

“Jonah: The Big Picture”

Jonah 1:1-4:11

Don Maurer

July 21, 2023

Don: Before we go into the book of Jonah, why don't we open with a word of prayer? Our gracious heavenly Father, we thank You for another day of life. Father, You sustain us every day. Your word says, in a context by the way of sorrow, but it says that *“your mercies are new every morning, and great is Your faithfulness.”* So Father, that is our great joy. That is what keeps us going; that is our great confidence. I thank You, Father, for each and everyone here today. Lord, we praise You. We ask that You would instruct us in Your word. We thank You that we have Your word. We thank You that we have the freedom to read it, the freedom to worship, the freedom to assemble together as a group of men. Our Father, we pray that You would indeed instruct us this morning in Your word as we study this wayward prophet Jonah.

Father, we pray continually for Jeff and Tab. We thank You, Father, that Tab has gone three straight days without having to see a doctor. Father, we take that for granted. And yet when that happens, Lord, after you've been exposed to what Tab has been exposed to, that is a real blessing. And we pray, Father, that that would continue for her, that You would strengthen Jeff, Lord, as he takes care of his wife, And Father, that You would see fit through the Lord Jesus Christ to heal her of her cancer, to heal her of her kidney failure. Lord, we know that You are able to do far above what we ask or imagine.

And Lord, we continually lift up Sig and Nancy. Father, we pray for Sig as he takes care of her. We pray, heavenly Father, for this condition that she has. We know, Lord, that they're really not able to determine and to figure out what is causing all of these problems. We pray, Father, that You would give the doctors wisdom. We pray, Father, that You would heal her of this.

We pray for Bruce. We pray for Becky. We pray, heavenly Father, for the unspoken requests that are given here this morning. And Father, we pray that You would bless our time in Your word, for we pray it in Christ's name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Don: Well, we're in the book of Jonah today. And I've entitled this “Jonah: The Big Picture.” When I talked to Ted last week I informed him of what I was going to be teaching. I told him I was going to tease him. He said he was not going to be here today. And I said that I wished he would have because I would have liked to have picked on him. I was going to say something like, “Ted, the Lord just temporarily gave me the sense of sight because I can see the veins popping out of your neck.” When I said that we're going to go through the book of Jonah, Ted's immediate reaction was, “You can't go through Jonah in just one session!”

And I said, “Oh yes I can. I did it in Sunday school at church a couple weeks ago. And so I think that I'm going to be able to do it now.” Now obviously we're not going to be able to go in detail verse by verse in depth. But I've entitled it “Jonah: The Big Picture.” I think that we'll be able to go through all four chapters today. And of course any questions or comments are always welcome.

Let me just say that along with the prophet Daniel (most people know Daniel in the lion's den. Most people know about the three men in the fiery furnace.) But next to

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Daniel I would say that Jonah is probably the best-known prophet in the prophets of Scripture. Even unbelievers know about Jonah and the whale, as the King James translates it, or the fish.

You may have heard me tell this joke before. The skeptic and the Christian are talking. The skeptic says, “How can you believe that the Bible is the word of God?”

And the Christian says, “I believe that every word of the Bible is inspired by God.”

“Well take Jonah, for example,” the skeptic says. “How can you believe that a man could be swallowed by a whale and survive?”

And the Christian says, “Well I’ve always wondered about that myself. That’s one of the first things I’m going to ask Jonah when I get to heaven.”

And the skeptic says, “Well what if he isn’t there?” And the Christian says, “Well then, you can ask him.” (*Laughter*)

Anyway, a little bit of historical background. It gets kind of confusing when we read the Old Testament because as you probably know, a lot of what we have in the Bible and a lot of the books of the Bible are not in chronological order. And so you have the historical books and it ends with Esther. But of course we have Ezra and Nehemiah which are post-Exilic; that is, they deal with Israel and Judah after their captivity to Assyria and Babylon. And then you have the Major and the Minor prophets. They are called that because of the length of the books, not because the prophets are minor in importance.

And we need to remember that Jonah lived at the time of the reign of one of the kings in the book of 2 Kings and 1 Chronicles—Jeroboam II. Not Jeroboam the son of Nebat, but Jeroboam II who was king in Israel from around 793 B.C. to 753 B.C. And I’m sorry that I don’t have any slides or maps for you. You’ll have to do what I do and just remember all this with your imagination. But Jonah would have been a contemporary of the prophets Amos and Hosea. And he would have been a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel. Because of Solomon’s sin and idolatry Israel was split into two parts: the northern kingdom, which was the eleven tribes of Israel, and then Judah, the southern kingdom.

