

The Book of Obadiah

Background and Introduction

Authorship and Setting

Obadiah is the shortest book of the Old Testament and comprises the oracles of the prophet Obadiah. Nothing, beyond his name is known of Obadiah. His name means “worshipper of Yahweh.” The date for the composition of the book is not known. When the question is posed, “What era fits the situation and perspective of the prophecy?” Many scholars agree that the early exilic period fits best. This would have been around the 580s BC. Four other Old Testament passages from the early sixth century (Psalm 137:7; Lamentations 4:18-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14 and Ezekiel 35:1-15) reflect similar circumstances and tones as Obadiah, which help us with the setting and timeframe. As Pastor Ben said last week, this would have put its writing ahead of Amos’ prophecies.

Theological Themes

Obadiah prophesied against Edom, one of Israel and Judah’s longtime enemies. Edom was in a region south of the Dead Sea, in the Aravah Valley. Edom was in almost constant conflict with Israel. Obadiah and other prophets condemned Edom for its mixed attitudes during the Babylonian invasion of Judah. When we understand that Edom was formed from the descendants of Esau, Jacob’s (Israel) brother, it makes sense why there was longstanding conflict between the two.

Obadiah, along with the previously mentioned passages, express the ferocity in which Yahweh judged Edom for their taking advantage of Jerusalem’s subjugation by the Babylonians. Obadiah also anticipates a time of reversal of circumstances and thus, hope for Judah. Thus, the message is that, although Israel and Judah deserved judgment for their wickedness and rejection of Yahweh, the nations He used to enact this judgment were no less wicked, and Yahweh will now judge them. The righteous are reassured that the those who oppose God will be judged. God’s people will ultimately be preserved and exalted. **God’s final victory over evil is sure and His faithfulness to His people and His word is displayed.** The first 18 verses of the book are considered poetry, with verses 19-21 often considered prose. However, they do contain parallelism and so may also be poetic in nature.

Structure

- I. Vision of Edom’s Destruction (1:1-9)
- II. Reasons for Edom’s Destruction (1:10-14)
- III. Israel and the Nations (1:15-21)

I. Vision of Edom’s Destruction (1:1-9)

Obadiah's vision is explained. Edom's downfall can largely be attributed to their arrogance and sense of invincibility. They thought they were safe and untouchable due to their mountainous stronghold. This serves as a powerful reminder for individuals and nations alike: pride comes before a fall. History shows time and again that those who are proud often overlook their vulnerabilities and fail to see how their actions can lead to their demise.

Obadiah 1-3: The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom: We have heard a report from the LORD, and a messenger has been sent among the nations: "Rise up! Let us rise against her for battle!" (2) Behold, I will make you small among the nations; you shall be utterly despised. (3) The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, "Who will bring me down to the ground?"

Here we see God's sovereignty through judgment of sin in pagan nations. Edom was self-deceived. They would be brought low due to their pride.

In verses 5-7, Obadiah elaborates on the first as he highlights just how low they would be brought.

Obadiah 5: If thieves came to you, if plunderers came by night— how you have been destroyed!— would they not steal only enough for themselves? If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave gleanings?

These are rhetorical questions that Yahweh through Obadiah brings to demonstrate the utter completeness of the coming loss. Thieves can only take what they can carry. Every grape is not harvested. But this is set against verses 6-9, where we see that Edom will be stripped completely bare.

Obadiah 6-9: How Esau has been pillaged, his treasures sought out! (7) All your allies have driven you to your border; those at peace with you have deceived you; they have prevailed against you; those who eat your bread have set a trap beneath you— you have no understanding. (8) Will I not on that day, declares the LORD, destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of Mount Esau? (9) And your mighty men shall be dismayed, O Teman, so that every man from Mount Esau will be cut off by slaughter.

The term *Esau* is used interchangeably with Edom here and in verses 18, 19, and 21; although Edom is the more common name for the nation.

We see in verse 7, that Edom needed allies (Babylon) to attack and plunder Jerusalem. The prophet uses language in verses 8-9 that point to a total reversal, looking forward to the time Edom itself will be betrayed by the nations they trusted and had made alliances with. Verse 8 indicates a lack of leadership in the nation, which will result in helplessness and destruction.

