

JONAH

ACT 4 - THE SCENE ON THE HILL

OVERVIEW

- Act 1 - The Scene on the Ship (1)
- Act 2 - The Scene in the Fish (2)
- Act 3 - The Scene in the City (3)
- Act 4 - The Scene on the Hill (4)

In chapter 1, we saw Jonah trying to run from God. But instead, in chapter 2, we saw Jonah running into God. Today, in Jonah 3, we are going to see Jonah running with God. Jonah 4 – Jonah Trying to Run God.¹

Returning to God: A Heartless Prophet, Jonah 4

Jonah: The Pouting Prophet

"The 4 Problems of the Prophet"

INTRODUCTION

There is nothing in this narrative that would suggest to me that Jonah is thinking right. Everything in it tells me Jonah is clinically depressed. Jonah is completely irrational. God's love for Jonah is evident in the compassionate prodding and gentle questioning. God's seeks Jonah restoration to joy.

"Two keys will prove useful in understanding the real issues in this book. First, the book records Jonah's mission to Nineveh, but it is written to Israel, who hated Nineveh. Second, Jonah is not the principal character of his own book—God is! God has the first word and the last. He orchestrates the entire drama to show His love for Israel's enemies."²

THE TEXT

IN A NUTSHELL

God is tenderly drawing Jonah to Himself. The book ends with unresolved tension. Because it is believed Jonah wrote this autobiography, we might safely assume his mental / emotional / spiritual "health" was restored.

AUTHOR'S EMPHASIS:

OUTLINE

I. Jonah's Displeasure at God (vv. 1-4)

4 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly,^[a] and he was angry. ² 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. ³ Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." ⁴ And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

Anger "to glow; to burn" [4:1, 4, 9]

Jonah did grasp the greatness of God's love for a sinning world.³

Jonah knows the foundational Israelite confession from Exodus 34:6–7.

- 6 The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin (Exodus 34:6–7 ESV).

This is a description of God from the mouth of God himself to Moses on Mount Sinai.

- A. He knew God is "merciful" to the deserving.
- B. He knew God is "gracious" to the undeserving.
- C. He knew God is "slow to become angry" when justice cries out for vindication.
- D. He knew God is "abounding in steadfast love" on those that are unlovely and self-centered.
- E. He knew God is willing to be "faithful" even when we are faithless and frail.
- F. He knew God "forgives" transgressors and sinners.

God responded to Jonah's rant with a single question: "Is it right for you to be angry?" (v. 4).

[See further HANDOUT – QUESTIONS]

II. God's Desire for Jonah (vv. 5-11)

⁵ Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. ⁶ Now the LORD God appointed a plant^[b] and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort.^[c] So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. ⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." ⁹ But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." ¹⁰ And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ And should not I pity

Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

Notice several aspects of this story.

A. The Wait - Jonah hopes God will change His mind (4:5)

The 40 days of which he had spoken probably had not yet expired. He was waiting to see if God was going to judge them despite their repentance.

B. The Weed - God used a plant to comfort the fuming prophet (4:6).

C. The Worm - God intentionally destroyed Jonah's creature comfort (4:7).

D. The Wind - God sent a scorching wind to disturb Jonah (4:8).

E. The Word - God asked Jonah a penetrating question (4:9-11)

1. He corrects Jonah's attitude [4:3, 8, 9]

Jonah is so depressed that he wills to die. God works to help Jonah see the oddity of his reasoning (4:4, 9).

2. He clarifies His actions (4:10, 11).

God is a God in pursuit of His people for their joy and His glory. God meets us where we are. Only God can make us into His image.

- God did this with Elijah.
- God did this with Peter.
- And He does this with us.

“The major question of Jonah 4 is connected to the book's abrupt ending. After Jonah's complaint, God explains in verses 10-11 why it is silly for Jonah to care so much about a plant and so little about a city full of people—and that's the end. The book seems to drop off a cliff without any further resolution. Bible scholars have addressed this question in many ways, although there is not a strong consensus. What people do agree about (for the most part) is that the abrupt ending was intentional—there aren't any missing verses still waiting to be discovered. Rather, it seems the biblical author intended to create tension by ending the book on a cliffhanger. Doing so forces us, the reader, to make our own conclusions about the contrast between God's grace and Jonah's desire for judgment. Plus, it seems appropriate that the book ends with God highlighting Jonah's skewed vision of the world and then asking a question to which Jonah had no answer. It reminds us of Who was in charge throughout the entire circumstance.”⁴

Shepherding the Sheep: (What's NEXT?)

