

Jonah and the Sailors – Part 2

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – God hurls a storm at the ship in which Jonah flees, and the sailors throw him overboard
2. aim – To cause us to understand that there are deep consequences to disobedience
3. passage – Jonah 1:4-17

b. outline

1. The Storm Rages Over Jonah (Jonah 1:4-5)
2. The Sailors Confront Jonah (Jonah 1:6-10)
3. The Sea Receives Jonah (Jonah 1:11-17)

c. opening

1. the **nature** of the pericope
 - a. **continuing today: B¹:** Jonah and the sailors (1:4-17)
 - b. this pericope is *sandwiched* between Jonah's disobedience and Jonah's grateful prayer
 1. it represents what happens when a man is disobedient to the *explicit call of God*
2. the **place** in the pericope
 - a. **last week:** the Lord (himself!) hurls a great storm at the ship on which Jonah flees
 1. he sleeps through the storm because he is **oblivious** to his own sinfulness – he is so *convinced* that his choice was right that he sees *no danger* in running from the Lord
 2. the captain awakens Jonah, seeking for him to join the others in appealing to their gods
 - a. **i.e.** the men believe that there is *some causal connection* between *them* and the *storm*
 - b. **IOW:** this is *more* than just “get up and help us” ...
 - b. **observation:** the story of **Jonah** is so “familiar” that we have a tendency to *overlook* certain details
 1. **e.g.** this part of the story raises some *interesting* questions (x6) that no one ever seems to ask
 2. **i.e.** details that *actually tell us much* about Jonah and his *rebellion* against the Lord (**see below**)

II. The Sailors Confront Jonah (Jonah 1:6-10)

Content

b. the sailors determine Jonah's “guilt” (vv. 7-8)

1. the sailors “*cast lots*” to determine who is the guilty party among them
 - a. **again:** they *inherently* believe that this event is *more* than just a typical storm – it has *all the hallmarks* of a “divine” wrath being brought against someone on board
 1. maybe out of *rank superstition* (**i.e.** as polytheistic pagans, where *everything* that happens is due to men's *specific* evil; **e.g.** the assertion of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar in **Job**)
 2. or ... maybe out of a *deep suspicion* that Jonah is somehow involved (**i.e.** given that he is a *passenger* on a cargo ship, a rather interesting **coincidence**, perhaps?)
 - b. so, the sailors decide to use a “technique” that they believe will reveal the guilty party
 1. **note:** casting lots was a *common approach* to seeking divine help, amongst the various Semitic nations in the Middle East *and* amongst the Jews (**e.g. Joshua 18; Matthew 27; Acts 1**)
 2. **in fact:** the method is *obviously* “under” the sovereign nature of God (**Proverbs 16:33**)
“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.”
 3. and (surprise!!) ... the lot “*fell on Jonah*” – however they did it, it came up pointing to him
 - c. **question #1:** why didn't Jonah just *confess* that he was responsible for the storm, before lots?
 1. **IOW:** he *must have known* that the storm was due to *his* negligence (**see v. 12**)
 2. **note:** in **v. 10b**, we are told that Jonah “*had told them*” that he was “*fleeing from the ... Lord*”
 - a. **so: when** did he tell them that? – answer: *after* they had cast lots – otherwise, they would not have had to “get it out of him” (**i.e.** Jonah only *later* confesses what he was doing)
 3. **answer:** Jonah didn't *immediately* confess his responsibility *because he was still in full-on rebellion against the Lord* (he refused to “concede” that *God was using this against him*)
 - a. **i.e.** like his “baby-like” sleep, he was *still convinced* that his choice was *right*
 4. **principle (again): the Christian must always be “examining himself” (2 Cor. 13:5)**
 - a. we must always be ready to *admit* our sin and seek reconciliation with God
 - b. **i.e.** this is the *nature* of the *new heart* given to us in Christ: **a pursuit of holiness**