Living in pride blinds to the reality of the situation. The Bible often warns of the consequences of pride. Proverbs 16:18 states, ***"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a***

*fall.” Interestingly, indicating Yahweh’s ownership and sovereign rule over all creation, this punishment fulfills the curse promises in passages such as Deuteronomy 28:29, “**you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways. And you shall be only oppressed and robbed continually, and there shall be no one to help you.**”*

This curse was given to Israel, and yet Yahweh in his divine prerogative judges and curses other nations as well for their wickedness and arrogance.

II. Reasons for Edom’s Destruction (1:10-14)

In these verses Obadiah lays out Edom’s crimes against Judah. In verses 10-11, we see Edom’s passive observation of the destruction done to Judah.

Obadiah 1:10-11: Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever. (11) On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them.

The name Jacob and reference to “your brother” reminds readers of the original conflicts between Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:19-34; 27:1-28:9). Here though, Edom’s violence is unspecified and results in Edom’s shame. Verse 11 starts with “**On the day...**” which is a key term in Obadiah. Rather than help, the nation watched Jerusalem be pillaged by foreigners.

In verses 12-14, we see a series of eight prohibitions for Edom to stop opposing Judah.

Obadiah 1:12-14: But do not gloat over the day of your brother in the day of his misfortune; do not rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin; do not boast in the day of distress. (13) Do not enter the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; do not gloat over his disaster in the day of his calamity; do not loot his wealth in the day of his calamity. (14) Do not stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives; do not hand over his survivors in the day of distress.

These “do nots” refer to future actions that reflect that these things have previously happened as well. And we can see that the verbs progress from internal attitude to outward action. Gloating leads to rejoicing, and boasting then, entering the gates of Judah, then looting and standing and finally handing over people for destruction.

This is a lesson for us today concerning sin. Sin starts in the heart and progresses to action. One is reminded of James, where he writes,

James 1:14-15: But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. (15) Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

III. Israel and the Nations (1:15-21)

Obadiah's vision culminates with the fulfillment of the progression of the "in the day of" statements with the day of the Lord coming in verse 15. This day of the Lord, the day of Yahweh's sovereign intervention in the events of human history has long been expected and prophesied. Pastor Ben discussed this at length last week in Amos 5:18-20. Other passages include Isaiah 13:6-13; Jeremiah 46:10 and Zephaniah 3:8.

Obadiah 1:15: For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head.

The scope is global. Yahweh's divine justice will begin to be fulfilled. Edom, and indeed all nations will experience judgment and retribution.

Obadiah 1:17-18: But in Mount Zion there shall be those who escape, and it shall be holy, and the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions. (18) The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau stubble; they shall burn them and consume them, and there shall be no survivor for the house of Esau, for the LORD has spoken.

There is irony here, as Edom, who through their haughty pride and arrogance thought their stronghold was impenetrable and invincible is easily defeated and destroyed by Yahweh. Edom's mountain stronghold will be destroyed, yet Judah's Mountain refuge will be rebuilt and a place of perpetual safety for God's people. That it is done by fire is evidence of Divine judgment. Judgment by fire is a recurring theme throughout the OT (Deuteronomy 28:24; 32:22) and NT (1 Cor 3:13; 1 Peter 1:7; Rev 3:18).

The remainder of the verses discuss the repossession of the land, including Ephraim and Samaria. This is in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 30:3-5,

...then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. (4) If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. (5) And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.

Obadiah concludes with verse 21: ***Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau, and the kingdom shall be the LORD's.***

In Obadiah the Edomites, who have seized Judean lands in the wake of Babylon's elimination of Judean military and political powers, are excoriated for their enmity to Yahweh and his people. The fate of the Edomites, like that of other nations that occupied Israelite territory, is sealed.

