

## Leave Me Alone, God

### Զիս Առանձին Ձգէ, Ով Տէր

A children's story. Jonah, Jonah in the whale...

What whale? The book does not even mention a whale. The Bible says, "a huge fish." We will study more about that next week. But let me tell you, this is more than a children's story.

#### Names of the prophet.

Usually, the names of the prophets have to do with God. Their names honor God.

**Jeremiah** means Yahweh will exalt, will lifted up

**Isaiah** means Yahweh is Salvation

**Joel** means Yahweh is God

**Ezekiel** means God's Strength

The names of the prophets honor God. What about **Jonah**? It means a **dove**.

1. Biblically, we see the dove that Noah sent out from the ark. It returned with an olive branch, which means peace and compassion. Jonah's message is that God will bring forgiveness and **peace and mercy** to Nineveh.

The "Dove" of peace (Jonah) will be His agent.

2. In the Old Testament, doves also **moan and lament** (Isa. 38:14; 59:11) as Jonah does in Jonah 4 (We will see later in the sermons).

3. Doves are also birds of **sacrifice** (Lev. 5:7, 11), just as Jonah became in chapter 1 to save the sailors.

4. Finally, the psalmist longs to be a dove **to flee from the terrors of death** (Ps. 55:4–8). Jonah flees like a dove in Jonah 1 from the terror of Nineveh.<sup>1</sup>

#### Let us start:

**The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: <sup>2</sup> "Arise, go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." <sup>3</sup> But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.**  
(Jonah 1:1-3 NIV 11)

Jonah is the only prophet that God sends to a non-Israelite nation to preach about repentance. (We have 16 prophetic books, 12 shorter and 4 longer.)

God told to Jonah: “Brother Jonah, get up, *qoum* in Hebrew, stand up... “yalla, time to get up and go to Nineveh.”

Jonah did get up and moved... but not to Nineveh. Instead of going East and North, he went South then West. **Jonah is literally running away from God to the opposite direction.**

He is the only prophet who disobeys God’s command, and then he writes about it. Almost all the prophetic books we read: **“Thus says the Lord” and then the prophecy follows.**

We don’t see that here. We read that Yahweh tells him to go to Nineveh. The Assyrians who lived there were wicked and they needed repentance. It is unique a book, short but full of messages.

In other prophetic books we find God giving words of prophecy (usually in poetic form) and prophets obeying God.

Here we have a story, a disobedient prophet. We will see God’s sovereign hand over these events. We will learn from the life of the prophet. We will find God’s mercy and love. We will learn about the word *hesed*, the loyal love of God.

### **-I don’t like your message, God**

Jonah knew his time. He knew the enemies of Israel. He knew the Torah (his Bible). Jonah knew the Word of God. He knew what God said to Moses in Exodus 34:5-7

**“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”** (Exodus 34:6-7 NIV11)

He knew that God is slow in anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, forgiving...

Also God is just, there is punishment of the wicked, the sinner, the rebellious...

Jonah is ok with the second part, but not the first part...

We see this coming in the 4th chapter...

**He prayed to the LORD, “Isn’t this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a**

**God who relents from sending calamity. <sup>3</sup> Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” (Jonah 4:2,3 NIV11)**

“Why should God be merciful and slow to anger...?”

“It makes me sick that you are like this, oh God... I want my enemies to die...take my life...let me die...” (my interpretation)

Oh, how many times I have felt that way?

Oh, how many times you have felt that way against individuals or nations or groups...

I have faced this feeling lately when Armenia was under attack.

**-Let us see why Jonah was so angry towards the Assyrians.**

When it was written and who were the Assyrians?

The narrative of Jonah is set in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. during the days of Jeroboam II (786–746 B.C.). “Jonah son of Amittai” is the prophet. (2 Kings 14:25)

Jonah follows Hosea and Amos, his contemporaries, who also prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II.

Micah follows Jonah since Micah prophesied after the death of Jeroboam II (Mic. 1:1).

The Assyrian king those days was Tiglath Pileser III. (745–727 BC)

The Assyrians were proud for being cruel and violent. They did terrible things for people who were captured during the war. (I cannot even write about those, so bad...). They tortured the prisoners of war, they slaved them and deported to the Assyrian cities for hard labor in building projects.

