

# Note

## Jonah – Part 1 of 1

Era	Characters	Chapters
In the beginning	God created the world.	Genesis 1
Before 4000 BC	Adam & Eve	Gen 1~5
Before 3000 BC	Cain Abel Seth	Gen 4~5
Before 2500 BC	Noah	Gen 5~10
Before 2100 BC	Job Elihu	Job
About 2000 BC <b>Era of Patriarchs</b>	Abraham Isaac & Ishmael Jacob & Esau Joseph	Gen 11~50
About 1500 BC~ 1000 BC <b>Era of prophets</b>	Moses Aaron Joshua	Exo Lev Num Deu
	Joshua	Joshua
	Judges(Othniel Ehud Shamgar Deborah Gideon Tola Jair Jephthah Ibzan Elon Abdon Samson) Abimelech	Judges
	Ruth Boaz Naomi	Ruth
	Eli Samuel Saul David	1 Samuel
About 1000 BC <b>Era of princes</b>	Saul Jonathan David Absalom Solomon	1 Samuel 2 Samuel
	Solomon Jeroboam Rehoboam Ahab Elijah Elisha Jehu	1 kings
	Ahab Hezekiah Manasseh Josiah Elisha Jehu Elijah	2 kings
	Saul David Solomon	1 Chronicles
	Solomon Rehoboam Asa Jehoshaphat Jehoram Joash Hezekiah Josiah	2 Chronicles
About 500 BC <b>Era of priests</b>	Zerubbabel Ezra Nehemiah Haggai Zechariah	Ezra Nehemiah
	Esther Mordecai Haman Ahasuerus	Esther
	Isaiah Ahaz Hezekiah	Isaiah
	Jeremiah Baruch Zedekiah	Jeremiah
	Jeremiah	Lamentation
	Ezekiel	Ezekiel
	Daniel Nebuchadnezzar Belshazzar	Daniel
	Hosea	Hosea
	Joel	Joel
	Amos	Amos
	Obadiah	Obadiah
<b>Jonah</b>	<b>Jonah</b> ✦	

# Summary

## **Obadiah - Part 1 of 1.....3**

Jonah is the story of a prophet who was angered by God’s mercy towards the wicked city of Nineveh when they demonstrated repentance. Beyond giving us a glimpse of the greatness of God's love and forgiveness, it is a reflection of how narrow our hearts are and how we cannot accept it when God extends His love to our enemies.

# Transcript

## Jonah – Part 1 of 1

We come now to a very familiar story of Jonah. Everybody knows this story. Every Christian, and even non-Christians know this story. Though it's a familiar story, the truth is very few Christians believe the story. But more so, very, very few Christians really understand this story. They think it's about Jonah. But the truth is, this story is about you and me, about how narrow is our love, about how we cannot stand that God loves our enemies though we are taught, as a Christians, to love our enemies, and pray for them that persecute us. That's what are taught. But the truth is when God is merciful to our enemies, we cannot stand it. This is a story of Jonah. It's not about the story of a man and a fish, it's a story about you and me and our enemies, and how God says, "Love your enemies, pray for them that persecute you, pray for their salvation". How often have we done that? And if God really is merciful to save our enemies, are we even rejoicing? That's the story.

Jonah is one of the very unusual prophetic books. Prophetic books are usually about the words of a prophet to someone, "thus says the Lord", but the book of Jonah is not about his words to others. It's about him. In other words, the story of his life. Very unusual. In fact, it's not just a story. It's a satire. A satire is a comedy that makes fun of people who think they're very high and great. Usually there are political satires about our leaders who think they're very great. People will make a play which doesn't say that they are wicked, but it makes a comedy about them to show how foolish and ridiculous they are. This is a satire of Jonah. But truly, it's a satire of me and you.

Let's get the background of the story. Jonah is sent to preach to the city of Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. Assyria was a wicked kingdom compared to Egypt for example. Egypt would drown the babies

and beat the rest out of their lives. Assyria had a terrible policy. They terrified their neighbours. They invented something called impaling. To impale was to put a sharp stick on the ground, and let the person be poked right through on the stick and let him die slowly. Kindof like crucifixion, but not exactly. Instead of piercing your hands and your feet, your belly pierce is pierced. You're impaled. And they didn't do it to one or two people. They did it to the entire population. They wanted to terrify other cities, other countries so that they would surrender. So, of course, Jonah hated these people. They are so wicked. He's a prophet of God. He's a good man. And these are the most wicked people.

