

Jonah is Responsible for the Great Storm at Sea

Jonah 1:4-9

Jonah 1:4-9 - *“But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. ⁵ Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep. ⁶ So the captain came to him, and said to him, “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.” ⁷ And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ Then they said to him, “Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” ⁹ So he said to them, “I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”*

Background Notes

Has an unbeliever ever told you, “I can’t believe in the God of the Bible because the God of the Old Testament was so narrow-minded, and only cared about the Jewish people”? I ask these people, “Have you read the book of Jonah?” Jonah was sent to Gentiles, not Jews. He was sent to Gentiles who were not nice Gentiles. Jonah was called by God to go to Nineveh, a huge city, the capital of the ancient Assyrian Empire. The cruelty of the Assyrians is well known in history. And yet God’s mercy extended out to those cruel and pagan Gentiles! In fact, the theme of the book of Jonah is “God’s mercy to all mankind.”

The fact that the pagan Assyrians repented at Jonah’s preaching was a rebuke to the nation of Israel. Jonah was a prophet in northern Israel at the time of King Jeroboam II. He ministered in the same time period as the prophets Hosea and Amos, who also prophesied in the northern kingdom during the reign of Jeroboam II.

At this time the northern kingdom of Israel was quite strong, politically and militarily. They had even regained some of the territory that had been lost to the Assyrians – and this was a direct fulfillment of Jonah’s earlier prophecies: *“He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hopher” (2Kings 14:25).*

Jonah must have been a popular prophet in Israel in his early ministry, because he had predicted Israel’s success and prosperity. No wonder Jonah didn’t want to leave Israel and go to Nineveh and the Assyrians! But although Israel was materially prosperous, it was weak morally and spiritually. The people were not following the Lord, nor were they responding to His Word spoken through the prophets.

And then of all things, Israel's archenemy - the pagan Assyrians – responded to the preaching of Jonah and repented of their wickedness! What a rebuke to people of the kingdom of Israel!

So while the book of Jonah does not contain any direct prophecies to Israel, the account itself is a rebuke to the unrepentant nation of Israel.

Doctrinal Points

1. God is sovereign over all nature.

“But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up” (v4). Many of you have read the book or seen the movie, “The Perfect Storm.” Well, the storm in the book of Jonah really is the *perfect* storm! This storm was designed and controlled by God for a distinct purpose - to turn Jonah around.

Where was Jonah when the storm began? He was down in the lowest part of the ship, fast asleep. Isn't that interesting? I don't think it's “over-spiritualizing” verse 3 to see that Jonah's path of disobedience was down, down, down: *“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 from the presence of the Lord.”* Jonah went *down* to Joppa, then *down* into the ship, then *down* into the lowest parts of the ship (v5). The path of disobedience, away from fellowship with the Lord, is always **down**.

And Jonah was fast asleep. What a spiritual picture of the disobedient runaway Christian! When we disobey and turn from the Lord, we become indifferent, unconcerned, and hardened. We're “asleep” while the unbelieving world around us is perishing. When the storms of life come into the lives of unbelievers, they're afraid. They don't know where to turn. All they have is their false gods. They do everything they can to shift the cargo in their lives and try to stabilize their ship - but it's no use. They're afraid.

And like Jonah, while the unbelievers are fearful and struggling, we have the answer. We know the One who allows the storms. We know the One who can bring peace in the midst of trouble. We know the One who can stop the storm and bring calm. We know the Lord. But we're asleep! We have the answers - but we're indifferent. We're unconcerned. We're hardened. Is it possible that you're indifferent to your unbelieving neighbors or the unbelievers you work with?

Notice that Jonah was rebuked by an unbeliever: *“So the captain came to him, and said to him, “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish” (v6).* Have you ever been rebuked by an unbeliever for not sharing the gospel? Has anyone said, “You never told me! You had the answer - and you didn't share it with me!”

