

# God is in Control

By Barry Minsky

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Jonah

**Preached on:** November 12, 2006

## **Quacco Baptist Church**

215 Quacco Road  
Savannah, GA 31419

**Website:** [www.quaccobaptist.org](http://www.quaccobaptist.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/minsky](http://www.sermonaudio.com/minsky)

Tonight we are going to look at the book of Jonah and I think everybody is familiar with Jonah. We all know the story of his encounter. We all know the story of the big fish and how he was swallowed by the fish and how the fish spat him up on dry land. We know the story of his encounter in the city of Nineveh.

But there are certain themes in the book of Jonah that I think are just incredibly profound that can have tremendous impact on our lives as we begin to understand them and recognize the truths that God has presented in this wonderful portion of his Word.

First of all, the man Jonah. The name Jonah means dove, the bird, the dove. I don't know what significance that is, but that is the meaning of the name of this prophet.

We read about him in a historical sense once before in the Old Testament in 2 Kings chapter 14 and let me turn to that with you, 2 Kings chapter 14 and in verse 25.

Now this is a time when Jeroboam II was king in Israel and Jeroboam II was one of the worst kings of Israel. The only problem is every time we read about a king of Israel we can say that. I mean, they didn't have any good ones.

If you look at the other nation that was created when the nation was divided and you have Judah, there were some good kings, not too many. But there was not a single king in Israel that is spoken of as a good king.

But this one... Let us read a little bit about the history of this man and then we will see where Jonah fits in. Beginning with verse 23 it says:

In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel became king in Samaria, and reigned forty-one years. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD.<sup>1</sup>

Boy, if there is any one thing I would not want to be my epitaph that is it. Can you imagine the one thing that is said about this man is he did evil in the sight of the Lord. There was a king over God's people.

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings 14:23-24

did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin. He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.<sup>2</sup>

The interesting thing is this is the only thing that we read in the Old Testament about the prophet Jonah. We only know about him that that God used him to predict that the border would be restored to Israel under the leadership of Jeroboam II. There was a northern border of Israel that had been lost and because of the work of Jeroboam the border was restored. That is all we know about this man whose name means the dove.

He is mentioned twice in the New Testament and interestingly he is mentioned in connection with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, with his death and burial and resurrection. He is used as an example for we know that Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights. And so we read—and let's turn to these passages—in Matthew chapter 12 and verse 39 it says this.

But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here."<sup>3</sup>

And then a similar passage to that one is in Luke chapter 11 beginning with verse 29, Luke 11 beginning in verse 29 and it says this.

And as the crowds were increasing, He began to say, "This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so shall the Son of Man be to this generation."<sup>4</sup>

That's all we know about the prophet Jonah other than what we have in the book about him.

The first lesson we learn is that God uses this man as a type or a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you know there are many types of Christ in the Old Testament? In fact, one of the... what I consider to be one of the most fascinating studies of the Old Testament is to look at the types of the Lord Jesus Christ that what individuals picture Christ in various ways.

---

<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings 14:24-25

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 12:39-41

<sup>4</sup> Luke 11:29-30

And here was Jonah. Jonah was someone whose life was actually one of a life that involved a rebellion against God. And yet God chose to use him as a picture of the death and the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I often think that this says to me that our lives can honor God even if at times we have been rebellious, even if at times we have done things that do not honor God. Yet, he can use us. Just as he chose to use Jonah in the story that we are going to recount and then also chose to use him as a type of the Lord Jesus. When we seek to honor God, God will use us for his honor and for his glory.

Well, what is the second message that we get from the book of Jonah? I think that one of the most profound is the message of God's sovereignty. You know, the Word of God tells us that we have a sovereign God. He is in control. He runs the show. He is in charge.

It says, excuse me, in the book of Ephesians chapter one and verse 11, that he is the one who does all things "after the counsel of his will."<sup>5</sup> In other words, he is the ruler. He is in charge.