The only other place in the Old Testament where Jonah is mentioned is 2 Kings 14:25 where he is said to have predicted the expansion of Israel’s territory by King Jeroboam

. We don’t know precisely who wrote the book or when it was written. It could possibly have been Jonah himself, even though it’s written in the third person. We know that Moses wrote in the third person, as well as Hosea and Jeremiah and Isaiah. So if Jonah did write the book, then that’s a very hopeful sign that indeed he repented of his backsliding and his wayward ways. Perhaps he or a scribe wrote it after Nineveh was spared. Most Bible-believing scholars would put the writing of the book around 700 B.C. or so.

And of course there’s a dispute as to whether this is a parable or an allegory, or whether it’s history. If you’re a believer you would believe of course that it’s history. And of course our Lord Jesus Christ believed that it was history. He regarded it as history and uses the incident of Jonah in the belly of the fish as a type of His resurrection. So that’s very important to know.

And of course skeptics have the questions. How could somebody survive that long in the belly of a huge fish? How could the people of Nineveh have repented so suddenly?

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How could the plant in chapter 4 have grown so quickly? Well, as Luther said, “Let God be God.” Is God God or not? Can He do everything that He says He can do, or can’t He?

Okay. I’m sure that some of you, maybe most of you, are familiar with the book of Jonah. If I were to ask you what the main theme of Jonah is, what would you say?

Don Bishop: It’s the refusal to do what God commands to do.

Don Maurer: Okay; very good. Yes, it’s Jonah’s refusal to do what God commands him to do. Absolutely, that’s a big part of that. Anyone else?

John Gratner: God’s grace to the Gentiles.

Don: God’s grace to the Gentiles. Is that John?

John: Yes.

Don: Okay. Yes, those are the two main themes: God’s grace to the Gentiles. All right, He’s gracious and merciful not just to Israel, but to all who truly turn to Him in repentance and faith. That’s something that the people of Israel and the Jews had all but forgotten. Jonah had, and of course in the time of Jesus and even afterwards when we get into the book of Acts they had forgotten it.

Okay. Others of course include God’s sovereignty in creation and even over disobedience, and grace toward even wayward and disobedient believers, such as Jonah.

Okay. I’m going to ask some people to read some portions of Scripture for us. And I’d like someone to read chapter 1 of Jonah, verses 1-3. Can someone read that for us?

Chapter 1 of Jonah, verses 1-3.

Don Rimbey: I will, Don.

Don Maurer: Thank you.

Don Rimbey: *“The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Ammittai. ‘Arise, go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, for its wickedness has come up before Me.’*

“But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare he went forward and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.”

Transcriber’s Note: ESV.

Don Maurer: Okay. Thank you, Don.

Don Rimbey: The word of the Lord.

Brave Men: Thanks be to God.

Don Maurer: Okay. The word of the Lord came to Jonah. He knew this for certain; I’m sure that it was an audible voice. And God says, *“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city.”* (NKJV) Of course we know that Nineveh was built by Nimrod. We see it first mentioned in Genesis chapter 10. God calls it *“that great city.”* It must have been huge in size and population. We know from chapter 4 at the end of Jonah that it had at least 120,000 people at that time. It was the capital of Assyria. It’s located opposite of northern Iraq; that’s how we would know it today.

And it was a thorn in the side of Israel, even though it was temporarily subdued during the reign of Jeroboam II. Jonah knew that Assyria had oppressed Israel and that their cruelty was brutal. If you look for example in the book of Amos, it talks about “woe to Assyria”, woe to other cities. Some of the crimes of these cities there for example were ripping babies from their mothers’ wombs, ripping open pregnant women; that kind of

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thing. Of course we do just about the same thing today. We burn them and scrape them and do all kinds of things to unborn children to end their lives.

Anyway, it's very easy for us to look down on Jonah for his refusal to obey God, isn't it? But let's face it: would we be any different? What if you were certain that God had told you to go to China, or to go to Saudi Arabia, which of course was a big part of 9/11, and to speak to someone like Osama ben Laden if he were still alive?

Or closer to home, let's say that the Lord instructed you and commanded you to go to a Pride Day celebration and to speak against it, or to the next Planned Parenthood convention? Would you do it?

In verse 2 we see that Jonah disobeys God's summons. And we see at the end of the book why he does it. He knows that there is the possibility of the Ninevites repenting and being spared; he doesn't want this.

