



# The Reluctant Evangelist

April 7-13, 2024

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## **MAIN POINT**

God extends His mercy to others even as He has extended His mercy to you.

## **INTRODUCTION**

If you were offered a trip to the city of your choice anywhere in the world, what city would you choose? Why?

What is a city you would never want to visit? Why would you avoid this place?

We're going to look at the small Book of Jonah. Jonah was a man who appeared quite content not to travel anywhere. Yet when God "offered" Jonah the opportunity to visit the city of Nineveh, he chose to go in the opposite direction.

Twice in the Book of Jonah we'll see that things did not go Jonah's way. In spite of Jonah's bad attitude, God still worked and exhibited love, mercy, and compassion. As we overview the Book of Jonah, keep an eye out for God's mercy at work.

## **UNDERSTANDING**

We know little about Jonah, except that he was a prophet who helped King Jeroboam restore the borders of Israel ([2 Kings 14:25](#)). This was during a time of threats from the Assyrian empire.

## **READ [JONAH 1:1-3](#).**

What did God call Jonah to do in this passage? How did Jonah respond to God?

When has God called you to serve Him in ways that were unattractive or unpleasant to you?

Since Jonah was recognized as God's prophet, we might wonder why he would disobey the One he served. Jonah may have thought he was doing the nation of Israel a favor. Assyria was Israel's enemy, and if God's judgment would mean the downfall of Assyria, Israel would no longer be threatened. However, if Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, repented, that would mean a continual threat to Israel. Jonah was willing to sacrifice himself through disobedience for the sake of his country.

## **READ [JONAH 2:7-10](#).**

Jonah boarded the ship thinking he had successfully avoided God's call for Him. Yet, once the ship left land, a great storm arose that threatened to destroy the entire ship. Jonah recognized the storm was a result of his sinful actions and told the sailors to throw him overboard. Despite some hesitancy, the sailors finally listened and threw Jonah into the sea. Though it looked like Jonah would drown in the water, God sent a great fish to swallow him for three days and nights. [Chapter 2](#) recounts Jonah's prayer from inside the fish.

Once inside the fish, how did Jonah respond to God's rescue?

What was Jonah's attitude toward God? What did he think about himself?

[Jonah 2](#) shows us Jonah coming to the end of himself and acknowledging that he could do nothing by himself. Reflecting on the mercy of God that forgave his sinful rebellion and rescued him from the depths of the sea motivated Jonah to confess his loyalty to God and commit himself anew to serve God. God's mercy calls for our sacrificial service.

How do you see God's mercy at work in this passage?

How has God pursued you when you have tried to avoid Him?

In a sense, the whole book of Jonah is about salvation. [Chapter 1](#) described how the sailors experienced a kind of physical and perhaps spiritual deliverance. In [chapter 2](#) Jonah was rescued. [Chapter 3](#) will show how the Ninevites repented and turned to God. [Chapter 4](#) shows Jonah's resentment over God's mercy toward the Ninevites. "Salvation is from the Lord" ([v. 9](#)) was not just a statement of theological belief for Jonah; it was a confession based on personal experience. We can know God and experience His saving grace only through a personal relationship with Jesus who died on the cross to save us from our sins.

**READ [JONAH 3:10-4:11](#).**

How do you see God's grace at work in this passage?

How did Jonah respond to God's goodness to the Ninevites?

What was the attitude of Jonah's prayer?

The Book of Jonah ends abruptly. Jonah was confronted with a question that we also face: Will I have a heart for lost people as God does, or will I have a heart for lost people as Jonah did? The obvious answer to the question is that God's concern for Nineveh was consistent with His character. Since God cared for the Ninevites, so should Jonah have. That Jonah even relayed or recorded the events of this book, which were humiliating and embarrassing to him, suggests that he was brought to conviction and repentance by God's word. Jonah's silence at the end of the book implies his quiet acceptance.

From these verses, what did God want Jonah to understand?

## **APPLICATION**

What can you do to respond with obedience to God the next time He calls you to do something good but unpleasant?

What is one way you can extend God's love and mercy toward others, particularly those who don't deserve it?

How can you express thanks to the Lord this week for all the love and mercy He has given to you and others?

## **PRAYER**

Lord, thank you for your grace to us. Help us to see others as you see them, and lead us to share your love and grace with them.

## **COMMENTARY**

### **JONAH 1-4**

#### **Jonah Flees ([1:1-16](#))**

To avoid his divine assignment Jonah tried to get as far away from Nineveh as possible. Nineveh was about five hundred miles to the east, so he headed for Tar-shish, probably what is now Spain, the farthest western location he knew, about two thousand miles. But God sent a storm and then a great fish to turn Jonah around. The sailors showed more compassion for Jonah than Jonah showed for Nineveh.

#### **Jonah Prays ([1:17-2:10](#))**

Jonah, having been thrown overboard, thought his life was over. Suddenly he found himself alive inside a huge fish. The psalm of prayer Jonah uttered was an expression of thanks to God for saving his life. For his own deliverance Jonah was thankful, but Jonah would show a different attitude toward Nineveh's deliverance. In view of his rebellion in chapter 1, his anger in chapter 4, and the pagan sailors' response to God in [1:14-16](#), Jonah's vow of thanks in [2:8-9](#) sounds rather self-serving. Also, there is no confession of sin or expression of repentance in Jonah's prayer.

The "three days and three nights" of [1:17](#) alluded to the notion popular at that time that the journey to the land of the dead (sheol) took that long. So Jonah's retrieval from the fish was like a retrieval from death ([Matthew 12:39-40](#)). The fish very likely dropped Jonah off at Joppa, where he had started.

#### **Jonah Preaches ([3:1-10](#))**

Perhaps about a month later, Jonah arrived in the great city of Nineveh ("a very important city" is literally "a city great to God"). After Jonah preached for only a day rather than the expected three days, the people repented. The message God gave Jonah to preach did not explicitly call for their repentance. Rather, it told the Ninevites that they had angered Jonah's God and that punishment was on the way. The Ninevites did not presume that God could be appeased but repented in humility, hoping that "God may yet relent" ([3:9](#); see [1:6](#)), which He did. That God's judgment message was conditional is clear from His sending the prophet, giving them forty days' warning, and postponing Nineveh's destruction ([Jeremiah 18:7-10](#)).

#### **Jonah Fumes ([4:1-11](#))**

Jonah despised the Ninevites so much that he would rather die than live, knowing he helped them escape destruction. Still hoping God would give Nineveh what they deserved, Jonah waited and watched. Through the incident of the plant and the worm (sent by God like the wind and the fish in chap. 1), the Lord chided Jonah for his double standard. Jonah was concerned for the transitory plant that gave him shade but not for the 120,000 people of Nineveh who despite their limited knowledge had trusted God.