Well, in the book of Jonah we find that God controls many, many things. Let's take a look at them as we just quickly go through the book and see those.

First of all it says in chapter one and verse four, "And the LORD hurled a great wind on the sea."<sup>6</sup> God is in charge of the elements. If God wants there to be a rough sea for a reason in his purpose, he will create the rough sea. You know, interestingly enough, he can do the opposite.

Remember, we read of the Lord Jesus Christ when he was in a boat and the sea was rough and the disciples came to him and they spoke to him about it and he told the sea to calm down and so it did.

Well, here we are told that God hurled a great wind at the sea and there was a great storm.

When we read of the great fish that swallowed up Jonah—and, by the way, it is not a whale. It is a great fish according to the Hebrew here. I know we always speak of Jonah and the whale. It was a fish. A whale is not a fish, a whale is a mammal. But here what about this fish? Why did the fish swallow Jonah? Why? Why did the fish choose to swallow Jonah?

Well, we read in verse 17 of chapter one, "And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah."<sup>7</sup> In other words God chose that this was going to happen. God chose that the fish would swallow Jonah. I am sure that God picked the exact fish. It wasn't just any fish. God chose this particular fish. It says that. He appointed that fish. And that

---

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 1:11

<sup>6</sup> Jonah 1:4

<sup>7</sup> Jonah 1:17

fish had a job and the only job that that fish had in his life was to swallow Jonah and so he did.

God is in charge. God is in control.

Well, that wasn't the end of the story. You know that the fish, after swallowing Jonah, eventually spit Jonah up on dry land. Well, how did that happen?

We go into the second chapter and we read in verse 10, "Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land."<sup>8</sup>

You know, God commands the fish. God is in charge of the sea. God appoints a fish. What does this say to us? It says God is in control. He is sovereign. He is the ruler. He has control over the elements and over the universe.

What is interesting is that Jonah was aware of that. Jonah was aware that God is in control. How do we know that? Well, in the ninth verse of this same chapter, in the second chapter Jonah says these words at the end of the verse. "Salvation is from the LORD."<sup>9</sup>

And the word "salvation" there not only talks about the kind of salvation that we think of, but it is speaking of any kind of rescue. In other words, he is saying—and at the time that he said this he was in the belly of the fish—and he was aware of the fact that there was only one possibility for his salvation from his difficult situation. And if I were in a fish's belly I would consider that a pretty difficult situation. It was only God who could do something because God is sovereign. God is in control.

Oh, we continue reading in the story and we find that Jonah eventually does preach to Nineveh and we will look at this in a few minutes in a little more detail. He eventually preaches to Nineveh and he gets very upset over the fact that God decides to save the people of Nineveh. He didn't like that idea.

I read a book one time that was very interesting. It was talking about the various prophets. And the title of the chapter about Jonah was "Jonah didn't like foreign missions either." I thought it was rather humorous, anyway.

But, you see, Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh, but he went finally. He preached the Word and the people got saved and Jonah got upset about it. He didn't want that to happen. And so we find that Jonah is moping. He is in the city. He sits down by a shelter and God chooses to have a plant grow up. It says a gourd. It is most likely that this plant is a castor oil plant.

---

<sup>8</sup> Jonah 2:10

<sup>9</sup> Jonah 2:9

Now the reason we think that is that that is an extremely fast growing plant in that area. It is something that can grow up over night and that is what we are told happened. And so how did the plant grow up and give shelter to Jonah?

Again, we read of God's control. It says in chapter four and verse six, "So the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head."<sup>10</sup> God chose a plant. And God caused the plant to grow to give shelter to Jonah. God is in control. He is the boss. He is sovereign.

Well, God didn't want the plant to stay there forever and there was a purpose for that.