The Book of Jonah ends rather abruptly. We can rightly assume that Jonah recovered from his self-inflicted wound and returned to a state of emotional / spiritual stability. How might we know this? You would have to be in your right mind to write about your wrong mind.

1. God can handle our emotional instability. He is not threatened by our mental frailty.
2. Our emotional responses to the prosperity of the wicked is illogical.
3. God cares for us more than we can imagine. He is tenderly turning our hearts toward Himself. God knows that our joy is firmly and ultimately sourced in His presence.
4. God is on Mission and will fulfill His Vision of seeing the earth covered with a knowledge of His glory as the waters cover the sea.

¹ https://redeeminggod.com/sermons/jonah/jonah_4/

² <https://mwtb.org/blogs/moments-for-you/27004545-jonahs-problem>

³ <https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/sermon-returning-to-god-heartless-prophet-jonah-4>

⁴ <https://www.thoughtco.com/jonah-4-bible-chapter-summary-363226>

A GRACIOUS GOD

Jonah 4:2

Romans 2:4 Or do you disregard the riches of His kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that **God's kindness leads you to repentance?**

James 5:11 See how blessed we consider those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen the outcome from the Lord. **The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.**

Exodus 22:27 because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? And if he cries out to Me, I will hear, **for I am compassionate.**

Exodus 33:19 **"I will cause all My goodness to pass in front of you," the LORD replied, "and I will proclaim My name--the LORD--before you. I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."**

Numbers 14:18 **The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in loving devotion, forgiving wrongdoing and rebellion.** But He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished; He visits the iniquity of the fathers upon their children to the third and fourth generation.'

Deuteronomy 4:31 **For the LORD your God is a merciful God;** He will not abandon you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers, which He swore to them by oath.

Deuteronomy 32:3 **For I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Ascribe greatness to our God!**

2 Chronicles 30:9 For if you return to the LORD, your brothers and sons will receive mercy in the presence of their captors and will return to this land. **For the LORD your God is gracious and merciful;** He will not turn His face away from you if you return to Him."

Nehemiah 9:17 They refused to listen and failed to remember the wonders You performed among them. They stiffened their necks and appointed a leader to return them to their bondage. But **You are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in loving devotion, and You did not forsake them.**

Psalms 103:8 **The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in loving devotion.**

Joel 2:13 **So rend your hearts and not your garments, and return to the LORD your God. For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in loving devotion. And He relents from sending disaster.**

Nahum 1:3 **The LORD is slow to anger and great in power;** the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. His path is in the whirlwind and storm, and clouds are the dust beneath His feet.

QUESTION

Jonah	"Is it right for you to be angry?"	Jonah 4:4
Adam	"Where are You?"	Gen. 3:9, 11
Eve	"What is This You Have Done?"	Gen. 3:13
Cain	"Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?"	Gen. 4:6
Cain	"Where is Abel your brother?"	Gen. 4:9
Abram	"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"	Gen. 18:14
Jacob	"What is your name?"	Gen. 32:27
Moses	"What is that in your hand?"	Exod. 4:2
Elijah	"What are you doing here, Elijah?"	1 Kings 19:9
Job	"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding."	Job 38:4
Isaiah	"Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver?"	Isa. 50:2
Crowd	"Who touched my garments?"	Mark 5:30
Disciples	"Who do people say that I am?"	Mark 8:29
RJR	"Why Do You Call Me Good?"	Mark 10:18
Disciples	"What Will It Profit A Man?"	Mark 8:36

FOR FURTHER STUDY

The Book of Malachi is built around seven questions that the people asked God.

1. How have we despised Your name? (Malachi 1:6)
2. How have we defiled You? (Malachi 1:7)
3. How have we wearied You? (Malachi 2:17)
4. How shall we return? (Malachi 3:7)
5. How have we robbed You? (Malachi 3:8)
6. And How have we spoken against You? (Malachi 3:13)

THEOLOGY IN JONAH

What is Jonah's MELODIC LINE? Is there/ are there themes holding the book together? Does the structure of the Book reveal Jonah's emphasis?