One day, God tells Jonah, "Go and preach to Nineveh". "What! Preach to them?" So he ran away. Instead of going east to Nineveh, he ran west to get a ship so that he could sail as far away from Nineveh as possible.

Now, the reason why he ran, people said, was number one, maybe he's scared. He might be impaled, imagine going to tell the king he is wicked. God said, "Go preach to them, they're really wicked, they need a good preacher". So maybe he's scared. He's human. Others would say, "No, no, no, he's a fearless prophet". But he said in his mind, how could they even repent? Why bother to preach to people who are very unlikely to repent? I mean, if you have tried to share the gospel, how often do you share the gospel with the most wicked guy around? In your mind, you say, "Don't waste my time". Maybe that was also in Jonah's mind, so he ran away. The reason why he ran away is not mentioned in chapter 1, but it's mentioned in chapter 4.

So he gets into a ship. And then a huge storm whacks the ship and the sailors fear. Sailors are notorious for being godless. They drink, they have women in every port. And generally, the stereotype of a sailor is a wicked fellow. But here, we see the sailors fearing God, "Is it God? This must be from God, this storm!" and so they pray, and then they realize there's one guy sleeping on the deck who's not praying. So they go wake up the prophet and say, "Pray!" Can you imagine, this is satire right? The guy who is supposed to be praying is asleep. The sailors who are godless are

praying. And then when Jonah comes up, they all cry out to God, "Help us God". And still the storm goes on. And then they decide, "My goodness, there must be a sinner among us. Imagine the sailors saying that? And then they say, "Let's cast lots", and find out who is the cause of God's anger on us. And lo and behold, it is Jonah. And so they asked Jonah, what in the world happened? Why? Why are you the cause of this?

Jonah 1:9 ESV

And 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."

It sounds so pious. I am a Hebrew. And I worship God who made the heaven and the earth. Now, if you worship God, and you respect God, why did you disobey Him? This is a satire, right? You know, a lot of times, we as Christians talk very pious, "God's on the throne, God will take care of us". And then the next moment we worry about COVID virus or whatever, as if God is not on the throne. Talk is always much, much further than our walk, especially when we are filled with Bible verses, and our heart is tiny and our hands are non-existent. Our religion is head religion, not heart, which is our love, our experience of God; not our hands, which are the fruit, the labour, the result of our love for God and knowledge of God. So we have a big head religion, tiny heart religion and no hand religion.

And then in verse 10 Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!"

"You worship God, you really worship God, and God's punishing you?"

"You must have done something."

For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord because he had told them. So finally he had to admit, "I believe God is the God of heaven and earth, but actually I'm running away". How do you run away from God who controls the heaven and the sea and everything? And

so Jonah then has to admit that he is the cause of all this. They try to continue praying but the waves became even stronger. So Jonah said, "Just throw me into the sea and that will stop it because God's angry with me". But the sailors were so God-fearing, they were afraid to murder a man of God. So they tried to row and row but the sea became more tumultuous, tempestuous and finally they had no choice but to throw him into the sea. And you know what? The storm stopped immediately. And the Bible says, they worshipped God.

I like the satire. Godless people understand the warnings of God. A godless people pray, a godless people were fearful to kill a man of God. And then, when all this happened, straightaway they worshipped God. It almost sounds like Jonah was very, very noble to sacrifice his life for these guys. Jonah said, "Throw me in the sea". But actually, he was just running away from God. So if I am going to run from God, I can't get away from a God of land and sea, just take my life away, let me die so I don't have to go and preach to these awful Ninevites. God didn't let him die, God prepared a fish for him, a big fish. So that's chapter 1.

In chapter 2, he's in the belly of this big fish, possibly a whale. A whale is massive; the biggest mammal on earth by far. Elephants are tiny next to a massive whale. He's in the stomach of a whale. In our stomachs, it's gassy. Imagine that in a whale, the bubble of gas would be massive because it's belly is massive, and Jonah is probably able to breathe. And so he prays to God and he cries out to God. He didn't repent in the entire prayer, "God I'm sorry, I ran away". He didn't. He just said, "God, thank you for keeping me alive. Thank you for still remembering me. Thank you, I can still pray to you in the belly of this fish. And salvation belongs to you". I mean, you're the one that can save me from death. And you know what? The word "salvation belongs to God" is actually found in verse 9 in chapter 2. He is not talking about eternal salvation. You always think salvation has only got one meaning. Salvation means to save somebody from problems. Of course, when we say in the spiritual sense, we want the real eternal salvation, which is forever and ever. And so the fish vomits him out. He can't run away. He worships the God of the land, the sea, so how to run, you can't run but Jonah runs away. That's the satire. Sometimes we talk

like that, but we do the opposite. So he finally comes out. He was vomited out on land and God says "Go to Nineveh, preach to them".