He flees to Tarshish, perhaps the mining port of Tartessus in southern Spain, or some other Mediterranean location. He goes in the exact opposite direction from Nineveh. It might have been quite a distance.

And Jonah knew very well that he could not flee from the presence of the Lord. But of course this is the insanity of our sin, isn't it? When we sin we think that we can get away with it. We think that the Lord will not find out. Leave us alone, God; let us do what we want. Of course Adam and Eve thought that they could hide from the presence of the Lord too, after they sinned. And if we're not careful, our hearts can be just as hard in our sin. Jonah does whatever it takes, including paying the fare, which might have been very expensive, in order to do this.

Okay. Can someone read verses 4-9 of Jonah chapter 1?

Don Bishop: *“But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea. There was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. Then they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. And Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship, and laid down and was fast asleep.*

“So the captain came and said to him, ‘What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your God. Perhaps your God will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.’”

Don Maurer: All right; thanks, Don. Jonah may have thought everything was fine, being sound asleep in the lowest parts of the ship during a fierce storm, in contrast to our Lord who was completely obedient and completely sinless; He was also asleep. But Jonah, only concerned for himself, is fast asleep while this storm is raging and the lives of people are in danger.

But the Lord was not through with Jonah. He will not let Jonah get away with his disobedience and sends the storm. He will not let us get away with our disobedience. If we truly belong to Him He will make sure that we are disciplined in some way, shape or form.

Of course the pagan sailors discover Jonah. It's very interesting to me that it would not have occurred to the sailors to think of this in a secular mindset like so many people do today. “Call on your God!” they say to Jonah. It wouldn't have even occurred to them that this universe is just something that happened by blind chance, or that this storm just happened. How arrogant people are today in our culture, thinking with their secular point of view.

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They discover Jonah. They cast lots: perhaps a form of divination used by these people. Apparently it’s something not forbidden in Israel. After all, with the calling of Matthias to replace Judas in Acts chapter 1 the apostles cast lots. The lot falls on Jonah, and so they grill him.

I can just imagine. “Who are you? Where do you come from? What is your people?”, etc. They just go on and on and on. If you were in danger of drowning, I think that we would have done the same thing, right? Any desperate measures would be taken. Imagine the scene: one question after another.

And of course Jonah tells them. *“I am a Hebrew and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”* That’s what my translation, the New King James, says. “In contrast to the false gods you worship”—those are my words.

It’s kind of ironic to me. *“I fear the LORD,”* “even though I’m disobeying Him.” He told them in verse 10 that the reason that the storm has happened was because of his disobedience. And so I’d like someone to read verses 10-15 for us.

Jordan Obaker: *“The men were exceedingly afraid and said to Him, ‘What is this that you have done?’ For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD because he had told them.*

“And they said to him, ‘What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?’ For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, ‘Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will quiet down for you. For I know that it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.’

“Nevertheless the men drove hard to get back to dry land, but they could not. The sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Therefore they called out to the LORD: ‘O LORD, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not upon us innocent blood. For You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You.’

“So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.”

Don Maurer: Okay. Thank you, Jordan. Notice the reaction of the men. They may have been very afraid of the storm and the loss of their lives. But when Jonah identifies himself and the true God they are exceedingly afraid, as my translation says. You know, they were more afraid than they were before.

Isn’t this similar to the reaction of the apostles when Jesus calmed the storm? You know, before they were afraid of drowning. “Lord, don’t you care that we perish?” And then afterwards when Jesus calmed the storm, you would have thought they would have said, “Oh, thank You, Lord!” But no. *“What manner of man is this, that even wind and sea obey Him?”*

Sigmund Freud in the 19th century with some of his atheistic cohorts wondered why it is, since they said there is no God, why is it that people are so religious and believe in God? And Freud came up with the hypothesis that people make gods of storms and bad circumstances. You can’t negotiate with a storm. You can’t negotiate with cancer. So what do you do? You make a god of those things. With a god you can pray to it, sacrifice to him. You can say, “Please get rid of this disease,” or whatever.

But these people here—these sailors—are afraid not only of the storm, but they’re more afraid of what Jonah says. *“I fear the LORD who made heaven and earth.”* And he

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even tells these idolatrous sailors and instructs the men in what to do so that the storm will cease. And no doubt this came from the Lord. Nobody in his right mind would say this; no doubt this comes from the Lord.

But isn't it interesting that sometimes Non-Christians put Christians to shame? The men go out of their way as it were to try to save Jonah, to avoid throwing Jonah into the sea. But the storm just grows more and more fierce. Here is Jonah, asleep and oblivious to what is happening, only concerned about himself. And here are these pagans concerned about Jonah. As I said, sometimes non-Christians put Christians to shame.