And so we go down to the seventh verse and it says this. "But God appointed a worm."<sup>11</sup>

Well, you know, I don't know. Did you ever think that God is control of worms? I mean, think about this for a moment. We think of God being in control of the big things. You know, I mean, God is in control of major things that happen in the universe. God is in control of everything. He is even in control of a worm. And he chose this worm and he appointed the worm so that the worm would attack the plant so that the plant would be withered. Isn't that amazing? The story that we have here, the message that we have is that we have a sovereign God. He is in control. He is the boss. He runs the show.

I find that amazing. One of the things that amazes me is that sometimes we, as believers, can tend to forget that. And yet we gather together here on Wednesday night and we have a prayer meeting. And we turn to God and we pray. What is the reason why we pray? Well, the reason why we pray is that we know that God has the power to answer prayer. If God did not have the power to answer prayer, if God were not sovereign, if God were not in control we should cancel prayer meeting, wouldn't you say? What is the purpose of praying if we don't have a God who has the power to answer the prayers that we lift up to him? That is the point of the book of Jonah that God is in control.

Now this book is actually divided into two parts. And both parts begin with basically the same words, the first two chapters and the second two chapters.

The first chapter begins with the words, "The word of the LORD came to Jonah."<sup>12</sup>

And then chapter three, the second part begins with, "Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time."<sup>13</sup>

So we have two messages to Jonah that are being presented here. God challenges the prophet. He says, "Arise and go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it for their wickedness has come up before me."<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Jonah 4:6

<sup>11</sup> Jonah 4:7

<sup>12</sup> Jonah 1:1

<sup>13</sup> Jonah 3:1

<sup>14</sup> See Jonah 3:2

Now there is implied in this that God is going to do something and Jonah understood it. What God was going to do was that on the basis of Jonah's preaching he was going to lead the Ninevites to faith and they were going to be saved.

Now Jonah did not like that idea.

Some may ask the question, "Why not? Aren't we supposed to be interested in foreign missions? I mean shouldn't it be our goal to get out and reach people with the gospel? Shouldn't the message of God's love go out to all the world?"

And, of course, the answer is yes. If we understand that Nineveh was the great capital of Assyria and the Assyrians were an extremely wicked people, I mean not only in their immorality, but in the way that they treated captured nations, in the incredible cruelty of the way that they dealt with others. And so like a lot of other people in that day Jonah was not really excited about going to Nineveh.

This would be... If you could pick a place where there dwelt folks that you would consider your enemies, people that you knew would want to kill you, people that you knew would want to harm you and God says to you, "I want you to go to those people and to preach the Word of God."

Now, hopefully each one of us would say, "Yes, Lord. We are going to go."

But the initial attitude might be, "I don't want to go there. I mean, you have got to be kidding, Lord. You know, send me somewhere else, but not to Nineveh. I mean, any place in the world. But don't send me to Nineveh."

That was the attitude that Jonah had.

And there is a sense in which—although obviously I disagree with his reaction—there is a sense in which I can understand the feelings behind it.

Well, Jonah did exactly the opposite of what God told him to do. Instead of going to Assyria, he went to Tarshish. It is in about the opposite direction. He went and got on a ship. It is as if God said, "I want you to go to New York," and instead you got on a train to California. That is the concept. You went just the opposite way that God was directing. That is what Jonah did.

But God had a plan. God was going to use Jonah in a very special way. He was on the ship. And Jonah went down into the hull of the ship and he was sleeping. And all of the sudden there came up an incredible storm, a storm that was so bad that it was going to destroy the ship.

The people on the ship who were various backgrounds and worshipped many false gods got together and they all prayed to their god. And Jonah was there. And so someone

encountered Jonah and said, “Why are you sleeping? Don’t you see what is going on? Who are you? Get up and pray to your god.”

Now, at first I’m sure they had no concept that Jonah’s God was the God of the universe, the one who was in control. But they just wanted some more prayer going up to some other god so maybe some god might answer and they would be safe.

They asked him the question, “Who are you? Where are you from?”