So he walks to Nineveh, probably looking pretty horrible. In the fish belly, though there is oxygen, there's a lot of acid in a mammal's stomach. I think I learned enough science to know acid can do quite horrible things to your skin. So he probably had acid burns. This ugly looking Jonah now walks there. In chapter 2, it says he had seaweeds around him. I think in the belly, if you eat tons of veggies, the vegetables are still undigested in the stomach before it goes to the small intestines. He's vomited out, this ugly looking guy, and he has to go to Nineveh now. It's a massive city. He's told to preach, so he just preaches this basic thing which is found in chapter 3:4 "Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." That's all he's going to say. Now in Hebrew, that's only five words. So it's a five-word sermon. This sermon is very interesting. It doesn't say what their sin is. It doesn't say what they are supposed to do. It doesn't even mention God. I would call this, the most minimal sermon you can ever preach. How to preach a sermon like that? I mean, even if you wanted to preach anything less than this, it's almost impossible. This is the minimum sermon. It's like Jonah had to do a job but he wasn't going to do a good job. God said go and warn them, at least warn them their sin, their violence, impaling people, punishing widows, children, harmless people, innocent people, plundering them, mention their sin at least, and then say, you have to repent to God. Tell them how to get out of it. That's preaching, right? And tell them God will judge you. But not a word about these things. So, it's like he doesn't really want to preach. And he's barely one-third way into the city, just screaming out these five words, and then it says, "All the people, all the people began to fast and put sackcloth on them". They believed him!

Sometimes if you have tried to evangelize people, sometimes just mention one verse, one verse of the Bible, which sometimes is not even the John 3:16 type of verse, and people get saved. I've heard people telling me, "Pastor, do you remember you said this?" I said, "No". "You know, you came to my church such and such a time or you came to this conference such and such a time, you said this verse or you said this statement, it changed my life totally? I was going the wrong direction, I was not a

believer, and now I'm a preacher, now I'm a pastor, and now I'm a missionary". It's like, "Really? I don't remember saying it and that verse, I think you're taking it a bit out of context, you know? If I said it, I didn't mean it that way". But you know, the Word of God is powerful. God say go say something and you just go say it.

And so they fasted, they put on sackcloth and the king heard about it. And he proclaimed a national fast that everybody, including the animals, should not eat, should put on sackcloth, ashes on them and pray for mercy. I wish I could see a revival like that, it was a national revival of the most wicked kingdom in the world, possibly the most arrogant people. And you know what? God accepted their repentance. God accepted their plea of mercy, and God did not overthrow the city. You mean after murdering millions of people, after ruining millions of lives and nations, they just wear sackcloth and cry out to God from their heart, "Lord, have mercy on us!" But repentance is the change of heart, the heart turns. Suddenly they realized, "Oh God, we didn't know there was a God there, we are sorry. We are not the Assyrian power - the greatest nation, we are nobody, forgive us, God". God accepted it. Wow!

Some people said the word "overthrown" in "Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" has two meanings in Hebrew. I don't know Hebrew but I am just sharing what some writer said. "Overturn" can mean to utterly demolish: something powerful becomes nothing - overturned, like Sodom or Gomorrah, but it can also mean it's turned around. Turn it over. In other words, from arrogance to humility. 40 days and Nineveh shall be turned. But it was not 40 days, it was less. It was very fast. Whatever it was, there was a national repentance and God accepted it.

Chapter 4. Jonah is furious. He's so angry with God. And now we find out the reason why he ran away. It was not fear. It's not that he thought they would not believe, that they would be resistant to preaching. Why bother? Why risk my life and waste my time? We thought that was the reason. Jonah gives his reason before God now in chapter 4. This is very interesting. If we don't understand this, we will always have what I call the



Sunday school version of Jonah. Jonah is in the whale's stomach and it spat him out. We know the story but we don't know the meaning, which is mostly our understanding of the Bible; we know the stories, but not the meaning. And often we only know the meaning for myself, not so much the meaning that helps us understand God.

Let's look at Jonah in Jonah 4:1-2 ESV

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, (this repentance of theirs and God accepting it.)

and he was angry. 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.

(When God had told him to preach, he said, "Isn't this what I said to you".

