

## **A Fish Feast: Having Jonah for Dinner (Jonah 1:17-2:10)**

Grace Chapel    September 3, 2008    Dr. John Niemelä

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **BACKGROUND TO JONAH**

**Author:** Jonah, Amitai's son, a prophet from Gath Hepher, near Nazareth

**Destination of the Book:** The Northern Kingdom (Israel)

**Date:** The events of the book occurred in 759 BC (37 years before Israel fell)

What would account for Jonah's reluctance to preach in Nineveh?

He recognized that God is gracious

He inferred from the prophetic warning that Nineveh would be spared

He was aware of Hosea 11:1*ff.*

Jonah needed some time to see his foolishness:

He probably wrote within a few years after 759 BC

Evidence that Jonah later saw his foolishness

What made him see his foolishness?

#### **Summary of Chapter 1**

God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh to prophesy destruction, but he went down to Joppa & boarded a ship going to Tarshish to flee from God's presence (1:1-3)

God sent a great storm that was ready to break the ship, so fearful seamen prayed, dumped cargo, urged everyone to pray to his gods for deliverance (including sleeping Jonah), & cast lots to find the culprit (1:4-7a)

The lot identified Jonah, so they interrogated him (to learn how he offended the gods); Jonah said he was a Hebrew worshipper of the One God, who created both sea & dry land (7b-9)

The seamen were astonished that Jonah would try to flee from God, the creator, so they asked his advice for calming the increasingly stormy sea; He told them that casting him into the sea would make the sea calm—(a true prophecy) (10-12)

The seamen tried unsuccessfully (instead) to row to shore, so they prayed to Jonah's Lord, that He would hold them guiltless, because God has done as He pleased (& they were trying to do His will) (13-14)

The sea became calm when they threw Jonah into the sea, so they (went ashore) and sacrificed to the Lord and vowed (to testify of His deliverance) (15-16)

## NEW EXPOSITION:

**God appointed a fish to swallow Jonah, where he remained for 3 days & 3 nights (1:17).**

1. Skeptics often ridicule the Bible because of this one verse

2. Jesus affirmed this event in Jonah as historically true: He said

*For 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.* (Matthew 12<sup>40</sup>)

Jesus says that He would be buried for the same length of time as Jonah was in the fish, so He affirms Jonah.

3. The book of Jonah deals with events in the life of a historical prophet: Jonah, Amitai's son. 2 Kings 14:25 treats Jonah as a historic figure. We must regard this as historical.

4. Was it a fish or a whale? Either is possible, because the word for fish (*dāg* = *dawg*) can include other sea creatures. Compare Genesis 1:21 speaks of "sea creatures," while Genesis 1:26 lumps all such creatures under the term fish (*dāg*). Jonah does not specifically say *whale*, but he does not deny that it was a whale. It could have been **a fish, shark, or a whale**.

5. God appointed the fish (*dāg*). The term *appointed* (*mānâ*) does not tell us whether it was an already existing species or whether it was a new and unique variety. Therefore, forget all of the argument over baleen whales having a large mouth, but only a small opening into the stomach versus toothed-whales having a large mouth, but having a body that is too small. Ditto for Mola Mola fish. God could have made a one-of-a-kind sea creature to teach Jonah a lesson.

6 There are accounts of whalers being found alive soon after being swallowed by a whale. Of course, God the creator is quite capable of sustaining Jonah for a longer time.

(Repeat) **God appointed a fish to swallow Jonah, where he was for 3 days & 3 nights (1:17).**

**EXCURSIS:**

How long is *three days and three nights*? The reason for asking this question is that Jesus said that He would be in the tomb for the same length of time as Jonah was in the fish.

*For 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. (Mt 12<sup>40</sup>)*

The length of time that Jesus was in the grave is important for NT chronology. Why?

1. Jesus was resurrected on a Sunday (Mt 28:1; Mk 16:1–2; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1)
2. Was He crucified on a Wednesday, a Thursday, or a **Friday**?

