

INTRO: If I asked what the book of Jonah is about, I'd expect the most frequent answer to be, "A man got swallowed by a big fish." Fair enough, but **how** and **why** did Jonah get to be swallowed in the first place! This sermon will explore that and relate it to our overall Lenten theme this year, namely, Biblical substitutes.

## I. JONAH IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

### A. Some history and geography

1. Ninevah (Iraq) the dominant world power; ruthless, vicious
2. King not named; Tigleth-Pileasar later deported Northern Kingdom
3. Nineveh NE by land; Joppa/Tarshish due east by sea
4. BTW, been there, cruise ship; **huge** sea

### B. Jonah's problems

1. defies, disobeys God; incurs wrath
2. Lord **sent** a great wind; mariners afraid
3. cargo overboard; prayed to various gods/idols
4. captain wakens Jonah below deck; **pray** you fool
5. desperate; whose fault? Lot fell on Jonah; short straw
6. admits to crew, offers himself; initial reluctance
7. throw Jonah overboard; storm ceases; fish swallows Jonah, per God
8. substitute one Jonah for the whole ship's crew

### C. But there's more

1. ch. 2 is Jonah's prayer from inside the fish
2. ch. 3, after 3 days/nights, God caused fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land
3. God repeats command; Jonah goes: "40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed"
4. king and people repent (miracle!); God spares them
5. ch. 4, Jonah sulks, angry w/God; God shows mercy on penitent ones

## II. AN ANALYSIS OF JONAH'S BEHAVIOR (and introspection?)

### A. Fleeing from God's command

1. Isn't that a definition of sin, doing the opposite of what God says
2. Adam disobeyed God, hid from God; He sought and found Adam
3. disobeying God has consequence (Rom.3 wages of sin...)
4. and God has not changed, even to this day

B. "Throw me overboard"

1. God's prophet did not clear this with God first; he wasn't thus obeying God
2. was it a selfless sacrifice? Rom.5:6-8 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7) For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would dare to die. 8) But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
3. fatalistic? Gonna die anyway; couldn't hurt
4. atone to God for his previous disobedience?
5. Bible doesn't say; not the point here; it happened, Jonah's in the water

C. And analyze Jonah's peaching at Nineveh, after being spared by God

1. preached 'law'; no hint of God's mercy to penitent sinners
2. pouted when God spared penitent Nineveh
3. "should I not pity Nineveh...120,000...right from left hand"
4. God is merciful to the penitent; punishes the impenitent

III. NEW TESTAMENT PARALLELS

A. Sleeping through a storm

1. cp. Jesus with disciples in a boat on Galilee
2. both, rowing and getting nowhere
3. nor did it help for mariners to pray to false gods
4. both times, God stilled the storms (as He always does)

B. Throwing cargo overboard

1. Acts 27:18-19 Paul's shipwreck; cargo/tackle (prisoners) overboard
2. God preserved His messenger for the sake of the message; Nineveh, Rome

C. 40 days until God does something

1. Nineveh shall be overthrown
2. remember 40 days for purification after a birth
3. Israel wandering, before God let them into the Promised Land
4. Jesus fasted, tempted 40 days before beginning teaching, healing (etc., etc.)

D. Jesus' 'sign of Jonah' (*coup de gras*)

1. Jesus confirms it; no speculation; genuine type-fulfillment
2. Matthew 12:39 and Luke 11:29 Beelzebub accusation; merely, sign of Jonah
3. Matthew 16:4 'red sky'; and 'sign' request; 3 days in fish/earth
4. **Jesus** says Jonah's 3 days prefigured Jesus' 3 days in the tomb
5. Jonah's self-sacrifice prefigured Jesus' sacrifice of Himself for the world, whatever Jonah's motives might have been

IV. NEW TESTAMENT MOTIVES (some of which we **do** know)

A. **We** live in the New Testament era

1. our every sin is a turning away from God; e.g., selfish motives
2. e.g., too often we act without checking with God first...
3. e.g., pray **first**, not after we're inside a big fish...
4. also, study God's word for our moral compass
5. let penitent Nineveh be **our** example

B. Jesus' motives often are stated in the New Testament

1. 1 John 4:16 God is love (more than merely 'loving'; love personified)
2. 1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (substitute: Him for us)
3. John 15:13 (Upper Room) Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for His friends
4. I'm not sure of Jonah's motives; I couldn't be surer of Jesus' motives
5. 1 John 2:2 He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but also for the sins of the whole world
6. but you already knew that: John 3:16 God so loved the world...

CONCLUSION: The book of the prophet Jonah is only 4 short chapters. There is so little we know about his motivation for asking to be thrown into the sea to save the other mariners. Thank God, we do know the loving, sacrificial heart of Jesus who gave Himself as the substitute for the punishment of our sins. As we believe, God counts that trusting faith as righteousness. Amen.