I heard last week about the sentencing phase of the trial for Robert Bauers, the person who killed the people at the synagogue five years ago. And they were talking about someone testifying about one of the people who were killed. Oh, what a wonderful person; a smile on his face all the time; a great doctor who even made house calls after he was finished with his regular work. And he wanted to found a clinic in his retirement years in Africa. And yet he was not a Christian. Sometimes non-Christians put us to shame.

And notice what happens in verse 14. They pray to the Lord, asking that He would not charge them with sin and bloodguilt on account of Jonah. And they say this: *“For You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You.”* Isn't it unbelievable? It seems that these men had a better understanding of the sovereignty of God than many Christians do today. And wonder of wonders! When they throw Jonah into the sea, the storm ceases.

Again the reaction of the men is even more fear of the Lord than before, with the result that the men offer a sacrifice to the Lord and take vows. I—and I am not alone—truly believe that these men—these Gentiles—were saved at that very moment, a demonstration of one of the great themes of this book: that the grace of God in the gospel is for all people, something Jonah forgot and that Peter was to discover in the tenth chapter of Acts. Okay, so now we come to—

David Miller: Don?

Don: Yes?

David: You know, I've heard that some Christian preachers have said that God does not hear the prayers of a Jewish person.

Don: Aha!

David: And this right here is a demonstration that God does hear their prayers. That doesn't mean that He does what they say. But it does indicate that God hears every prayer of every man and does what He's going to do anyway, right?

Don: Yes. Thanks for bringing that up, Dave; I was going to bring that up later. It does say that *“the sacrifice of the wicked”* and *“the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD.”* However, God can hear the prayers of those who are not His people for His own purposes. We know that happened, for example, with Cornelius in Acts 10. He may have already been saved; he may have been a God-fearer. But we know that God can do what He wants. And we're going to see that He does that in chapter 3 of Jonah when we come to the repentance of the Ninevites. So thanks for bringing that up, Dave.

John: Don?

Don: Yes?

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John: In verse 11 they say to Jonah, “What should we do, that the sea may calm down for us?” What they didn’t do was, “The lot was cast on you, and so we know you’re the problem. And if you don’t somehow fix it, we’re going to throw you overboard.”

And Jonah’s response was, “Okay. Well I know that this is my fault.” So he voluntarily tells them, “You can throw me over. How do I say this?: I don’t think that he thought that the idea of getting thrown over was going to do anything other than end his journey.”

Don: Mm-hmm.

John: He’s going to give his life for the people on the ship in that scenario.

Don: Mm-hmm.

John: It wasn’t their idea, as far as we are told in the text, that “Hey, you fix this or we’re throwing you overboard.”

Don: Right.

John: He said, “Well, I’m running away from God. But that doesn’t mean that I don’t still believe in Him. You should, actually, because I know who He is. He’s the real God, and He’s the God of this sea. Well, you need to deal with him and I do too. But throw me over.” So he was willing to give his life for the people on the boat. He was learning the lesson that he was supposed to go and give his life to spread the gospel to Nineveh. And I don’t think he had any idea that the fish was coming. I mean, we know the whole story; he didn’t know half of it.

Don: No. You’re right, John. Are you saying that perhaps in this instance—I don’t know if I want to say this—but maybe he was a type of Christ at that point even though he was so disobedient?

John: Sure. I think we can see something there. He had a bit of clarity at that point, where it was like “Hey, in some sense you don’t have a lot to lose.”

Don: Right.

John: “So throw me over. And by the way, after you throw me over you need to believe that the God of heaven and earth is the One who fixed this problem here.”

Don: Right.

John: So he said a good word to them.

Don: Yes, yes.

John: And we’ll see that in chapter 2. But Jonah’s heart had a new beginning.

Don: Yes.

John: And we’re all good at going back and being disobedient. *(Laughter)*

Don: Yes. We’re so much more like Jonah than we are like Jesus, right? Absolutely.

John: Yes. There are moments of clarity given to us—

Don: Yes.

John: “I’m going to speak the truth and let God be God; throw me over.”

Don: Yes. You know, like I said, I’m sure this had to come from the Lord; I’m sure it didn’t come from Jonah’s flesh. Good point, John; very good. So we go now to the incident of the fish or the whale, according to the King James. Meanwhile for Jonah, who was blind to this lesson that God saves the Gentiles, the Lord had already prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah.