Views on Matthew 12:40

- 1 Many people believe that 3 days + 3 nights *must* equal 72 hours (24 +24 +24)
2. 72 hours before Sunday morning would be Thursday morning.
- 3 A Wednesday crucifixion would mean that Jesus was buried for 72 hours +
- 4 A Thursday crucifixion would mean that Jesus was buried almost 72 hours
- 5 A Friday crucifixion would mean that He was buried a lot less than 72 hrs

I accept a Friday crucifixion. Why? **In part:** Three days & three nights was an idiom.

Gen 42:17 speaks of 3 days of imprisonment.

Gen 42:18 Then (after 3 days of imprisonment ended) Joseph said on 3rd day

1 Kgs 20:29 Israel & Syria off 7 days. After that, on 7<sup>th</sup> day they fought

2 Chr 10:5 they were to return after 3 days, so they did so on 3<sup>rd</sup> day (vs 12)

Esther 4:16 Not to eat/drink for 3 days, then go to king (5:1) went on 3<sup>rd</sup> day

1 Sam 30:12–13 did not eat/drink for 3 days/3 nights when was left 3 days ago

3 days & 3 nights is the same as saying On the third day (Fri, Sat, Sun)

**The Lord answered Jonah's prayer from the belly of the fish for deliverance (2:1–2)**

Although Jonah prayed this prayer while in the fish, he recounted things that happened to him before the fish swallowed him.

The deliverance was by the grace of God and Jonah knew it.

Note Jonah 4:1

**Jonah acknowledged that the Lord cast him into the sea (for discipline) (2:3)**

**Though God had cast Jonah out of sight; he knew that he would return to the Temple (2:4)**

**Jonah rolled in the currents, was wrapped in seaweed, saw the bottoms of the mountains, and had no way to escape; but the Lord (sent a fish to) deliver him when Jonah prayed (his first prayer while in the sea) (2:5–7)**

Jonah described his death

Jesus confirms that Jonah died while in the sea (as we will see later in the message)

**Jonah realized that idolatrous Israelites were guilty of forsaking the God who was loyal to His covenant (2:8)**

The idolaters of whom Jonah speaks were Israelites

The meaning of mercy (*chesed*)

Unfortunately, Jonah soon lost sight of the Lord's grace and mercy

Unfortunately, so did Israelites of the northern kingdom (Israel)

**Jonah vowed to make a thanksgiving sacrifice to the Lord, because He delivered him (2:9)**

The thanksgiving sacrifice is described in Leviticus 7:11–18

We have seen this sacrifice before (when looking at Psalm 22:22ff. (esp. vs 25))

Hebrews 13:15 indicates that it was a legitimate sacrifice even in NT times

What is Jonah saying?

## **The Lord caused the fish to spit Jonah out onto dry land (2:10)**

Jonah did not deserve to live (after his rebellion), but God was gracious

God allowed Jonah to live, despite knowing how Jonah would conduct himself in chapters 3–4

God allowed the northern kingdom to continue, despite knowing that its many idolaters had forsaken their God who was in covenant loyalty to them

Sidelight on John 1:15ff. (which Ricardo mentioned on Sunday)

*The Living Water* punctuates John 1:15–18 correctly. NKJV does not.

## **Matthew 12:38–40 as a commentary on Jonah (we will consider verse 41 next week)**

What is *the sign of Jonah*?

Many preachers claim that Jesus refers to Jonah's *preaching* as *a sign*. They claim that there would be no more signs for Israel (just preaching). However, we know that Jesus kept performing signs after this date.

Actually, Jesus refers to being *raised from the dead* as *the sign of Jonah*.

After this Jesus did some signs other than raising Lazarus and Himself from the dead, but I believe that He conceived of such signs as healing the lame man (John 5), feeding the 5000 (John 6), walking on water (John 6), and healing the man born blind (John 9) as foreshadowing His own resurrection. Jesus, as always, kept His promise.

## **CONCLUSION:**

**God graciously rescued a rebellious prophet & an idolatrous northern kingdom, even though Jonah's sacrifice of thanksgiving did not prevent further rebellion on his part and even though the northern kingdom would not respond to Jonah's book**