A Christian youth worker I know used to spend all kinds of time and effort running exciting events and building good relationships with teens - but he spent very little time sharing God's Word and the gospel. One of the teens (let's call him Tom) went to college. Of all things, during the first week, Tom ran into another student on campus – a complete stranger - who shared the gospel with him, and Tom became a Christian! When Tom returned home for Thanksgiving break, he looked up his old youth leader. He asked the youth leader why he had never shared the way of salvation with him. What a rebuke! The youth leader felt so rebuked that he re-organized his entire program. He made sure he shared the gospel right up front! God turned everything around in his life, and great fruit came from that renewed ministry. That's a good lesson for all of us.

Jonah was about to be wakened, because the storm was the means that God used to turn Jonah around. God was controlling the storm. God is sovereign over nature.

2. God is sovereign over circumstances.

The word "sovereign" means that God is in complete control of everything. But what about verse 7? Verse 7 says, "...let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.' So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah." So was it simply a coincidence that the sailors' "lottery" selected Jonah as the cause of the storm? No, this was **not** by chance, and it was **not** a coincidence - because **God is sovereign over all circumstances.**

What? Is God even sovereign over what numbers come up when dice are thrown? Yes! Proverbs 16:33 says, "*The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.*"

Remember the book of Esther, when God controlled the "lot" that was cast by evil Haman? God controlled the "lot" that selected the date – and thus He gave the Jews the maximum time available to get ready to protect themselves. That's why the Jewish people incorporated another festival into their yearly calendar, "Purim." *Purim* is the Hebrew word for "lots." Purim is still celebrated today, commemorating that event when God controlled the way Haman's "lot" was cast.

God is sovereign over all circumstances. Nothing happens just by chance!

Notice what the sailors said when the lot selected Jonah: "*Then they said to him, 'Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?'*" (v8). And notice what Jonah did **not** say. He didn't say, "Who, me? What are you talking about?" No, Jonah replied very honestly, and his response was very correct and orthodox. "*So he said to them, 'I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land'*" (v9). Jonah was "right on" in his theology.

Jonah's problem was not his theology, and it was not his faith. Jonah's problem was his **attitude**. He didn't want to do what God was asking him to do! And that's the problem for many Christians today. Are you possibly in that category? You don't have a problem with believing the Bible. Your beliefs are orthodox, and your faith is in the Lord - but you have an attitude problem. Maybe you don't like what God is doing in your life, or maybe you don't like what God is doing in

someone else's life. You may have a problem with "unwanted grace." You appreciate the grace of God - but only on *your terms*. You don't appreciate the grace of God being shown to others, when it's not quite the way you think God should operate.

Jonah had that problem. He hated the Assyrians. He didn't want the grace of God to be extended to Nineveh. But God had his plans and His ways to help Jonah begin to change his attitude - because **God controls all circumstances**. This is just as true in our lives as it was in Jonah's life.

Ephesians 1:11 says, *"In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will."* For the believer, we know that God works all things together for good in the lives of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. His ultimate goal in our lives is to make us more like Jesus (Romans 8:28-29).

I love this doctrinal point! What a comforting doctrine! **God is sovereign over all circumstances!**

Practical Application

You cannot escape from God!

Jonah tried to run away from God to Tarshish, but he never made it. You cannot escape from God! This applies to the unbeliever as well as the believer.

Listen to the words of Amos 9:2-4, in reference to unbelievers who think they can run away, and escape, and hide from God: *"Though they dig into hell, from there My hand shall take them. Though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down; ³ And though they hide themselves on top of Carmel, from there I will search and take them. Though they hide from My sight at the bottom of the sea, from there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them. ⁴ Though they go into captivity before their enemies, from there I will command the sword, and it shall slay them. I will set My eyes on them for harm and not for good."*

You cannot escape from God.

If you're an unbeliever, you need come to Christ and trust in Him as your Savior, because you cannot escape from God. And believers - like Jonah, you may run away from God into disobedience and sin, and you may try to hide - but you cannot escape from God.

Perhaps you're missing out on the Lord's blessing in your life because you're trying to run away from what the Lord wants you to do. Why don't you confess your sin right now and get things right with the Lord today? Because you cannot escape from God!