I can’t even imagine what that must have felt like, and for three days. In chapter 1 we had Jonah’s rebellion. Now in chapter 2 on your handout we have Jonah’s reflection.

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It’s important to realize that the fish is not so much a punishment for Jonah, though it certainly was uncomfortable. But it’s Jonah’s salvation; the fish is Jonah’s savior. Jonah prays. Apparently he doesn’t complain, though I’m sure it was very, very uncomfortable, or ask, “Why, O Lord? Why me?” I think Jonah knew very well why this was happening. I don’t think he expected it, as John pointed out. But he’s like Paul and his companions in the Philippian jail. He prays, which is shamefully, I admit, unlike what I would have as my initial reaction when adversity comes my way.

Right from the get-go Jonah acknowledges the Lord. *“I cried to the LORD because of my affliction.”* Near drowning; I don’t think I would want to go through that experience; it would be a horrible way to die.

“I cried to the LORD because of my affliction, and He answered me.” Isn’t the Bible fond of understatement? You better believe that God answered Jonah in that belly of the fish!

All right. *“From the belly of Sheol”*—the grave; I think the King James Version says hell—*“I cried.”* Of course drowning is about as near to death as you can get. And I’m sure, as John pointed out, that Jonah thought that this most likely was going to be the end for him.

Zach Jarvis: Hey, Don, I’d like to ask something related to what John said.

Don: Yes.

Zach: So from what you said, John, it kind of makes me think that here’s Jonah. Instead of doing what God wanted him to do, he’s kind of on the way, right? He’s taking the easy way out. And then basically, when he’s on the ship and he’s really going to take the easy way out, he’s just giving up. It sounds like that, right?

Don: Yeah.

Zach: And so in his mind he’s giving up. But God wasn’t letting that happen.

Don: Right.

Zach: So that’s the thing. No matter what you run away from, if you run away from your problems, or what God has planned for you, you’re still not running away from Him. And then here is God giving him this redemption or salvation, really.

Don: Yes, indeed.

Zach: So even when Jonah thought he was at the very end, God said no. I can’t get that out of my mind.

Don: Mm-hmm. Well that’s right, Zach; thank you. And of course we’re going to see that in chapter 3, aren’t we? Jonah may have thought initially, “Lord, You’re through with me. You can’t use me anymore.” The evil one would like all of us to think that, and yet God does. Very well put.

The Lord heard his voice. This discipline is very gracious on God’s part as it is for all of us, even though when we’re disciplined at the time, as the book of Hebrews says, it is not pleasant. *“But afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”*

In verse 3 Jonah acknowledges that it was not just the sailors but God who had cast him into the sea, *“into the deep,”* a graphic description of what it must have felt like, and the desperate condition Jonah was in. “The cords of death encompassed me: the sea weeds wrapped around my head”—the horror of drowning.

It’s a type of our spiritual condition apart from the grace of God in Christ. Even though Jonah was saved, he goes on to say that it caused him momentary despair. Verse

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4: *“I have been cast out of Your sight.”* He thought that this was what he wanted for himself earlier, right? He tried to run away from the presence of the Lord. And now he sees the foolishness of such thinking. And of course that’s the deceptive nature of sin, isn’t it?

“You have brought my life from the pit, O LORD my God.” This is God’s doing. Jonah is completely passive in this regard. And even though Jonah was saved I think this is a very good illustration of our regeneration and our salvation. We were dead in trespasses and sins. It was God who made us alive in Christ Jesus. And because of God’s grace Jonah remembers the Lord and looks again to Him. Isn’t it wonderful to know that God is always eager to receive us when we turn to Him in repentance and faith?

Jonah was learning the lesson, although short-lived, (he says this in verse 9), that those like him *“who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy.”* They forsake the benefits that God alone can give.

Was Jonah guilty of idolatry? Yes, he certainly was. His idol was his self-righteousness, right? His idol was his country. He wanted Israel to be saved and no one else, and he was self-righteous. His idol was his comfort. And of course we have those kinds of idols also. And the world is going after everything today that only God can give.

But he says in verse 9: *“I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay what I have vowed.”* In other words, “I will obey You, unlike before, because now I know that *salvation is of the LORD.*” I think that those five words really summarize this book. *“Salvation is of the LORD.”* And the Lord is free to save who He wants, where He wants, when He wants, any time He wants.

“Salvation is of the LORD.” Jonah had experienced this in a dramatic way. And only then, when God was satisfied that he had learned that lesson, only then did God release Jonah onto the dry land. Okay, so—

John: One more thing.