The book of Jonah is strongly **programmatic**. God's Vision for His creation and people is coming to pass. No one and nothing can stop God from doing what He does.

There are a lot of "theological tentacles" in Jonah. Each has its own power and suction. Yet, there are primary ideas and a handful of salient features that must be elevated from the book that the Holy Spirit wants the reader to grasp. These features are text driven and it is these features that provide the melodic line for the entire book.

"The purpose of the book of Jonah is plainly stated: 'Should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city?' (4:11). The compassion of God for all people, even Israel's enemies, is at the heart of the book."¹

Jonah is written as a play with four acts.

OVERVIEW

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- Act 2 - The Scene in the Fish (2)
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Each act contributes to the following four emphases.

First, the primary point is God's vision for humanity at large. His design has always been global.

"We all are familiar with the story of Jonah and how he did not want to go to Assyria and do as the Lord commanded. However, we often miss the point of this important book; namely that God's purpose to save people from all nations is clearly demonstrated even in the Old Testament, for the entire city of Nineveh repents (Jon 3:1ff). **The message is not about Jonah running from God, but God's mercy on sinners.** Christ as the true Jonah, fulfills this book by making atonement for sin (3 days idea), but also carries forth the message of hope and restoration to all the peoples of the world (Matt 12:39-41). However, Jesus does not grumble at God's mercy to Gentiles, but instead rebukes those who fail to understand God's forgiveness and mercy to pagan nations."²

God is on Mission. He saves worshippers from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation (Rev. 7:9). If this point is missed, then the Spirit's voice has been silenced.

God is faithful in fulfilling His Word to bless all the nations, including those of our enemies (Rom. 12:14-17). As Christians we must be careful that our patriotism does not interfere with our evangelism. Our nation is at war with several nations (i.e. people groups). We must pray for those in our government

and respect those who have authority over us (Rom. 13:1; 1 Tim. 2:1, 2; Titus 3:1) knowing the decision they make affect our witness and our worship. **God just might be saving those whom we “wish dead”** [awkward].

Second, the book demonstrates the control of God in accomplishing His purposes (1:17; 4:6-8).

God uses whatever He wishes to accomplish the fulfillment of His promise. Jonah is not the stereotypical image of one we would think God would choose to use, but **God chooses what we would not to accomplish what we cannot.**

The Book of Jonah allows the “curtain” of God’s activity to be pulled back and enables the reader to see how He works providentially in the performing of His will. He ‘prepared’ a great fish, a gourd, a worm, and an east wind.

- Jon 1:4 **The LORD hurled a great wind on the sea** and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up.
- Jon 1:17 And **the LORD appointed a great fish** to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.
- Jon 4:6 So **the LORD God appointed a plant** and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant.
- Jon 4:7 But **God appointed a worm** when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered.
- Jon 4:8 When the sun came up **God appointed a scorching east wind**, and the sun beat down on Jonah’s head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, and “Death is better to me than life.”

“God is in total control of the forces of nature but is not part of them. The sea is not a person but a part of creation. Yahweh can make it rage or be still (Jonah 1:4 Jonah 1:13 Jonah 1:15). He can send the wind and cause a storm (1:4). He can remove the clouds and make the sun bear down with all its force (4:8). He can use the fierce desert wind to carry out his plan (4:8). He can appoint huge denizens of the deep (2:1) or commission a tiny worm (4:7) to do his will. If he wishes, he can make a special plant come up from the earth to fulfill his purpose (4:6). He can also control people—even those who have not previously known him. In 1:15 the sailors throw Jonah into the ocean, but in 2:4 the action is attributed to Yahweh. He is the God of heaven but also Creator of the sea and dry land (1:9). The sovereign Lord even controls the casting of the lots so that they identify Jonah as the source of the calamity (1:7-10).”³

A supporting element to this primary idea of God’s oversight is how God works.

Third, this oversight/control is often worked directly through secondary agents to accomplish His purpose.