2. the sailors *interrogate* Jonah as to his background, through several questions:
 - a. “on whose account [is] this evil?” = the *primary* query – are you the guilty party, and (if so!), why?
 1. **i.e.** for what *reason* has this event risen up against us – what have you done?
 2. **note:** in **v. 9**, Jonah *doesn’t actually answer this question (see below)*
 - b. “what is your occupation?” = the *secondary* query – are you some sort of *prophet* or *priest*?
 1. **i.e.** the question of *occupation* would *imply* some sense within them that Jonah was involved in some sort of “religious” activity, and that this storm was related to that reality
 2. **note:** in **v. 9**, Jonah *doesn’t actually answer this question either (see below)*
 - c. “where do you come from (etc.)?” = the *tertiary* query – what is your *ethnicity*?
 1. **i.e.** the *gods* you worship would be determined by your country-of-origin, and that might tell us something about *why* this situation is happening to us
 2. **note:** in **v. 9**, this is the question that Jonah answers (**see below**)
 - d. **IOW:** the sailors *believe* that Jonah is at fault, and *force him to give them an answer as to why*
- c. the sailors learn of Jonah’s background (v. 9)
 1. Jonah “confesses” who he is and who he worships as God:
 - a. “I am a Hebrew” = I am of the *people* (ethnically) descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
 1. **remember:** at *this point* in Israelite history, Israel is a “divided” kingdom – Jonah *does not call himself an Israelite*, for his *point* is to note *which God* he worships (not which “part” of Israel)
 - b. “I fear the LORD, the God of heaven ...” = lit. I fear Yahweh, the *only* God (**i.e.** monotheism)
 1. and ... he *describes* Yahweh as the One who “made the sea and the dry land” (**i.e.** the *Creator* God; the One who is in control of the *physical universe*; the God who *can whip up storms*)
 2. **irony:** Jonah makes a *proper confession* of his understanding of God, yet *it is against this God* that Jonah is rebelling – his “confession” is true, **but not applied to himself**
 - c. **note:** it is *probably at this point* that Jonah reveals *the rest of the story (v. 10b)* – **i.e.** his occupation (as a prophet) and his flight from the calling of the Lord (the “account” of why this evil has come)
 2. **how much effort does it take others to get you to confess that you are a follower of Christ?**
- d. the sailors fear Jonah’s God (v. 10)
 1. **question #2:** *why* were the sailors “exceedingly afraid” – of what *else* could they be frightened?
 - a. **assumption:** they are afraid of *being caught up in Jonah’s sin* – of God looking to *destroy* Jonah, and them *along with him* (**i.e.** suddenly seeing this as a *communal destruction* rather than an *individual failure*; **remember v. 7**)
 - b. **answer:** they have encountered *the Living God*, even as represented by Jonah – his *existence* (in the face of their *ignorant* paganism) is *obviously evident*, and they *don’t know how to deal with it*
 1. **i.e.** for the *first time* they’ve actually encountered a “living” God (contra their *fictional* ones)
 2. so ... the reasons for the storm have been made *abundantly clear* ... **what do we do now??**

III. The Sea Receives Jonah (Jonah 1:11-17)

Content

a. the sailors ask Jonah what to do (vv. 11-12)