Don: Go ahead.

John: I’m not trying to be an apologist for Jonah here. But sometimes he gets a bad rap.

Don: Yes?

John: So with this prayer in these eight verses, if you have footnotes in your Bible—cross-references, rather—this whole prayer is portions of Scripture.

Don: Yes.

John: Which I think is noteworthy, because sometimes we forget that Jonah wasn’t sitting at a table with a lamp and his Bible in the belly of the fish coming up with this prayer. But this was what is reported coming out of Jonah from having been inside him, as a true believer and a true follower of the true and living God.

Don: Yes.

John: My problem is my disobedience, not always my knowledge. And so we have the same thing here with Jonah.

Don: Yes, he knew his Bible, didn’t he?

John: He sure did.

Don: Yeah, absolutely. And thank you for pointing that out, John. As Bruce has said, *“Knowledge should lead to learning, and learning should lead to loving.”* But you’ve got to have the knowledge first. What you do with it then is very crucial. But yes, Jonah

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knew his Bible; we need to do this as well. All right. John, would you read verses 1-4 of chapter 3?

John: *“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ‘Arise! Go to Nineveh the great city, and proclaim to it the proclamation which I will tell you.’”*

“So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days walk. Then Jonah began to go through the city—one day’s walk. And he cried out and said, ‘Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown!’”

Don: All right, thank you. The word of the Lord comes to Jonah a second time; he receives a second opportunity. That’s sheer grace on the part of God, isn’t it? And He gives us many, many chances to renew our faith and repentance every day.

And Jonah is to preach what the Lord tells him. We’re not given here the exact words that Jonah is to say. But it’s interesting to me that what Jonah says to the people of Nineveh is the exact opposite of what is said in many modern gospel presentations today. There’s not a word about God’s love here, or mercy, or grace, but simply *“Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown!”* Jonah probably said this many times as he traversed the great city of Nineveh. It may have taken him three days or more. And the Bible says that the very first day he starts giving this message.

And from what we know in chapter 4 Jonah was probably hoping that Nineveh would be overthrown, maybe even praying that would happen. And yet the very opposite takes place in the rest of the chapter.

Notice what it says in verse 5. I’m just hurrying through this for the sake of time. It says first of all, *“They believed God.”* That’s what my translation says anyway. It’s one thing to believe in God; it’s quite another thing to believe God.

There are polls taken today. And I realize that secularism is on the increase in this country. But still most polls say that most people say they believe in God. What do they mean by that? A lot of people say, “Well I’m spiritual, but not religious. I believe that there’s someone somewhere out there.” There was a song in the ‘50s; I think it was sung by Frankie Lane: *“I believe that Someone in the great somewhere hears every word. I believe for every drop of rain that falls, a flower grows”*, this vague kind of thing. The late Don Williams sang a song in the ‘80s called “I Believe in You.” *“I believe in babies. I believe in Mom and Dad. And I believe in you.”* You know, this kind of vague nonsense.

David: Don?

Don: Yes?

David: Imagine a guy who had been in the belly of a fish for three days covered with seaweed walking into the city and saying that they’re going to be destroyed. It must have been quite an affirmation.

Don: Oh, yes, uh-huh. I wonder what he looked like. His skin was probably bleach white.

Don Rimbey: What did he smell like?

Don Maurer: Yeah, right. Absolutely. That would have been an attention getter. I didn’t think of that, Dave; thank you. But it’s one thing to believe in God; it’s quite another thing to believe God.

Of course with the world it goes without saying that they don’t believe God. But the problem with many people in the professing church today is that we don’t believe God

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when He warns about sin and judgment and hell. Many who call themselves Christians—many denominations, many ministries—are collapsing today and caving in on moral and theological issues; we know that.

But the people of Nineveh, from the least to the greatest, including the king himself, believed God through the word from Jonah. A nation-wide fast is proclaimed. A nation-wide time of mourning in sackcloth is also proclaimed.

Can you imagine that today? Could you imagine if President Biden would proclaim a national time of mourning and fasting for our country? We know that happened once. Abraham Lincoln did that, George Washington did that. Can you imagine that happening today? Why, there would be cries of “Separation of church and state! You can’t do that!” Wow, we’ve come a long way, baby! (*Laughter*) We really have.

But these were pagans, known for their brutality, notoriously wicked. And even though Jonah said nothing about grace, the king says in verse 9: “*Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?*”

Now we’re not necessarily talking about salvation here, although perhaps some of these people may have been saved. But we’re talking about preservation as a nation. In His common grace God sees their works of repentance and spares them. And Dave pointed out a few minutes ago about God even hearing the prayers of these pagans and sparing them. We know that 2 Chronicles 7:14 says that, “If My people who are called by My name will repent and turn and pray, I will hear from heaven and heal their land.” It’s a Biblical principle.