*They will die out as a sovereign people and the Israelites will repossess the promised land under Yahweh's blessing. The present incapacitation of God's people may provide a temporary hope for Edom. But the eventual and final fate of Edom is the fate of all the wicked—death. And the eventual and final reward of God's people is life abundant. This is what Obadiah's words meant to his original audience and what they should as well mean to us.*¹

The Day of Yahweh is when God will defeat chaos, opposition, death and sin. Not only will land be repossessed fully by Israel, but Jerusalem will be restored and visited by saviors, or deliverers. This happened in small part at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah but will happen fully in the millennium, and beyond. The ultimate Day of the LORD deliverance will be eschatological. The messianic kingdom will be inaugurated under King Jesus. Pastor Ben brought up several messianic psalms last week. One he didn't, but that came to my mind was Psalm 72. That psalm explains that in the Day of that King there will be perfect justice, prosperity, the oppressed will be delivered, peace and righteousness will abound, all kings will be subject to Yahweh's King, food will be over-abundant, and his Name will endure forever!

¹ Douglas Stuart, [*Hosea-Jonah*](#), vol. 31, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 408.

The Book of Jonah

Background and Introduction

Authorship and Setting

Jonah prophesied in Israel. According to 2 Kings 14:25, he was from Gath-hepher, which was a medium sized city within the territory of Zebulun. Other than the book of Jonah itself, 2 Kings 14:25 is the only other time he is mentioned in the OT. He lived and prophesied in the time of King Jeroboam II, around 793 to 753 BC. The book of Jonah narrates how Yahweh called the prophet to go and to preach a message of repentance to the people of the city of Nineveh, which was the capital city of Assyria. Nineveh, a major city, surrounded by rich farmland, was on the east bank of the Tigris River. It covered an area of approximately 7 ¾ square miles. Nineveh was located at the site of the current city of Mosul in Iraq. It was significant, as Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire was one of the greatest enemies to the Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel. Jonah was commanded to go and cry out against its wickedness.

Of the minor prophets, Jonah is the only one written in narrative form. Jonah becomes a part of the story, whereas other prophetic books generally contain many prophetic pronouncements, which form the basis of their content. The only prophetic pronouncement to be found in Jonah is his calling out as he arrives in the city of Nineveh, ***“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”*** in chapter 3:4.

Jonah is classified as a didactic prophetic narrative. There is a building narrative that culminates in God’s speeches in chapter 4. Upon reading, one can easily see that there are elements to the story that are clearly designed to spark imagination and emotion in the reader. Jonah resembles some of the early accounts in Daniel (Daniel in the lions’ den; the fiery furnace); or also some of the miracle accounts in Elisha’s ministry. Elisha and the widow’s oil multiplying in 2 Kings 4, or Elisha raising the Shunammite woman’s son, Elisha purifying the stew, both also in chapter 4, as well as other accounts in his ministry all the way through chapter 7.

Theological Themes

Jonah isn’t primarily about the big fish, or the city of Nineveh, or even about Jonah. The main character of the book is Yahweh. We can readily see aspects of divine sovereignty, divine compassion, divine judgment, Jonah’s honest, yet difficult relationship with the Lord, as well as God being the God of gentiles as well as Jews and the theme of ***“Salvation belongs to the LORD!”*** that runs through the book. And as we will see with Jonah, all these themes should produce more than mere mental ascent but understanding these things should affect our lives and raise our affections for God.

Structure

I. Jonah’s First Call (1:1-2:10)

II. Jonah’s Second Call (3:1-4:11)

I. Jonah's First Call (1:1-2:10)

1. The Lord's Call (1:1-2)

Jonah 1:1–2: “1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.”

Here, we see two things. God's word was given to a certain prophet, Jonah, son of Amittai. Jonah was a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel and was given a word by Yahweh. Usually, prophets of Israel or Judah were called to prophesy within their own boundaries, to their own people. But he was to prophesy to Nineveh.

Jonah's name means “dove” and his father's name means “truth”. Jonah received revelation from God and in verse 2 is told to take that message to Nineveh. It was called **“that great city”**. The book refers to Nineveh in this way three times: once here, then again in chapter 3:3, and in 4:11. Jonah is called to physically go to preach to that city. Nahum 3:19 says of Nineveh that it was full of unceasing evil. Jonah was called to “arise” or “get up” and go.