And he explained that he was a Hebrew and he feared the God of heaven that made the sea and the dry land. And they were frightened and they asked him, apparently believing what he was saying, ‘What is it that I should do? How can we calm down the sea? What do we need to do?’

Jonah gave them an answer that actually seems pretty strange. The answer was, “Throw me overboard and it will be all right.”

I don’t know whether I would want to say that, would you? How many of you would say to somebody, “Now, this is what you need to do. You need to pick me up and you throw me in the rough sea and everything will be ok.”

In other words, Jonah was telling the truth for he understood that what he did had caused the disruption on the ship. And they did exactly what he said. They picked him up. They threw him in the sea and the sea calmed down and everything was all right on the ship.

Everything was not ok for Jonah, but everything was all right on the ship. And at this point God appoints the great fish who swallows Jonah and Jonah is now in the belly of the fish.

Well, you know, there have been some interesting accounts of people who have been swallowed by large fish. I have read a couple of them. In reading a commentary some time ago in the book of Jonah there have been some evidence about people that actually have been swallowed by a fish and have been spat up. It has happened.

Now it is not normal. I am not recommending that you go find a big fish and be swallowed by it. That’s not my recommendation. But it has happened.

Some have said, “Well, you couldn’t live for three days and three nights in the belly of a fish. All of the acids that would destroy, that would grind down food and make it palatable for digestion would have an effect on the human body.”

Well, certainly it would. Of course, God is in control of all that.

Jonah was in the belly of the fish and he prays a prayer. It is an interesting prayer. We don’t have the time to read it now. It is most of chapter two. And in this prayer he comments on the fact that God is the one who can save his life.

He says this in verse six:

I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, But Thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD; And my prayer came to Thee, Into Thy holy temple.<sup>15</sup>

He ends this by saying, “Salvation is from the LORD.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, “I have faith in you, Lord. You are the only one who can save me.” And then it says that God commanded the fish to vomit up Jonah.

Well, Jonah then is given another message by God. I mean, I like second chances, don't you? I mean, God says, “Go to Nineveh,” so he heads towards Tarshish.

This time God says, “Go to Nineveh,” and he went to Nineveh. Good for you, Jonah. I appreciate that.

Well, he goes to Nineveh and he proclaims the message to the Ninevites and God in his matchless love finds that the people of Nineveh turn to him and believe and worship him. And we are told in verse six of chapter three.

When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on the ashes. And he issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.<sup>17</sup>

Isn't that amazing? These wicked people who had been the destroyers of nations as in mass turned to God and worshipped him and praised him.

Well, what reaction did Jonah have? I mean good old Jonah who didn't like foreign missions, who didn't want to go to Nineveh in the first place was very unhappy. Now, I don't know. That's not a normal reaction as far as I am concerned. If you go and you share the gospel with someone and that person trusts in Christ as Savior and Lord, don't you get excited about it? I do. That's a thrilling experience. That is a life changing experience in the life of a person. And here is Jonah seeing the multitude of people in a whole city turning to Christ. Boy, I would get excited turning to the Lord. I would get excited about that.

---

<sup>15</sup> Jonah 2:6-7

<sup>16</sup> Jonah 2:9

<sup>17</sup> Jonah 3:6-8



Not Jonah, not Jonah. Listen to what it says in the beginning of the fourth chapter. It says, “But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry.”<sup>18</sup> And it says he prayed to the Lord and he says:

Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, “If you are going to save Nineveh, kill me. I don’t want to see this, Lord. If there is anything I don’t want it is the salvation of Nineveh. I hate these people.” That is what he is saying. That is what he is saying.

God had a lesson to teach Jonah. Here was a man who needed some lessons, isn’t he? He is a fellow who really had a problem. He was turning away from the will of God. And so he plans a teaching exercise for Jonah.

Jonah goes and basically we find him sobbing and crying and he is unhappy and he is distraught and, “Oh, Lord, why in the world did you save these people?”

