

This is lesson number **Three** in our exposition of the Book of Jonah.

Please open to the Book of Jonah.

INVOCATION FOR THE MESSAGE

My job as a preacher of the Word of God is to find out what Jonah meant to the first readers of the book. Then discover the biblical context. Then make 21st Century applications from the text.

The most important thing to know about Jonah is that our Lord Jesus Christ said that the “sign of the prophet Jonah” is the only sign that would be given to an evil and adulterous generation.

The “sign of the prophet Jonah” is primarily the **historical fact** of Jonah being in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights just as it is an **historical fact** that Jesus the Christ was three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

The “sign of the prophet Jonah” includes where Jonah was from, a town in Galilee called Gath-Hepher, because the Pharisees said, **“no prophet has arisen from Galilee.”**

The “sign of the prophet Jonah” also includes the **missionary mind** of God. God is and has always been a missionary God with a heart for Gentiles as well as for the Jews. But the Jews had **singularly** failed to be **“a light to the Gentiles”** and God was **rebuking** Israel for their disobedience by sending His Jewish prophet to Nineveh. Jesus bringing up Jonah would have stung the Pharisees and scribes and leaders!

In our message on Chapter 1:1-3, we saw that the **“word of the LORD came to Jonah.”** The word of the LORD was rare in Israel in those days and it did not exist at all in wicked Nineveh where God told Jonah to go and preach repentance.

“But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.”

Jonah
“But the LORD ...”

We saw that Jonah knew that he could not physically hide from God but that he thought that if he could get as far as he could from **“the presence of the LORD”**, defined as a place where God was worshipped, that just maybe he would not have to go to Nineveh and preach to those wicked heathen.

“Cain went out from **the presence of the LORD**” [Genesis 4:16]

We also saw that even though Jonah **sinned** in his disobedience that he at least had a noble motive. Jonah was trying to protect the honor of God. God had told Jonah to preach, **“Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”**

Jonah knew that if God granted repentance, which He could do, then it would appear that Jehovah was a **changeable** God and Jonah just could not allow that to happen. But God did not need Jonah to protect His honor and **Jonah needed to learn some lessons about God.**

In today’s text [1:4-16] we will see:

The introduction of the sovereignty of God,
 How false or natural religion works,
 And what true or revealed religion produces.

Jonah 1:4-16

But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.

5 Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.

6 So the captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish."

7 And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 Then they said to him, "Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?"

9 So he said to them, "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

Jonah “But the LORD ...”

10 Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, "Why have you done this?" For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. **11** Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?" — for the sea was growing more tempestuous.

12 And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me."

13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. **14** Therefore they cried out to the LORD and said, "We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You." **15** So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. **16** Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows.

Editing Note: Did not use this.

In verse 3 we read, “so he paid the fare...”

Jonah paid the fare.

Donald Grey Barnhouse highlighted the phrase, “so he paid the fare” by noting that Jonah did not get to where he wanted to go, since he was thrown overboard. He did not get a refund on his ticket. He went “down” to Joppa and he went “down” into the boat. Running from the presence of the Lord is always “down”! So Jonah paid the full fare and did not get to where he wanted to go. It is always like that when you try to run away from the Lord.

The introduction of the sovereignty of God:

Jonah 1:4

But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.

Please notice that it does not say that a storm “just happened.”

What it says is that the **LORD “hurled”** a great wind!

Jonah
“But the LORD ...”

Psalm 48:6-7

6 Fear took hold of them there,
And pain, as of a woman in birth pangs,
7 As when You break the ships of Tarshish
With an east wind.

Are you as tired as I am of hearing preachers say that God “wants to do something?” Yes, there is a sense in which God desires all men to be saved. That is the same as God’s desire that we should not lie and commit adultery. But if you read your Bible through and through you will see that God does exactly what He pleases and His will and secret purpose is sure.

Ephesians 1:11 says, “... according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.”

David was tired of hearing that His God was weak.

Psalm 115:1-8

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory,
Because of Your mercy,
Because of Your truth.
2 Why should the Gentiles say,
"So where is their God?"