2. Jonah's Disobedience (1:3)

Jonah 1:3: “3 But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.”

Rather than saying, “Here I am, send me,” like Isaiah, Jonah fled in the opposite direction. Nineveh was east of Israel; he went down to Joppa and fled west, toward the Mediterranean Sea.

One feature to note: much like going **“down”** to Joppa, Jonah “went down into” the ship. This “going down” becomes a picture of descent into rebellion against God throughout the first half of the book.

Why did Jonah respond this way? Some have suggested that Jonah responded in righteous indignation because the Ninevites were so wicked. Assyria was renowned for its brutality toward its enemies. However, his response was in no way righteous. Jonah's problem was ultimately not with Nineveh, but with God. In verse 3, it says not once, but twice that Jonah was **fleeing from the presence of the Lord**.

Jonah knew God; he knew his character and nature. Jonah knew that if the Ninevites responded in repentance to God's message, then God would spare them. By fleeing from the Lord's presence Jonah announces emphatically his unwillingness to serve God. His action is nothing less than open rebellion against God's sovereignty.

3. Yahweh's First Intervention (1:4-16)

- Storm Hurlled (1:4)

Jonah 1:4: "4 But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up."

Actions have consequences; sin has consequences. Jonah is spiraling down the spiritual drain.

- Sailors' activity vs. Jonah's inactivity (1:5-6)
Jonah 1:5-6: "5 Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. "6 So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? **Arise**, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish."

We know that the sailors were pagans because each prayed to his own god. Apparently lightening the load and praying to their gods didn't work. The storm raged, and the ship and its people continued to be threatened. Here we see the crew and captain fearing the storm, which would progress to fearing the Lord. Jonah was still nowhere to be found.

In verse 6, perhaps the captain was searching to make everyone was accounted for; perhaps he thought Jonah could be of assistance. When he finds Jonah sleeping, he is incredulous. The phrase translated as ***"What do you mean, you sleeper?"*** can be translated "What are you doing sleeping?" And then in an ironic twist, the captain tells him "Get up and call on your god!" The irony is that Jonah was attempting to flee from God. Not to mention the wording with "arise" and "call" closely resembles Jonah's initial interaction with God in verse 2. They placed their hope in Jonah's God – maybe *He* will deliver them. They had more spiritual discernment than Jonah did!

- The sailors' blamelessness vs. Jonah's sin (1:7-9)
Jonah 1:7: "7 And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah."

This may seem sort of strange to us: investigating the cause of a storm through what we might say is superstition. However, the reader has already been clued in that it was the Lord sent the storm because of Jonah's disobedience. Proverbs 16:33 says, ***"The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD."*** Here, the lot fell upon Jonah, and he is immediately placed on trial. A point of application here, we see that rebellion against God is costly. You may be forced to pay now, or you will pay later, but it always comes with a price. Galatians 6:7 provides a principle for us here, ***"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap."*** Here Jonah, starts out disobeying the command of God, then keeps ignoring God and running from him spiritually and physically. This hardens his heart and sears his conscience until God turns him over to his rebellion and its consequences.

Jonah 1:8-9: "8 Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" 9 And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

These were the questions of terrified sailors, fighting for their lives amid this fierce storm. These men wanted confirmation that Jonah was the cause of their catastrophe. Jonah's answer in verse 9 is both breathtaking and ironic at once. This is his confession. He fears the LORD the God who made everything, including the raging sea they were on. He told them he was from Israel. Here is the ironic part of his answer: **Jonah, the one who didn't want to go to Nineveh and proclaim God's word to the pagan people there, is now on this ship telling pagans about the God who made them and all things!** And he is blatantly disobedient!

- The sailors' reverence vs. Jonah's irreverence (1:10-16)

In verses 10 -11, what the sailors say could be summed up like this, ""You fear the Lord? Really? We are stuck in this mess because of you! Your words and your life sleeping in the hull of the ship don't seem to line up!" These sailors give Jonah a harsh rebuke. They now know that the storm is divine judgment upon Jonah. These men were not pleased that they have been caught in the middle of it all.

