

The Book of Jonah
Class Notes
Session 4

Jonah 1.7-10 The sailors prayed to “the gods” during the storm at sea.

(v.10): The circumstances intensify... The description of the sailor’s fear is literally... “they feared with a great fear.”

The sailor’s question of what Jonah has done includes... “What have you done *to us?*”

Both Jonah and the sailors would know that running from a god was foolish... To run away from the God who made heaven and earth is dangerous...and foolish!

Jonah maybe responsible for the sailors’ deaths... Another irony... He ran from his call to the Ninevites that could have saved them!

Yet Jonah now has to deal with other pagans and determine to save them.

Disobedience to God only creates more frustrations, pain, and misery!

Jonah 1.11-12 In this text we begin to see one of the core, theological themes in Jonah.

As Creator, God is the God of all creation... In His creative sovereignty, God (Yahweh) elects a specific Nation, Israel, to be His people and reflect the power, love, and mercy of Yahweh.

As the sea increasingly became rough and dangerous, the sailors learned from Jonah himself that he was the cause of the storm.

It made sense to the sailors that if Jonah were the cause, he would know how to stop the storm!

The question in *v.11* implies not only that Jonah would know what to do, but also that Jonah himself would need to do it!

The question, “*What should we do to you to stop the storm?*” can be expressed as a causative, for example... “What should we do to you in order to cause the storm to cease?” or “... cause the wind no longer to blow?”¹

Jonah’s answer... He should be thrown overboard! This would calm the storm and Jonah would likely die, ending his running from Yahweh.

“Jonah’s reply is the counterpart to the captain’s outburst in v. 6 and is a crucial step forward in the development of the plot. The captain had posed the stark alternatives: “Pray or we perish,” but Jonah knows that the upshot must be that he should perish... he admits his responsibility for the storm. The piety of the seamen has evidently banished his nonchalant indifference and touched his conscience. By now he has realized how terrible is the sin that has provoked this terrible storm. The only way to appease the tempest of Yahweh’s wrath is to abandon himself to it as just deserts for his sin. His willingness to die is an indication that he realizes his guilt before God.”²

¹ B.F. Price and E.A. Nida. *A Translators’ Handbook on the Book of Jonah* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1978).

² L.C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1976).

Jonah 1.13-14 Interestingly, the sailors did *not want to* throw Jonah overboard, rather, they tried to make it back to the shore.

Irony/Contrast again...The compassion of the sailors for Jonah and Jonah's lack of compassion for the Ninevites! And...as Jonah attempts to outrun God...The sailors attempt to outrun the storm...Both will fail!

“Dry land is where the sailors want to be. Just as Jonah thought he could *run* from the conflict at Nineveh, the sailors think they can row out of the storm to dry land. The lesson is not subtle. Yahweh is God of *both*, as Jonah has told them...They tried calling on other gods, lightening the ship, asking Jonah to pray, casting lots, interrogating Jonah, and rowing. Their fear is that they will die for doing something they really don't want to do: participating in God's judgment on Jonah. It is a horrible situation for them, and they say so: “Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man.”³

The sincere prayer of the sailors illustrates both the growing faith of the Gentile sailors, as well as the sovereign mercy of God. Already in these first seventeen verses, we see that everything is occurring according to the will of God...which the Gentile sailors recognize!

Jonah 1.15-16 Ultimately...the sailors throw Jonah overboard into the sea, which calmed the sea.

The “Hebrew is more graphic... “Then they lifted Jonah up and they hurled him into the sea and the sea stood down from its raging...”⁴

(v.16): The sailors now “feared” Yahweh... they offered a sacrifice and made vows as an expression of their faith.

“The progression of the sailors’ “conversion” to Yahweh can be seen in the Hebrew word *yara*, which has the basic meaning “fear” ...or “reverence.” The sailors have three kinds of “fear” (*yara*) in this chapter. In Jonah 1:5 they *fear* dying in the storm, and each relies on his own god. In 1:9 they hear that Jonah *worships* (“fears”) a God they do not know, the very God who has sent the storm. Then they are *terrified* because they realize that their circumstance is as desperate as it could be. After the raging sea grows calm, they “greatly fear the LORD” and worship him (1:16).⁵

The increasing irony...Jonah runs from his commission to proclaim God's grace to the Gentile Ninevites.

In his running, he encounters other Gentiles who, through God's merciful “storm,” come to faith in Yahweh as Jonah is seemingly drowned in the sea.

A sacrificial death opens the way to reveal God's mercy and salvation...the theological principal ultimately and finally fulfilled through Jesus Christ!

Going Forward: “In many ways Jonah was the most successful prophet of the Old Testament. He preached and people were saved. He was also an exception to the general rule Stephen referred to in Acts 7:52. The irony is that he would have preferred to be like most of the other prophets whose call to repent and turn to the Lord was rejected and whose prophecies of impending judgment were fulfilled. What does this say about measuring God's servants by the success or failure they encounter?”⁶

³J. Bruckner. *Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004).

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶P. Mackrell. *Opening up Jonah* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2007).