



“A Whale of a Tale” (Jonah 2013)

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Intro: Boy do I have a whale of a tale to share with you tonight!

Chapter 1

v.1 II Kings 14:25 tells us that Jonah was from Gath Hopher, which was located 2-3 miles north of Nazareth in Galilee. Remember when Nicodemus confronted his fellow Pharisees about their unjust plans against Jesus? (See John 7: 52.) So the Pharisees were mistaken when they said that no prophet ever came from Galilee, because Jonah was from Galilee. Jonah’s initial ministry was to northern Israel, and his message was that God was going to bless Israel by extending her political boundaries.

v.2 Nineveh was the capital of ancient Assyria. It was built by Nimrod (Gen.10:11), who was “a mighty warrior on the earth” (Gen.10:8). Nineveh was second only to Babylon in size. It had 1200 - 200 foot towers and a 100 foot high wall with the foundation of polished stone and was so wide that three chariots could drive on top of it. The Assyrians were the world power in Jonah’s day (Like America today). They were known for their brutal atrocities it inflicted on their captives of war. People so feared them that on some occasions an entire town would commit suicide rather than fall into their brutal hands.

v.3 It was 500 miles to Nineveh, but it was 2,000 miles to Tarshish! Jonah is attempting to get as far away from God as he possibly can. Of course we all know that you can run from God, but you cannot hide (see Psalm 139:1-12).

vv.4-7 Prov.16: 33 The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

vv.8-10 At least he’s honest!

v.17 We are not told that it was a whale, but whatever kind of fish it was, its belly was big enough to house Jonah alive for three days and three nights. Of course Jesus said that this was a sign of him being three days and three nights in the grave after his death on the cross (Matt.12:40).

Chapter Two

vv.1-9 It is incredible how being in very desperate situations aids our prayer life! And the more desperate the situation, the greater the promises we make to God (v.9b).

v.10 God hears Jonah's prayer and answers it by causing the fish to get sick (of Jonah) and regurgitate him up on the beach! I cannot help but think of Rev.3:14-16. Jonah was not "cold" toward God. He openly confesses to the sailors that he worships the God of heaven. But he is certainly not "hot" toward God, otherwise he'd be headed to Nineveh!

Chapter Three:

vv.1-4 Note: Dr. Harry Rimmer, former president of the Research Science Bureau of Los Angeles, tells of an English sailor who years ago was swallowed by a whale shark in the English Channel. In an attempt to harpoon the whale, this sailor fell overboard, and before he could be rescued, was swallowed by this great sea monster! Forty-eight hours after this occurred, the whale was sighted and slain. When the shark was opened to retrieve the body of this sailor, they were amazed to find this guy alive but unconscious. He was rushed to the hospital, where he was found to be suffering from shock. After his recovery, they put this fellow on display in a London Museum advertised as "The Jonah of the Twentieth Century." When Dr. Rimmer met this man (two years after the event), he was devoid of hair, and had patches of a yellowish-brown color covering his entire body. The gastric juices of the fish had changed the man's appearance for life. That is no doubt what happened to Jonah, and probably helped him gain everyone's attention as he preached.

vv.5-9 This is the greatest revival ever recorded in the Scriptures! And the contrast here of the response of the Ninevites compared to the response of Jonah's own people, the Israelites, is amazing. Hosea and Amos were contemporaries of Jonah, but their ministries were pretty fruitless.

Chapter Four:

vv.1-3 In other words, Jonah did not want the people of Nineveh to repent. He wanted them to perish in hell, because they were brutal bitter enemies of Israel.

v.4 Good question. God had extended grace and mercy to Jonah in rescuing him from "the depths of the grave" (Jonah 2:2), but he is upset when God extends the same grace and mercy to the people of Nineveh.

Remember how the early church had a difficult time accepting that God had granted repentance to the Gentiles (Acts 11:18)? Remember who was initially sent to share the gospel with the Gentiles? Peter (Acts 10). And Peter would later write II Peter 3:8-9, telling us that God wants *everyone* to repent and be saved. See Isa.49:6; 19:19-25.

vv.5-6 Jonah does not deserve this kindness from the Lord. He has an attitude toward God. He is angry at God. But despite Jonah's attitude, God is gracious to him. Is there a message there? Note: This is the only time in the story where Jonah is really happy!

vv.7-9 He wanted to die. Guess what? He deserved to die! One commentator described Jonah as a “sulking, griping, self-absorbed little man.”

vv.10-11 Jonah cared more for his personal comfort than he did for the spiritual destiny of thousands of people.

LESSONS from “A Whale of a Tale”

1. It’s foolish to run or try to hide from God.
2. Obedience to the Lord should not be dependent on:
 - a. Feeling
 - b. Understanding
3. God loves people whom we do not.
 - Is there anyone you’d be disappointed in seeing in heaven?
 - Jesus died for the Hitlers of this world.
4. Anyone can be saved.
 - Matt.12: 41 The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here.
 - Saul of Tarsus; Sometimes the most unlikely people repent more easily than those we would expect to repent.
5. Are there limitations as to people that you would go to share with if God called you?
 - If God called someone in Israel to go to the area of Nineveh today, he would have to be willing to go to Iraq, for that is where Nineveh was located! (Opposite the modern day city of Mosul.)
6. Are there limitations on where you will go if God called you?
 - Nineveh was located on the east side of the Tigris River about 550 miles northeast of Samaria. It was a journey of more than one month traveling the average 15-20 miles per day.
7. God is looking for more than obedience.
 - “Bare obedience can harden us to God more than disobedience can. If you doubt it, compare the older boy with the younger one in the parable of the prodigal; compare

the Pharisee and religious rulers with the tax collectors and prostitutes in the stories about Jesus. Or just look at Jonah.” (Your God Is Too Safe, Mark Buchanan, p.49)

8. God’s grace and discipline do not always work in changing a disciple’s heart/attitude.
 - God’s grace toward Jonah did not make him a gracious man; God’s discipline of Jonah did not soften his heart.

CONCLUSION

- The story of Jonah ends without telling us if Jonah ever repented of his ungodly attitude. “The lack of resolution as the book closes invites the reader to examine if his or her heart is more in line with the angry prophet or the merciful God.” (The Essence of the OT: A Survey, p.399)