After Jonah tells them to throw him into the sea to quiet the storm in verse 12, they initially try to row back to land, but the storm grew stronger.

Finally, with nowhere else to turn, they cry out to Yahweh.

Jonah 1:15-16: So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. (16) Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

These sailors now feared God and they even worshipped him by offering a sacrifice and vows to him. This passage clearly highlights the sovereignty of God over nature, circumstances, individuals, and even human souls. God brought these pagan sailors to himself despite Jonah and his less than faithful witness. God is merciful and compassionate – a recurring theme throughout the book that Jonah himself seems to miss.

4. The Lord's Second Intervention (1:17-2:10)

- Great Fish Appointed (1:17)

We have seen the sailors be delivered from what looked like certain pending death on the Mediterranean Sea, as they threw Jonah overboard, and came to faith in and worship Jonah's One True God. But Jonah is still floating out in the sea, most likely hoping to drown to death and not have to go preach to Nineveh.

Jonah 1:17: "And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."

This miraculous act of appointing the fish to swallow Jonah and keep him in the fish for 3 days was an act of compassion. Despite Jonah's sin and his swift downfall in chapter 1, God has sent an agent of his divine mercy! This is the first of 4 instances where we see Yahweh "appoint" something. This further highlights His absolute sovereignty.

Often, the focus is on the great fish in Jonah, which is only mentioned in 3 verses. We tend to do this because the fish provides a fantastic element to the story. However, the fish is not the focal point of the narrative. GK Morgan wrote, “Men have been looking so hard at the great fish that they have missed the great God.”

- Jonah’s Prayer (2:1-9)

If we weren’t so familiar with this story, we would most likely be led to believe that Jonah was dead after verses 15 and 16 in chapter 1. But we see the story isn’t over.

Jonah 2:1-2: Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, (2) saying, “I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.

We see here that Jonah cried out to Yahweh from the belly of the fish. As Jonah had been thrown off the ship into the sea and sank down, he was as good as dead. Jonah called out because of his distress. He knew his circumstances were less than favorable. And note that Jonah was not in distress because of some enemy. He was not being oppressed. He was in this predicament because of his own sin. And even in that, God was gracious and merciful to accept his prayer. God doesn’t answer prayer because we are so great, he answers prayer because He is great!

Then in verses 3-6, Jonah openly and honestly highlights his great despair.

Jonah 2:3-6a: For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. (4) Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’ (5) The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head (6) at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever;

The imagery here is drowning in deep water. He sank deeper and deeper. We saw at least 3 times in chapter one that Jonah was trying to purposely flee the presence of the Lord. And now in his prayer he laments God’s pushing him away from his presence. Jonah saw this as banishment from God. Jonah poetically and vividly describes what was happening to him before the fish swallowed him. He sank lower and lower; he was in a watery prison, that would soon turn into a grave. The seaweed stuck to him and bound him like ropes. The picture is terrifying. There is a spiritual as well as physical aspect to Jonah’s despair. We have already seen that God was pushing Jonah out of his sight in a spiritual sense. Here, Jonah’s physical demise and despair paralleled his spiritual decline.

In the second half of verse 6 through 9, we see Jonah’s reliance on God.

Jonah 2:6b-9: ...yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. (7) When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. (8) Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast

love. (9) But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!"

The end of verse 6 closes with Jonah recognizing that although he put himself on a downward spiral, God is the One who rescues him. On his own, down was his only direction. He knew he could do nothing to save himself. He called out to God in verses 1 and 2, as he was at the end of himself. All was lost if left to him, but he depended upon God. He finally showed a spark of humility and God recognized it. God brought him up! God reversed his downward trend! Verses 7 through 9 reinforce Jonah's utter reliance and trust on the God who put him into the depths of the sea, as the only one who could save him from those depths.