3 But our God is in heaven;
He does whatever He pleases.
4 Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of men's hands.
5 They have mouths, but they do not speak;
Eyes they have, but they do not see;
6 They have ears, but they do not hear;
Noses they have, but they do not smell;
7 They have hands, but they do not handle;
Feet they have, but they do not walk;
Nor do they mutter through their throat.
8 Those who make them are like them;
So is everyone who trusts in them.

The helpless and mute gods of those sailors are described in this psalm. But we will see that when the only true God was revealed to them that they wanted Him and not their false gods.

Jonah “But the LORD ...”

God is about to intervene in the plans of Jonah and in the lives of those sailors. God is going to arrest Jonah in his flight from the “**presence of the LORD**” and Jonah will preach his first missionary sermon!

Notice that when we sin it almost always involves other people. Those pagan sailors were just doing their jobs when along comes a disobedient Hebrew prophet and they all nearly die because of Jonah’s sin.

God caused a great storm and the sailors who had battled many storms before had never seen anything like this storm.

Jonah 1:5

5 Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.

The sailors are busy doing what they know by experience is the only thing to do. Make the ship lighter by throwing the cargo overboard.

But Jonah was fast asleep!

We can and do resist the revealed will of God but if you belong to God you won’t enjoy your disobedience very long. Jonah went fast asleep?

Keta asked, “How could Jonah fall asleep when he knew that he was trying to run away from God?”

Again I refer to Hugh Martin’s commentary where he cautions us not to be too quick to judge the motives of Jonah and not to misunderstand how Jonah could fall asleep. Do not conclude that Jonah is not troubled by his disobedience. Rather it is just the opposite, he is in anguish of soul.

Just before His crucifixion, as He prayed in Gethsemane where Jesus sweat great drops of blood, Jesus found His disciples asleep.

Why were His disciples asleep? They were in anguish of soul!

Luke 22:45

45 When He rose up from prayer, and had come to His disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow.

Jonah
“But the LORD ...”

Sometimes the response to grief is sleep.

Jonah was retreating from great sorrow that he was disobeying the LORD. But Jonah had not yet repented!

Let me ask you to reflect on the times when you were disobedient. Now don't even think about lying to yourself by thinking that you have never been disobedient. How do we reach a state where we are disobedient?

First we decide that we don't have time to read the Bible. Then we are too busy to find the time to pray. Then Wednesday Bible study and prayer meeting are really not all that important because there are school activities and ball games to attend to. Then we reason that if I can skip Wednesdays surely a few Sundays don't matter either.

Then old Satan says, **“Here is a Christian that is ready to be devoured. He has laid down his armor. He is asleep!”**

That is how Jonah was able to sleep but God is about to wake him up!

Sinner if you are asleep and fleeing from God, don't wait to see how God will get your attention. Hear the warning from Jonah and repent! If you are not able to repent it is because you do not belong to God!

One writer says Jonah is a picture of the church. The church is asleep while abortion and the homosexual agenda and pornography and organized gambling keeps advancing in being accepted by society as necessary and “normal.”

Well God is about to reveal His sovereignty to the sailors and to Jonah!

God has a people chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world and they will be brought to believe in Him. But they will do the believing.

God will arrange the circumstances so that the truth of God will be heard and believed by His people. If a person chooses not to believe in God it will be their responsibility. **There is nothing in the Gospel message to keep anyone away from the truth.**

Jonah
“But the LORD ...”

Well Jonah belonged to God and you know what, there were some sailors on the ship that Jonah boarded, that were about to hear from God.

Don't miss the irony here. Jonah didn't want to preach to pagans in Nineveh but he is about to preach to these pagan sailors.

First see how false or natural religion works:

“But the LORD hurled a great storm.”

