

- ii. The people of the day would not have been surprised that Jonah fled.

Jonah: The Absurdity of God's Compassion
All Bound Up with Justice
Jerry Cisar — May 1, 2022

Text: Jonah 1:1-3 (Robert Alter's translation)

Introduction

The absurdity of God's compassion.

God's people's preoccupation with and misconception of *justice*.

The extreme strangeness of God's ways in the world.

James Bruckner (NIV Application Commentary, Jonah): "God's compassion and clemency were not weaknesses in God's justice, but were better justice than human justice."

LIVE THE STORY

The following questions are designed for use in our Community Groups as an aid to growth in the Gospel and Community.

Love the Gospel

- What are some of the things for which the book of Jonah is often used but that it is not about?
- What are some of the characteristics of the book that make it unique in the Scripture?
- How central to the story of Jonah is the fish?
- In what we've seen so far, how might we find a path to Christ?

Live the Gospel

- In what relationships do you consider yourself the right arbiter of justice? How would it change things for you to those others to see God's compassion instead?
- How often do we want a Rambo like solution for our enemies rather than the Lord who is compassionate and gracious?
- What are some ways that we think like Jonah did?

Advance the Gospel

- What limits have you put on God's will to show compassion?
- How are we to relate to Jonah?
- What might this book say about attitudes we have toward the lost?

I. Jonah as Hebrew Scripture

- A. It was written in a community called Israel, to a particular people with a set of experiences.
 - i. It is *our* family history.

- ii. Jonah is the only Israelite in the story. He is us.

"Jonah is a ridiculous excuse for a prophet—the holy man as screwup—and we are just like him. Why Jesus would want to identify with him is a deep mystery, as deep as his love for the rest of us.... [W]e have to begin by being willing to identify with the ridiculous prophet ourselves. Otherwise we miss the point of the joke." (Cary. Jonah: Brazos Theological Commentary)

- iii. This story will likely adjust your understanding of what it means to be chosen by God.

B. Read Jonah through the lens of the Israelites.

i. The opening words make us think Jonah is a prophet, and he is, and that this is a book of his prophecies, which it isn't.

ii. Why was this book given to us in Scripture?

a) Jonah was not written for the Ninevites.

b) Jonah was not written as a litmus test for our faith!

c) Jonah was written for people who existed *after* the events of the book just as the Gospels were written for people after the events described.

➤ God is sending Jonah on a mission that will result in the death of Israel.

C. Jonah was *not* running from God because he lacked the confidence necessary to do mission, or because he didn't like non-Jewish people, or because he feared what the Assyrians would do to him.

II. Jonah the Comic Prophet

A. We ought to have fun reading the book of Jonah.

i. Being prophetic is dangerous and costly.

"Jonah is a comic figure: he does everything wrong, almost, yet through him the LORD God of Israel does everything right." (Cary).

ii. Jonah is anything but innocent or the son of faithfulness.

➤ 2 Kings 14:23-25

B. Genre

i. Everything is extreme.

ii. Satire is a comic play on reality wherein the figures are real figures but the joke is on the audience.

III. Jonah as the Arbiter of Justice

A. Who are the Ninevites?

i. Nineveh was the capitol of Assyria.

ii. No one has surpassed the Assyrians in cruelty.

B. Jonah saw himself righteously as the arbiter of justice.

i. *That* Jonah wanted to see the Ninevites perish is not the surprise in this story. That God wanted to show them compassion is.