our gracious God!

## Questions

- 1 Who was Jonah?
- 2 What was Nineveh like?
- 3 What does this show us about God’s heart?
- 4 Why did Jonah flee?
- 5 What did it cost him and others?
- 6 What does the picture of sleeping teach us?
- 7 Contrast Jesus asleep in the storm with Jonah.
- 8 Review Pastor Paul’s example.
- 9 What does it mean to be awake?
- 10 Review Spurgeon’s desire.

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### <sup>i</sup> **2 Kings 14:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher.

### <sup>ii</sup> **Matthew 12:39-41 (ESV)**

<sup>39</sup> But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. <sup>40</sup> For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup> The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

### <sup>iii</sup> **Luke 11:30 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.

### <sup>iv</sup> **Hebrews 1:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,

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v **Jonah 3:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup>Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

vi **Isaiah 10:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup>For he says: "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding; I remove the boundaries of peoples, and plunder their treasures; like a bull I bring down those who sit on thrones.

vii **Jonah 4:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup>And he 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.

viii **2 Peter 3:9 (KJV)**

<sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

ix **Psalms 32:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup>I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

x **Matthew 3:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup>"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

xi **Acts 10:34-35 (ESV)**

<sup>34</sup>So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup>but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

xii **Psalms 139:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup>If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

xiii "I have found that there are three steps in every great work of God: first it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done." Hudson Taylor

xiv **Psalms 52:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup>Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man? The steadfast love of God endures all the day.

xv David Guzik, [Jonah](#), David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2000), Jon 1:4

xvi **Mark 4:37-39 (KJV)**

<sup>37</sup>And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. <sup>38</sup>And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? <sup>39</sup>And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

xvii **Matthew 8:23-24 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup>And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. <sup>24</sup>And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep.

xviii David Guzik, [Jonah](#), David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2000), Jon 1:5,6

xix **Ephesians 5:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup>for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

xx **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup>Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

xxi **Colossians 3:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup>If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

xxii **2 Corinthians 4:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup>as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

xxiii **Joshua 5:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup>And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?"

xxiv **Matthew 16:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup>Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

xxv <sup>11</sup>David Guzik, [Jonah](#), David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2000), Jon 1:5–6. Quoting Spurgeon