And there’s another very interesting thing in addition to that. Did these prayers change God’s mind? Was God intent upon destroying that city? And do these people kind of twist God’s arm? “Oh no, I can’t do that.” How do we handle that aspect of the word of God?

David: It was just His goal all along.

Don: Yes. Very good, Dave; very, very good. We see this as a Biblical principle, don’t we? God uses the prayers of His people, and in this case even the prayers of those who were not, to accomplish what He had planned all along. He spared the people of Israel when Moses prayed for them after the incident with the golden calf and after their complaining that “we don’t want this manna anymore.” He would have spared Sodom and Gomorrah if He had found ten righteous people. It’s a great Biblical principle.

Now this Ninevite repentance was short-lived. Nineveh was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in the year 612. So their repentance was short-lived.

All right. So we have Jonah’s rebellion, the sailors’ response and rebuke, Jonah’s reflection, and then in chapter 3 we have Nineveh’s repentance. In chapter 4 now we have Jonah’s response. Can someone read verses 1-5 of Jonah chapter 4?

Don Rimbey: “*But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the LORD: ‘O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.’*”

“*But the LORD replied, ‘Do you have any right to be angry?’ Jonah went out and sat down in a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade, and waited to see what would happen to the city.*” (NIV)

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Don Maurer: Okay. Thank you, Don. Okay, so what is Jonah’s reaction here? Rejoicing at the grace of God? Is he happy that God was so gracious to spare the city? No, just the opposite. My translation says that *“it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.”*

Now again, let’s not be too hard on Jonah. I don’t know if Michael Rush is here today.

Michael Rush: Yes.

Don: Okay. Well, about a month ago you talked about Jeffrey Dahmer. I also remember Ted Bundy. They were two notorious serial killers in the ‘80s and early ‘90s who both made professions of faith in Christ in prison. Ted Bundy was interviewed by James Dobson, and Jeffrey Dahmer was interviewed by Stone Philips.

Well when I heard that initially, I have to admit that my first reaction was not “Hallelujah! Praise God!” It was “Yeah. Are they just trying to get out of something? Are they just trying to get an easy pass into heaven?”

What if Vladimir Putin or Xi Jinping or someone from the Biden Administration were to genuinely come to the Lord? What would your reaction be? Corrie ten Boom confronted one of the guards years after she was in a Nazi concentration camp. He was responsible for the death of her sister, and the guard begged her forgiveness. And it was hard for her to do that. But she did it, and they embraced.

It’s said, as Michael pointed out in his talk, that Christ saves from the gutter-most to the uttermost. And we have to remember, as Mike said, that we are the gutter-most. Jonah was the gutter-most. Had he forgotten so quickly what happened in the belly of the fish?

You know, we’re so quick to point out 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, aren’t we?

Transcriber’s Note: 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, ESV. “Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Don: Oh, I’m not one of those homosexuals. I’m not one of those idolaters or murderers. Of course we are idolaters in many ways. We murder when we think angry thoughts. But what about those acceptable sins like gossip or covetousness, or something like that?

So in verse 2 Jonah reveals the reason for his initial disobedience. “Lord, I knew that You are a gracious and merciful God.” (NKJV) Of all things, he says this in a prayer! “I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, one who relents from doing harm.”

Now he wanted that for himself and his countrymen, but not for those pagans, not for those terrible Gentiles! Aren’t you glad that God is a gracious and merciful God, “slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, One who relents from doing harm?” Aren’t you glad that time after time He has been that way to you? He has been that way to me.

And Jonah is so angry that he wants to die. His response is the opposite of the apostle Paul’s statement in Romans 9 with the Israelites: that he would be willing to die and to go to hell if it meant their salvation.

In verse 4 and again in verse 9 the Lord asks Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry?” It’s a rhetorical question. Jonah should know very well that it isn’t. But of course in his sin and the insanity of his sin it blinds him to rational thinking. And so what does he do? He goes out, he builds himself a shelter, and has a pity party like the older brother in the

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parable of the prodigal son. “This son of yours! You didn’t have a party for me! Wa, wa, wa!” Well, with Jonah it’s the same way, right?