Psalm 107:23-32

**23 Those who go down to the sea in ships,
 Who do business on great waters,
 24 They see the works of the LORD,
 And His wonders in the deep.
 25 For He commands and raises the stormy wind,
 Which lifts up the waves of the sea.
 26 They mount up to the heavens,
 They go down again to the depths;
 Their soul melts because of trouble.
 27 They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man,
 And are at their wits' end.
 28 Then they cry out to the LORD in their trouble,
 And He brings them out of their distresses.
 29 He calms the storm,
 So that its waves are still.
 30 Then they are glad because they are quiet;
 So He guides them to their desired haven.
 31 Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness,
 And for His wonderful works to the children of men!
 32 Let them exalt Him also in the assembly of the people,
 And praise Him in the company of the elders.**

Now we will see what **natural religion** can do. Natural religion is what all men have. Man is a religious creature and he will worship something.

After this we look at what **natural religion** can do and we will see what true or **revealed religion** does.

Natural religion caused the sailors to be afraid.

Each man cried out to his god.

Jonah
“But the LORD ...”

These were experienced men of the sea and they instinctively knew that they had to lighten the vessel or this terrible storm was going to send them to the bottom of the ocean.

But Jonah was fast asleep. His conscience has been afflicted with sorrow and he isn't aware of what God is about to do. I doubt if he would be asleep if he knew what was just ahead.

Jonah 1:6

So the captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish."

The captain of the ship wakes Jonah up. Maybe your God has some influence over this storm. Well the captain was right but he didn't know it yet. Here is a prophet of God being rebuked by a pagan shipmaster.

The world is watching the church. How do you respond to the storms of life? Are you asleep? Do you “go to pieces”? Do you give witness that you believe that God is in control? I am not talking about stoicism but rather a calm trust in the God who cares for you.

Jonah 1:7

And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.

Natural religion says, Let's see what “chance” will tell us. Cast lots and maybe we can learn what is behind this most terrible storm.

The “lots” were sheep anklebones. The “lap” was formed when a man wearing a long garment sat down and spread his legs and formed a place where the lot could be cast.

Proverbs 16:33

**The lot is cast into the lap,
 But its every decision is from the LORD.**

You can believe in “luck” and “chance” if you choose to do so. For me, I am content to know that absolutely nothing “Just Happens.”

Jonah
“But the LORD ...”

That is not to say that I will understand everything or even understand most things but nothing happens outside of God’s providence. One of our problems is that we want to understand “right now”!

Providence means God’s management of His creation. You tell me something that is outside of God’s control and I will worship that because it will be more powerful than God.

So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. **Big surprise?**

8 Then they said to him, "Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?"

Now they sailors all have questions.

What have you done to bring this trouble on us?

What do you do for a living?

Where do you come from, what is your country, what is your ethnic background?

Perhaps if they could get the answers to these questions, maybe by “chance” they would get “lucky” and find a god who could do something about this terrible storm!

Now here is the **irony** of this situation. Jonah ran away to keep from preaching to pagans in Nineveh and now he is forced to preach to pagans anyway!

Jonah 1:9

So he said to them, "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

We will see that natural religion and man’s works will not help at all.

But see what true or revealed religion produces.

Now we will see the effect of **revealed religion**.

True religion from God Almighty!

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The main reference materials used in this study are acknowledged at the end of this series of sermons.

Jonah
“But the LORD ...”

Not superstition but the identity of the only true God!

Jonah said, **“I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”**

The **“LORD”** is Jehovah; the self-Existent or Eternal; Jewish national name of God: **“the God”** is 'elohim specifically used (in the plural thus, especially with the article) of the supreme God.

Think about how Paul preached to the pagan philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens. He began with God as the Creator!

These sailors have traveled to all the ports on the Mediterranean Sea and they have heard about the God of the Hebrews who delivered them out of their bondage in Egypt by sending mighty plagues. They had heard of Him but now they are experiencing His power over the sea and over them.

Jonah 1:10

Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, "Why have you done this?" For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

Now they were more than “afraid”, they were **“exceedingly afraid!”**

The sailors were afraid and now they are **terrified!** This is not the power of some dumb idol that I can control **this storm is from the LORD who made the sea and the dry land!**

“Why have you done this?”