It seems Jonah is truly worshiping the Lord because of God's mercy to him. Note, his words echo the sailors' response back in chapter 1 verse 16, after God stopped the storm from its raging, ***"Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows."*** And then finally, in verse 9, Jonah proclaims, ***"Salvation belongs to the LORD!"*** No other words could so profoundly describe Jonah's appreciation of what the Lord had done. And really, the theme of ***"salvation belongs to the LORD!"*** can summarize the entire Bible storyline.

Jonah knows that God saves. However, he is content to experience God's deliverance for himself but is enraged to see it in the Ninevites. But for now, in this moment, Jonah is thankful for God's deliverance. Nevertheless, here in Jonah's beautiful psalm/ prayer/poem, we do see his acknowledgment of his deep reliance on God, and a turning away from trusting himself.

And then we see Yahweh's great act of deliverance.

- Great Fish Vomits (2:10)

Jonah 2:10: "And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land."

Here now in chapter 2 verse 10, the LORD spoke to the fish, and it unceremoniously vomited Jonah up onto dry land. The fish obeyed God. Jonah didn't die in the heart of the sea, nor did he die in the belly of the fish. God sovereignly acted to deliver Jonah from that fate. God clearly controls nature, he controls history, he controls nations, God controls circumstances, he controls life and death, and he controls the animal world. God is supreme.

Christ Connection

- Sign of Jonah – Mt 12:40

Here we have a connection that Jesus himself makes. When the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign from him, he replied in Matthew 12:39 that no sign would be given to that adulterous generation except the sign of the prophet Jonah. And in 12:40 he said this,

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

He says in verse 41,

“the men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it for they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And behold, something greater than Jonah is here.”

Reluctant Jonah’s stay in the belly of the great fish was a pointer, Jesus is saying, to the one who came willingly to save the lost, who really did descend all the way down to death itself, to gladly make Jews and gentiles into true worshipers of the living God. It is one of the greatest ironies of the book of Jonah, that the fish is a Savior, that the runaway prophet is a type of Christ. God gives His salvation in mysterious ways. He puts His Son on a cross. He hurls Him into death, and rises again, that we might live.

II. Jonah’s Second Call (3:1-4:11)

1. Jonah’s Proclamation (3:1-10)

- Yahweh’s call 3:1-2

Jonah 3:1–2: “1 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, “2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”

Compare verses 1-2 of chapter 3 with the first two verses of chapter 1 and you see immediate similarities. Almost identical language is used. The same call comes a second time to Jonah. He’s commissioned once more to the same ministry.

- Jonah’s Obedience 3:3-4a

Jonah 3:3: “3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. 4a Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey.

Here now, Jonah stands again on familiar ground chastened and compliant. The similarities between the opening verses of chapter 3 and the opening verses of the whole book of Jonah in chapter 1 are intentional, as though the Lord here in chapter 3 has hit the re-set button. Having saved Jonah from death, Yahweh now re-commissions him for ministry. Jonah gets another chance. God works to restore Jonah, not just to personal faithfulness, but also to public usefulness.

Jonah begins his march into the city, about a day’s journey, and there he begins to preach. We have a one-line summary of his message in verse 4. It’s hardly the most heartwarming of messages. This is not “Your Best Life Now.” Jonah preaches God’s Word – nothing more, nothing less.

Jonah 3:4b: And he called out, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’”

- Nineveh’s Mourning 3:5-9

Jonah 3:5–8: “5 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. “6 The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with

sackcloth, and sat in ashes. "7 And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, "8 but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands."

God gave His Word power as Jonah preached and the entire city responded. The **"people of Nineveh believed God."** Not just that they believed in Him; more than that. Even demons have that kind of faith and tremble. We need more than faith that "God is." We need faith to rest upon the God who alone saves. They believed Him. They trusted Him, His Word, and His promises.

Second, along with faith there is true repentance – the flipside of saving faith. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth – the symbols of mourning, from the greatest to the least. The king, when he hears the Word of the Lord, is cut to the heart. Notice how he humbles himself. He steps away from the throne as though to acknowledge only God is the true sovereign. He disrobes and puts on sackcloth.

Then in verse 9,

"Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."