And we turn to the fifth verse and it says, “Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, “I am just going to see what goes on here because I just, you know, I don’t believe this. I don’t believe what is going on.”

And God, at this point, causes this plant to grow up and while Jonah is there something happens and Jonah becomes happy. Why is Jonah happy? Because Nineveh is saved? No. Because he has this shade plant.

You know, he doesn’t like Nineveh. He is not happy because they are saved, but he likes the plant because it is giving him shade. So he is happy because of the plant, but not because of Nineveh. Isn’t that getting your priorities a little mixed up? It certainly is.

So God, to give him the message, appoints a worm to destroy the plant and the plant is destroyed. And we find out that Jonah is sitting there and he is crying his little heart out and he says to God, “Death is better than life for me.”

Here I where the lesson comes in. And it is not only a lesson for Jonah, but it is a lesson for anybody, for those who know the Lord and may because of their own sinful inclinations turn to do the wrong thing.

---

<sup>18</sup> Jonah 4:1

<sup>19</sup> Jonah 4:2-3

<sup>20</sup> Jonah 4:5

And this is what God says to Jonah. He says, “Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?”<sup>21</sup>

Listen to Jonah. What does he say? He says, “I have good reason to be angry.” In other words, “Lord, yeah. I have a good reason to be angry. You give me a plant and then you destroy the thing,” not even thinking about Nineveh and all the people to be saved.

And God says to him and this is the ultimate message of the book of Jonah. “You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work, and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.”<sup>22</sup>

“You had compassion on a plant. It is nothing. It doesn’t mean anything. It grew up and it fell down. But there was your compassion because it gave to you something. It gave you shade.”

“And should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?”<sup>23</sup>

What did he mean by that difference between the right and left hand? They had no concept of God and his grace and his blessing.

Jonah is told—and this, I believe, is a message to all believers—“Jonah you have to get your priorities straight. Jonah, you have to begin to focus on what it is that God wants you to do, on what is valuable in life and what is meaningful.”

Sometimes we, as believers, get our priorities all mixed up, don’t we? Sometimes we do. Sometimes we focus on our possessions like the plant that gives shade or the home in which we live or the automobile that we drive or the money that we have in our pockets or the food that we eat.

And sometimes like Jonah we can forget the mission that God has sent us to. We can forget the goals in life that he lays before us. When God says, “Go to Nineveh and preach to them,” he means, “Go to Nineveh and preach to them.”

Now I don’t think he has told any of us to go to Nineveh. Couldn’t. It doesn’t exist anymore. But he has told us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He has told us to go and to tell our neighbors about Christ.

And how marvellous it would be if every Christian took that mission and that responsibility with the seriousness with which the challenge was given by God. When we can begin to focus more on the priorities that God lays down rather than the priorities

---

<sup>21</sup> See Jonah 4:4

<sup>22</sup> Jonah 4:11

<sup>23</sup> Jonah 4:12

that the world would lay down for us, that we focus on the mission rather than all the other peripheral things in our lives.

And so when we do that we find that God will bless.

Well, I trust that none of us will be thrown over a ship by a group of men and swallowed up by a fish. But I will tell you. If we don't serve him we will find that our lives will be lives of the kind of sadness that Jonah had, sitting there and moping under the plant that God had given him.

Some of us might be moping in the house that God has given us. Our goal is to get out, find the ministry in which God wants us to use our talents for his glory that he might be lifted up, that his name might be glorified in all the earth.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we thank you for the message of the prophet Jonah. Lord, you have chosen to use him as an example of the death and burial of the Lord Jesus Christ. You have chosen to give a picture of your sovereignty in this wonderful book. And, Lord, we thank you, Father, that in the end Jonah did preach to Nineveh. Lord, may it be that we will lift up the ministry to which you have called each one of us and even if we are extremely faithful today, that we might be even more faithful for your glory. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*