In verses 6-11 the Lord teaches Jonah an object lesson. In spite of his sin—and in spite of our sin I should say,—God is very gracious. He provides a plant for shade and for comfort for Jonah. Perhaps it’s the castor oil plant or a gourd. That’s the way the old King James translates it. And needless to say Jonah is very grateful for the plant. I’ve heard that in Israel and in the Middle East that when the sun beats down it’s terrible, like the temperatures that Phoenix and other parts of the country are experiencing right now.

But in the morning what does God do? “He prepared a worm that destroyed the plant, and an east wind that caused the sun to beat upon Jonah’s head”, so that he was about to pass out. “The LORD giveth, and the LORD taketh away.”

And when that happens, whether it be loss of material possessions or a change of health or financial circumstances, or the loss of a loved one, what is our reaction? Is it that of Job: “Blessed be the name of the LORD?” I realize that we will all feel grief at those things; there’s nothing wrong with that. But is our reaction after the Lord is disciplining us “Blessed be the name of the LORD?” Or is it like Jonah—bitterness, a root of bitterness that spreads like cancer, which is forbidden in Hebrews chapter 12?

Jonah says that he’s angry, angry enough to die, even when the Lord graciously confronts Jonah with his sinful attitude. Jonah is so bitter and blinded by his sin that he answers God’s rebuke with “Yes, it is right for me to be angry!”

And again the Lord continues to be gracious with Jonah! And if I may use the DMV—the Don Maurer Version here,—“Jonah, your priorities are all out of whack. You pitied the plant that I provided for you. It was here yesterday and gone today.” We would say, “Here today and gone tomorrow.” It’s temporal, it’s temporary.

“But you don’t have any pity for these people. Should I not pity the 120,000 people in Nineveh, and the animals too—the livestock? Jonah, isn’t it My prerogative to pity these Gentiles, to save who I want to save? I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.”

Apparently Jonah certainly, and the Pharisees in Jesus’ day forgot that. And so will we if we are not careful.

You know, I’m reading a book; I need to bring it back; I’m almost finished with it. So Gary, I’ll bring it back soon, Lord willing. It’s a book by Carol Ward called *Lord, Send Me Where No One Wants to Go*. And it’s the story of how she went to Uganda and northern Africa, and the horror of what happened with the paganism there and established a beachhead there and established a church. Sure, there are parts of it that make my theological teeth itch. But I want to tell you something; it is an unbelievable thing. She had the opposite attitude of Jonah. She was concerned about these people’s salvation, and went and did something about it.

And this is how the book ends. “Should I not have pity on the people of Nineveh and the animals?” There is no resolution to it, like the parable of the prodigal son. Did Jonah repent? I’d like to think so. And if he wrote it, yes, he would have. We’ll find out someday in heaven.

Okay, that’s the end of my presentation. Does anybody have any questions or comments before we close today?

Gary Craig: Don, I have a comment.

Don: Yes, Gary.

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Gary: I don't remember the god's name, but I believe I heard that Nineveh worshiped the fish god.

Don: Okay. That's interesting, isn't it? It's rather ironic.

Gary: So that may have been the reason why the people were so willing to repent with somebody who arrived there by a fish.

Don: Yes. How about that! Wow, that gives me a haddock just thinking about it! Ha, ha! Oh, that was bad, that was bad. But yes, Gary; thank you. Anybody else?

David: Yes. I'm just glad that God saves Gentiles.

Don: Oh, amen! We're grafted into that olive tree, right? Praise God! And of course this was His intention from the very beginning in Genesis 12, right? “Abraham, through you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.” And in Jesus Christ, hallelujah! That is the way it is; praise God for sure.

Ron Baling: Don?

Don: Yes?

Ron: We were just talking about Ted Bundy and those people. We forget that Paul was sort of that way.

Don: Yes he was.

Ron: Even some of the believers in some of the places he visited said—

Don: Mm-hmm. Yes, and look at how the Lord used him. We wouldn't have a great deal of our New Testament if it weren't for Paul and what God did in Paul's life, right? Yes, hallelujah!

So thank you. Let's close in a word of prayer. Our great God, indeed we stand in awe that You are a gracious God, “slow to anger, abounding in loving-kindness.” We thank You, Lord, that You saved us, like Jonah, when we were dead in trespasses and sins. And Lord, even though we confess that we are stubborn and disobedient so much of the time, that You use us for Your glory and for the salvation and edification of many people. We thank You, Father, for that. We pray, Father, that You would use us today in our various occupations or whatever You have in store for all of us today. And we pray all of these things in Christ's name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. (Applause)

Don: Thank you. Lord willing, Ted will be teaching next week.