Considering the gravity of their sin, could it perhaps be that God will forgive? There is no presumption there; there is only desperation. There is no false confidence but there is a real recognition of the sinfulness of sin; no attempt to leverage or manipulate God, but they cast themselves entirely upon His mercy as they forsake their rebellion and seek His pardon.

- God's Compassion 3:10

Jonah 3:10: "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it."

God responds to the requests of these repentant pagans. It's amazing. And it should be reassuring to us all. **Even Ninevites' prayers take hold of the mercy of God when they respond to His Word in repentance and faith.** The Lord never turned anyone away. However wicked and wayward they may be who come to Him seeking mercy, He never turns anyone away; not Ninevites and not you. This says volumes about the character and nature of God.

2. Jonah's Displeasure (4:1-11)

We get to chapter 4, and we see that Jonah still doesn't get it, despite his previous reluctant obedience. It seems disappointing. So, what is the point of it all, then?

- Jonah's First Dialogue with God 4:1-4

Jonah 4:1-4: "1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. "2 And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you

are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. ”3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” 4 And the Lord said, “Do you do well to be angry?”

The point of this passage which is a main point of the whole book, is that God shows love and mercy to people from all nations and his people don't have a right to claim someone is less or more deserving of His favor, because none are.

Yet here is Jonah, still angry. This prayer is a great contrast to the humble reliant prayer in chapter 2. What was he angry and displeased about? Jonah was angry that God relented of the judgment he was going to pour out on Ninevah, because they turned from their evil, repented, and called out to God. Jonah loves God's grace and mercy for himself but is still locked into his pattern of hating those outside Israel and thinking that same grace and mercy should not be for them. Notice the contrast, God's anger is turned away from the Ninevites in chapter 3 verse 9, but here Jonah's anger is kindled. Jonah and God are far apart.

Jonah hated what God had done; he was furious, in fact. Again, he benefited from and enjoyed God and his compassion for himself but despised that God would lavish it upon Israel's enemies. Douglas Stuart comments, *“He was actually expecting God to suppress his own natural inclination to show mercy wherever possible. It was not simply the case that Jonah could not bring himself to appreciate Nineveh. Rather, to a shocking extent, he could not stand God!”*

God's reply to Jonah's anger is concise. He doesn't waste words. Here, in effect is the finger of God pressing into the festering wound of Jonah's sin. ***“Do you do well to be angry?”*** Jonah is not listening. He does not answer. Instead, he marches out of the city, presumably in a fit.

- Jonah's Second Dialogue with God 4:5-6

Jonah 4:5–6: “5 Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. 6 Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.

Jonah went and sat east of the city; underneath a shade structure he had built. The words used of this “booth” indicated that it was a rudimentary structure and probably didn't provide Jonah much protection as he waited, possibly to see if God would wipe Nineveh out. Jonah likely used whatever branches he could find from brush and trees in the area not already claimed for firewood. His shelter almost certainly did not have much of a roof. It seems he still had hope that God might destroy Nineveh, despite his lovingkindness, mercy and grace, and despite Nineveh's faith and repentance in God's message that came from Jonah's own mouth. From Jonah's vantage point as he surveyed the city, there were no natural shade trees. He would have been out in the open in the hot desert climate.

In verses 6 and following, we see yet another lesson that God brings Jonah. In verses 6, 7 and 8 we will see the phrase **"God appointed"** 3 times. This is the same phrasing used in chapter 1, verse 17, where it was said that ***"The LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah..."***

The focus here is on God and his sovereignty. God sent the plant to grow to provide shade to deliver Jonah from harm. The text says Jonah was exceedingly glad about this. He would have seen it as God's mercy. He liked God's mercy when it was for him, but not others. Jonah had one day of relief from the sun's effects before verse 7, which says, ***"But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered."***

Why did God do this? God provided the shade, which very likely could have saved Jonah's life in the harsh unrelenting conditions. And yet the very next day, he appoints a worm to eat and kill the plant that provided for Jonah. God is bringing a lesson to Jonah. Back in verse 3 Jonah prayed that God would kill him because he could not bear to see God have mercy on the Ninevites. Verse 6 says Jonah was exceedingly glad for the shade God provided. God was teaching Jonah about compassion, as well as God's care and mercy. And if this wasn't enough for smug Jonah, the same day, it says in verse 8, ***"When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint..."*** This was a day of trial for Jonah.