That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish.)

This is the reason:

v2 for I knew that You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

Now that's the reason why Jonah ran away. He knew God was merciful and if he preached, God might forgive his enemies. And that was not acceptable to Jonah. He hated his enemies. Why should they be blessed by God?

Do you think this is only in Jonah's heart? You think this feeling is only in Jonah's heart? Is this a story of Jonah? Is this a satire of Jonah? Or is this a satire of Paul Choo and you - that we hate our enemies? We can hear preaching "Love your enemies, pray for them that persecute you, that you may be like the sons of God, sons of your Father who is in heaven". Sounds so spiritual, but is that really how our heart is? Is that the wideness of our heart? And so he's angry with God. Then he said to God,

v3-4 Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live. And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

Is it justified for you to be angry that I spared people from horrible destruction? Jonah didn't bother to answer God.

v5 Jonah went out of the city sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there.

So he walks on, out of the city, goes to the east side. I guess it's more shaded there. He makes a little shed, sits and watches the city from the outside and says, "I hope God changes His mind and destroys them. I hope so. Or maybe I hope their repentance is fake and now they start to party and then God will just punish them because they just pretended to repent. I hope so". So he sits there, waiting. And you know what? God is so merciful. God does a miracle: makes a vine grow really fast on his little shed. He made a few sticks to shelter himself from the hot sun. And God makes a vine grow on it. Vines grow on scaffoldings. This vine grows at top speed. Vines usually have big leaves and it provides him more shade than his little stick shed can provide him. So he's now nice and comfortable. He's still waiting there for the destruction of Nineveh. It doesn't happen and the next morning he wakes up, still waiting. Now what God does is, He prepares a worm to eat up the roots of this vine and then the vine shrivels up. And He then allows the scorching sun and an east wind to come; the east wind is a very hot wind that comes from the desert. And Jonah is miserable in the heat now. He's angry inside, he's hot outside. And he tells God, "It's better for me to die".

v9 But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?"

You see, the plant had died and Jonah was so angry, "Why did you take away my plant? It gave me shade, it's the only comforter I have. I'm so angry." He's angry with God.

v10 And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labour, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. 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?"

God said, "I need permission from you to kill the vine? You're angry because I didn't ask you permission to kill the vine. Can I have your permission now to be kind to a city with 120,000 children, infants, and much cattle? Can I have your permission not to destroy the city? Satire, sarcasm and the story ends there.

We don't know what Jonah answered, I have no idea. Why did God not show Jonah's response? Because this story is not about Jonah, it's about you and me. You see, when people tell the story of Jonah, they talk about Jonah. It's not about Jonah. Otherwise its ending is ridiculous. Was he repentant? Maybe he was. I don't know. Maybe he said, "God, I'm so sorry. Forgive me". But we are left hanging because it's not about him. He's just there, a character for you and me to see ourselves, because if you ask Christians, "You heard this from Matthew 5:44 - Love your enemies?" They will say, "Yes, Pastor, I know". "You think you can do it?" "I think I can. I mean, God asked me to, I think I can." Really? If our enemies, horrible people who do terrible things to us, one day, said "Sorry God", turns around and God forgives him. Can you handle that? Is the love in your heart big enough to even grasp the love in God's heart? Or is my love so tiny that I will be angry with God because His love is big. I cannot accept that His love is so big. That's the moral of this story. The greatness of God's love, the acceptance of God of repentance. A hundred-year life of rottenness, but at your tormentor's deathbed, he says, "I am sorry God", and he goes to heaven like you and me. Can you accept it? I think our heart is so tiny, so tiny that when we are confronted with a love of God that is so great, of

forgiveness that is so huge, we cannot accept it. Are you okay with such a God who has such a big love even for your enemies. I'm not even asking you, "Will you pray for them?" Will you just accept God like that. It's hard, believe me. So God teaches us in the Bible in many ways, sometimes by poetry, sometimes by satire.

When you have a great king, it's very hard to correct him by telling him what's wrong with him and lecturing him. He probably will never accept it. So people do satires hoping he can see himself in it, hoping this method will change him. So God is using Jonah to change us, to understand the love of God, so big, like the heavens, forgiveness, so free. Hard to imagine, and worse than that, hard to accept. May God give you a beautiful glimpse of the greatness of God's love, mercy and forgiveness. And may we love this God, not get angry with this God, this God of great mercy. I hope this Bible study will be a good reminder and more than that, a good slap on our face. May God bless this Bible study and may you know your God.