1. **note:** as the sailors look for solutions, the “sea grew more and more tempestuous” (**vv. 11 and 13**)
 - a. **i.e.** it’s almost (!!) as though God “speaks” to the sailors, forcing them into what to do ...
2. so ... Jonah tells them “pick me up and hurl me into the sea” = just as you threw the cargo overboard, so throw me over *too* (**ITC:** to “lighten” the ship of the *source of your trouble*)
3. **question #3:** why doesn’t Jonah just say “turn the ship around and I will head back to Nineveh?”
 - a. **i.e.** if the *reason* why the ship is in danger is because *he is going the wrong way*, wouldn’t it stand to reason that *turning around* might solve the problem?
 - b. **true:** the sailors will try this approach and fail (**see v. 13**), but *why doesn’t Jonah suggest it?*
 - c. **answer:** see next question ...
4. **question #4:** why doesn’t Jonah just *jump overboard* – why must they “hurl [him] into the sea?”
 - a. or ... why does he put *the sailors in jeopardy before God* (**note v. 14; see below**)
 - b. **answer:** because Jonah *still* refuses to go to Nineveh, yet he knows that *certain death* awaits him in the sea (**i.e.** he has *no idea* that a “great fish” is waiting for him)
 1. **IMO:** he is *afraid* of dying (so he won’t commit “suicide”), but his *stubbornness* refuses to abate
 2. Jonah is “caught” between two *self-inflicted* realities: he can’t go back, and *he can’t go forward*
 - c. **cognitive dissonance** = the inability to see an *inherent contradiction* within one’s position; the flaw within *fallen* humanity of fundamentally embracing *two contradictory thoughts simultaneously*
 1. **e.g.** to tout abortion as “reproductive health”, yet oppose capital punishment as “barbaric”

5. so ... Jonah tells the sailors to toss him overboard in order for their lives to be spared ...

b. the sailors look for an *alternative solution* (v. 13)

1. “*they rowed hard*” = they didn’t want to accept Jonah’s solution, so they tried to do *what he hadn’t suggested* – **i.e.** they tried an *alternative solution* (one better suited to their *fear of God*)
2. “*but they could not ...*” = assuming that God is *still* controlling the storm (**v. 4**), it would appear that there was *only one option* for the sailors ...

c. the sailors toss Jonah overboard (vv. 14-16)

1. “*they called out to the Lord*” = they cried out to the God of Jonah that his “*innocent blood*” would not be on their hands (**i.e.** making the argument that it was *God’s will* for this outcome)
2. **question #5:** why doesn’t *Jonah himself* cry out to the Lord and seek his mercy?
 - a. **answer: (again!)** another evidence that Jonah *still refused* to obey the call of God
3. **question #6:** does this make these men “innocent” of what they do, as it appears to be *God’s will*?
 - a. they *claim* Jonah is “*innocent blood*”, *ignoring* that he is *guilty* of bringing down this calamity
 1. yet *they choose* to do an “evil” thing (which they try to *justify*)
 2. **e.g.** Pilate’s attempt to wash the blood of Jesus off his hands (who was innocent; **Matt. 27:24**) *made no difference in his judgment* – he *knew* Jesus was innocent, yet condemned him anyway
 - b. **answer:** *no one* will stand before God and “justify” his *sinful actions* as though they were the “will of God” – God’s judgment *is always righteous* even when he *ordains* for the sinful actions of men to be a part of his larger purpose
 1. **IOW:** both the sailors and Pilate *made a sinful choice* – they were not *coerced into it* by a “capricious” God that “used” them for his dastardly purpose
 2. **ITC:** God *saved Jonah from drowning*, “mitigating” their actions (as was God’s *larger plan*)
 - a. **i.e.** the circumstances in *this* situation ultimately **vindicated the sailors** ...
4. so ... the sailors “*hurled him into the sea*” and the Lord calmed the storm

d. the great fish swallows Jonah (v. 17)

1. **note:** we will “tack” an examination of this verse onto the beginning of the next pericope ...
2. in **v. 16**, the sailors “*fear the Lord [Yahweh] greatly*” and **they worship him in sacrifices and vows**
 - a. **i.e.** the Lord used *all of this* to draw a few pagan sailors to himself, **in an act of great mercy ...**
 - b. God had *intended* to show mercy to the Ninevites through Jonah (**see below**), but wound up showing mercy to a handful of pagan sailors through Jonah *first*
3. **e.g.** the **inscrutability of God** = the nature of God whereby he is *utterly unknowable* by us, as creatures, for his judgments are unsearchable and ways are “beyond finding out” (**Romans 11:33**)