Tens of thousands in hundreds of cities suffered this fate over the two hundred and fifty years of the Assyrians’ reign of terror (c. 883–612).<sup>2</sup>

Thus, we understand how Jonah felt when God told him to be the messenger of “the good news” and “repentance.”

**Let’s go West**

**Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. <sup>5</sup> All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.**

**But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. (Jonah 1:4-5 NIV11)**

-How strange is this phenomenon! He is fleeing from God. He is on a ship going to Tarshish (most likely Spain), and the storm hits. He is going as far as he can. Interesting, that he does not stay in Jerusalem in the Temple (representing the presence of the Lord).

Maybe God would reveal something new....

He is going away. "Leave me alone, oh God..."

He is like the prodigal son who goes to a country far away, as far he can go from his father...

**There is a storm.** The sailors are afraid; they are crying out to their gods; they feel something is so wrong. They start throwing out the cargo. Our guy Jonah is sleeping deep inside the ship.

Seriously?

How can you have a **deep sleep** in a storm, my friend?

The ship is going to break... How much can one hide? Below the deck?

-In fact, if you read this in Hebrew you will laugh. It loses the meaning in translation.

Literally, the Hebrew says, "**and the ship considered to itself that it was breaking apart.**" As if the ship comes to life and talks:

"Hey, I am falling apart here..."

Everyone gets it except Jonah.

Jonah is sleeping.... this is a sad yet a humorous story...

**<sup>6</sup> The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."** (Jonah 1:6 NIV11)

The captain is terrified. SOS...SOS... "Help Wanted" sign: "All divine beings welcome to help... anyone..."

The captain is suggesting that Jonah should pray. I mean a non-Jewish captain has a better understanding about the power of prayer....??

**Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. <sup>8</sup> So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"**

**<sup>9</sup> He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I (fear) worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."**

**<sup>10</sup> This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)**

(Jonah 1:7-10)

Don't you love this dialogue. The pagan sailors are getting the sings of God more than Jonah.

Who are you? What is your name?

I am Hebrew, and I fear the Lord...

You fear the Lord?

Do you really fear the Lord who made heavens and earth?

The sailors are in fear anyway because of the storm. Now they are terrified because they heard about Yahweh, the God who rescued the Israelites from Egypt. What did you do Jonah?

**<sup>11</sup> The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"**

**<sup>12</sup> "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."**

(Jonah 1:11-12 NIV11)

Finally, Jonah is ready to be thrown into the sea to rescue the ship and the sailors. Funny, Jonah is ready to die, but he is not ready to obey God.

NIV commentary says:

"Jonah personally felt the weight of God's judgment in the storm at sea. He experienced his own false moral superiority (above God's!) in being willing to die for his position while sinking beneath the waves."<sup>3</sup>

### **Application:**

Where can we hide from God?

In Psalm 139 King David asked these questions. It looks like he had been in similar situations when he wanted to escape from God. He says:

**Where can I go from your Spirit?**

**Where can I flee from your presence?**

**<sup>8</sup> If I go up to the heavens, you are there;**

**if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.  
for darkness is as light to you.** (Psalm 139:7,8 NIV11)

We can escape and try to hide. Adam and Eve escaped when they sinned. They thought they could hide their shame... God gave them new clothes. God loves us, and He first sought us. The question, "Do we seek God?"

**<sup>6</sup> Seek the LORD while he may be found;  
call on him while he is near.**

**<sup>7</sup> Let the wicked forsake their ways  
and the unrighteous their thoughts.**

**Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them,  
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.**

**<sup>8</sup> "For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,"  
declares the LORD.** (Isaiah 55:6-8 NIV11)

Please ask those questions to yourself.

Do I seek God's presence (His face) in my life? (Daily)

When I hear His voice, do I escape, or obey His command.

Do I choose what to obey and what to disobey? If God asks you to do something you don't like, are you ready obey?

Amen

1. James Bruckner, *NIV Application Commentary (Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah)*. P41

2. *ibid* P 29

3. *ibid* p 32