God is the God of providence. He orders and is behind the natural outworking of this universe. I cannot answer as to why things happen only that each event has significance. His *Story* is moving forward. This working through secondary agents is no less real than if He touched the Himself. This thought enables us to make certain observations about our lives in general.

- God is master of the sensational and the mundane.
- Although we seek to know God and crave some kind of visual and/or verbal intervention, God is present and appointing our moments.
- Learn to accept where you are as part of God's program for you.
- Stop kicking against the goads.

Fourth, Jonah's emotional / spiritual frame of mind must be considered a primary element within the book.

Jonah has become the "poster child" and "scratch pad" for preaching disobedience. Yet I believe there is another way and I think a more honest way of looking at Jonah's disobedience.

There is a tendency to ask, "What is God asking you to do that you are not obeying Him in?" Or, "How are the hardships in your life pointing to areas of disobedience?" Both questions are wrong. The overriding idea of this book is not Jonah's disobedience or obedience. The path of disobedience has an intrinsic demerit. You cannot do what God forbids and expect to be emotionally/spiritually stable. This, however, is not the point of the book. **God is always in pursuit of His people.**

Our emotions always lag behind our intellect. God is not threatened by our fatigue nor is He challenged by our failure. God is bigger than this. There are several thoughts we might consider when looking at Jonah's emotional / spiritual depression.

God can handle our emotional instability. He is not threatened by our mental frailty. Our emotional responses to the prosperity of the wicked is illogical.

Our peace of mind only happens as we see our story inside of His.

We cannot undo what is true. Trying to live in the fantasy world of the fictional leads to a deeper and darker depression.

God is never pushed off center by our emotional and spiritual frailty.

Finally, God's victory does not always look like what we want. Trust him and continue to believe that His ways are not our ways.

What God designed us for is to trust Him even when none of this makes any sense and even when emotionally / spiritually we are spent.

What might we do when we find ourselves emotionally and spiritually drained?

First, the best defense is a solid offense. The "ounce of prevention is always better than the pound of cure." Learn to live inside of His *Story*. **Although we all seek the sensational, God is often moving in the mundane.** None of us wish to be swallowed by the "whale." Do not neglect the regular responsibilities

you have inside of existing relationships as part of God's presence and power. Do not downplay or overlook the regular and routine.

In addition, we should work to consciously [i.e. volition] keep ourselves inside of God's greater *Story* by . . .

- a. Gathering for corporate worship on a weekly basis
- b. Seeking opportunity for continued instruction in the Word of God
- c. Desiring transparent fellowship with other believers whom we can trust and "feel" unjudged and
- d. Finally, learn to live gospel rich lives that communicate Jesus to those around us.

Finally, in light of the New Testament, we should read every story as a single *Story* with Jesus at the center.

Finally, every story is to be read Christo-centrally (Matt. 12:40).

- Jonah as a sign will become a voluntary sacrifice that appeases the wrath of God (1:11-15).
- Third, God's justice is placated and His wrath abated as sacrifice is made (1:15).

"Without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sin." They attempted to appease God through the work of their own hands (v. 13-15), but God required "blood." Jonah had to be offered up/sacrificed.

What is God after in all of this? The sailors recognize God as creator and as such He may do what He wants with what is His and when He does it, it is always right. God does what pleases Him. How He goes about doing this does not always make sense to us, but behind all of it, God is working.

They assumed God controlled life and that a displeased God was behind the storm's fury. They assumed God's justice must be placated. They assumed the sacrifice would appease God. Jonah was so depressed that he was willing to die. He fully expected to die, but God had something else in view.

Two walking takeaways.

1. God cares for us more than we can imagine. He is tenderly turning our hearts toward Himself. God knows that our joy is firmly and ultimately sourced in His presence.

The Book of Jonah ends rather abruptly. We can rightly assume that Jonah recovered from his self-inflicted wound and returned to a state of emotional / spiritual stability. How might we know this? You would have to be in your right mind to write about your wrong mind.

2. God is on Mission and will fulfill His Vision of seeing the earth covered with a knowledge of His glory as the waters cover the sea.

¹ *The Shaw Pocket Bible Handbook*, 234.

² <https://theroadtoemmaus.wordpress.com/2007/08/17/the-message-of-the-minor-prophets/>

³ Paul Ferguson - <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/jonah-theology-of.html>