Here was Jonah, pouting, as he watched over Nineveh, hoping that God would somehow wipe the inhabitants off the face of the earth, while he himself rebelled against God. God provided comfort for him, and just as abruptly took it away. Jonah was in real danger. This is Jonah again being brought to the brink of death. Last time he was in grave danger of drowning a watery death. Jonah continues his pity-party, verse 8 continues, ***"And he asked that he might die and said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.'"*** He wanted to see Nineveh's destruction, which wasn't going to happen, and yet the circumstances were so unbearable to him. He prayed for death.

And then God answers Jonah, in verse 9. He gets challenged by the Almighty. ***"But God said to Jonah, 'Do you do well to be angry for the plant?'"*** Jonah enjoyed the comforts God's providence provided but he was unwilling to listen to the lessons God's providence was teaching him.

Jonah responds to God's probing question, still in verse 9, ***"And he said, 'Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.'"*** Jonah was saying that the plant, *which was serving him*, which was the result of God's providential care was worthy to live. He was outraged that God sovereignly destroyed it. The anger at the loss of the plant, caused him to prefer death to living in the world without the shade and protection of the plant. Yet, Jonah had no right to the plant. It was a gift of God's undeserved grace. Jonah really had no right to be angry that God would remove the plant.

Verses 10 and 11 provide God's response to Jonah and further explain the lesson. Verse 10, ***"And the LORD said, 'You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it***

grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night...” God is clear in his response to Jonah. The plant was 100% a gift of God’s grace to Jonah. To be so angry that it is now gone shows that Jonah doesn’t understand. This question that continues to come up about Jonah’s perceived right to be angry at God, is a key to the whole book. Verse 11 hammers the argument home. The argument that Jonah has no defense for. God continues, ***“And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”***

God is here saying, you value this plant, a plant you seem to be so invested in, yet you had no hand in its existing. And you are upset that I would pity Nineveh, a city with more than 120,000 people, humans I created in my image. Furthermore, these people are clueless. I made them. I’m their God. I’m their Lord. They are mine. They depend on Me. Ought I not to have pity on them? I have rights as the potter over the clay. Am I not free to have mercy on whom I shall have mercy?” **The only hope these people had was God.** God is not saying they are morally innocent or bear no guilt for their sins. What he is saying is that they were trapped in their sins and troubles, and only through God’s mercy would they ever escape the cycle. When they heard the message of God, they turned and repented and put their trust in Him. Jonah should be rejoicing and marveling in the astounding grace of God to them, rather than be embittered by it!

God tacks on at the end after describing the pitiful and hopeless people of Nineveh, “and much cattle.” And then the book ends. Douglas Stuart writes of the addition to the animals at the end, *“The reference to animals, rather, makes a simple point: God would have every right to spare Nineveh if only because of the dumb animals in it! They alone would be worth more by any accounting than was the gourd Jonah had become so attached to. If it was unfair in Jonah’s thinking that the poor innocent gourd should die, how could he relish the death of countless cattle just because it was Assyrians who happened to be their owners?”*

Jonah is angry at God’s generosity. Jonah over-emphasized God’s love to himself and despised God’s love to Israel’s enemies – people Jonah had deemed unfit for God’s love and grace. The measure of the love of God for the nations is ultimately the cross of Jesus Christ. Romans 15:9 – Jesus came ***“in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, to sing to your name.”***

Furthermore, we see throughout the book that while Jonah had near perfect theology - he understood God’s love, mercy, justice, grace, but his heart really wasn’t changed by it. Paul Tripp writes, *“Faith in Christ is never just intellectual understanding. Biblical faith is a commitment of the heart that radically alters the way you live. Truth not lived is truth not believed.”*

This is the lesson for Jonah, the original readers, and God’s people today: God is the God of the Jews and the gentiles, and salvation is of the LORD. We should be thankful and worship Him!