“If you believe in such a God and you disobey Him, are you crazy?”

Jonah 1:11

Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?" — for the sea was growing more tempestuous.

They respond in the only way that natural religion knows:

“What shall we do?”

Works versus grace, “What shall we do?”

Jonah
“But the LORD ...”

Jonah 1:12

And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me."

Could Jonah have prayed to God right now? Would God hear him? It is not that God would refuse to hear impenitent Jonah but that impenitent Jonah could not truly pray. The first prayer of a penitent soul begins with a resignation of its rebellion!

If we knowingly disobey the clearly revealed will of God do not think that God will hear us until we repent!

But Jonah thinks, I might as well get this over with, hurl me into the sea and the sea will become calm. Jonah was a prophet. He knew that God would calm the sea. But Jonah did not know what God had waiting for him under the sea. There are some things worse than dying and Jonah was about to find that out.

Jonah 1:13

Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them.

The sailors still trusted in themselves and rowed hard [digged their oars] but works never gets the job done because the storm grew worse. How much worse can it get?

Proverbs 21:30-31

**30 There is no wisdom or understanding
 Or counsel against the LORD.**

**31 The horse is prepared for the day of battle,
 But deliverance is of the LORD.**

Jonah 1:14-15

14 Therefore they cried out to the LORD and said, "We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You." 15 So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

Jonah
“But the LORD ...”

The sailors finally got the message and cried out, **“We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man’s life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You.”**

Have you ever gotten to the end of your striving against God?
 Are you ready to trust Jesus Christ and despise all your efforts to save yourself? Can you get in the ship with these sailors? Can you say, **“For You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You.”**

God is sovereign but He will not save you until you give up and trust Him alone. When you are brought to the place where the only hope you have is God then you are ready to be saved.

So after asking for forgiveness they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

Now see the further **irony** of Jonah. Jonah had run away from the presence of the LORD to keep from preaching to the pagans. Now he was forced to preach to pagan sailors and **he won’t even be there** to see that God saved the sailors.

God’s elect are found in strange places. A widow in Zareptath, a pagan Syrian general named Naaman, a prostitute at a well at Sychar, a thief on a cross next to our Lord, and pagan sailors headed for Tarshish.
 Even a wretch like me!

Has God found you?

Now here is the effect of revealed religion from the living God.

Jonah 1:16

16 Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows.

The sea became calm and there was calm in the hearts of the sailors.

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

The sailors turn from their idols and they worship the true and living God.

Jonah
“But the LORD ...”

Notice the order of events. This was not a “foxhole conversion” where a man is scared and promises God that if He spares him he will worship God.

Then when the danger is past he forgets his promise to God.

How many people felt a religious urge after 9/11 and are now back asleep?

But the sailors have truly repented.

After the storm had ceased to rage, **“Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.”**

Do not wait for the storm to rage around you.

Ask yourself and be honest with yourself:

“Have I truly placed all my hope and confidence in the life and work of the Lord Jesus Christ?”

**“I need no other argument, I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me.”**

We are learning from Jonah why the Lord Jesus Christ told the Pharisees that Jonah was the only sign that they would get concerning His authority.

God is sovereign. I would not worship a God who is not sovereign, yet many people don't believe that God is absolutely sovereign.

We have seen just how effective natural religion can be.
Row harder and the storms of life will only get worse!

Learn what revealed religion can do.

2 Corinthians 4:6

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Well, God has given His free grace to these pagan sailors through the preaching of the prophet Jonah. But Jonah has not yet learned what Jonah needs to know about God.

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Jonah
“But the LORD ...”

So today we have:

The introduction of the sovereignty of God,
How false or natural religion works,
And what true or revealed religion produces.

The next time I preach from Jonah [D.V.] we will begin at verse 17.

“Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”

The elders of this church are available to counsel with you at any time. If you are troubled about your soul do not suppress what may be the drawing of the Father to show you your need for Christ.

The message is the invitation.

Jim Gunn