

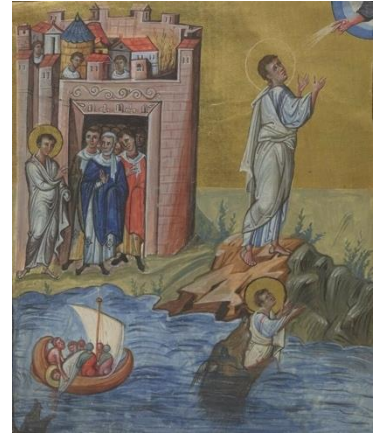
Weekly Scripture and Sermon Study: History & Context Guide

Jonah 1:1-17

History, Culture, & Context

The Book of Jonah tells us of a prophet whom God instructs to go to a place called Nineveh (a large port city in Assyria, located above the upper Tigris River) and to preach to the people there and warn them of their destruction. Jonah did not want to go because he hated the people there and tried to run from God.

In Verses 3-6, Jonah ran from the Lord's call to him and boarded a ship heading for Tarshish to flee from God. God sent a "great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up." (v.4). The crew grew terrified and prayed to their gods and threw over the cargo to lighten the ship's load. Jonah went to the bottom level of the ship to get away from the chaos and go to sleep. In verse 6, the captain finds Jonah and says "...How can you sleep? Get up and call your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish."



In an effort to figure out why this was happening, the sailors aboard the ship cast lots to see who was responsible for this storm. The lot fell to Jonah and they asked him (in v. 8) who is making this happen to them, who he is and where he is from. Jonah answered "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." The crew was terrified!

In verses 11-12, Jonah insists being thrown overboard in order to calm the storm. We are not sure as to why he suggested such a thing, but the sailors instead sought to save his life (and theirs) and "...did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew wilder than before." The crew grew desperate, and cried out to God (even though they themselves were pagans), and then ultimately gave in to Jonah's request to be thrown into the sea. The storm then ceased and the water calmed down. "At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him." God saves Jonah by sending a large fish to come and swallow Jonah. There, Jonah remained inside the fish for three days and three nights!

The Life Application Study Bible commentary points out, "Jonah had disobeyed God. While he was running away, he stopped and submitted to God. Then the ship's crew began to worship God because they saw that the storm had stopped. God is able to use even our mistakes to help others come to know him. It may be painful, but admitting our sins can be a powerful example to those that don't know God. Ironically, the pagan sailors did what the entire nation of Israel would not do—prayed to God and vowed to serve Him."

Questions to Consider

1. What may have caused Jonah to be angry with God's compassion and love for others (i.e. those whom Jonah despises in Nineveh)? Why do we do the same?
2. What call from God do you find yourself running away from? Why?
3. After reading this, please read 1 Samuel 15:22. What does it mean for "Obedience" to be better than a sacrifice to God?