

# Hey, Jo, Where You Goin with that Gospel of Mine?

*“The Sea was Angry that Day”*

Jonah 1:1-16

“The story of the great fish swallowing Jonah borders greatly on the marvelous; but it would have approached nearer to the idea of a miracle **if Jonah had swallowed the great fish**” (Thomas Payne).

Mention Jonah, and you can't help but think of him being swallowed. Too bad because there's so much more to hear.

Jonah is a historical account. It is a true story; the events in it – including Jonah being swallowed and surviving – are real.

How do we know? Jesus Christ Himself referred to Jonah as a prophet and his experiences as literal. He pointed His critics to Jonah's experience three days and three nights in the fish.

At the same time, Jonah's literal experiences are also illustrations of spiritual truth:

- Jonah illustrates the past, present, and future history of the nation of Israel. The Jews were commissioned by God to be a witness to the surrounding Gentile nations, but they refused. They were thus thrown into the “sea” – typical of the Gentile world - and “swallowed-up” by the nations. Still, they were not destroyed; they survived, and survive to

this day. Israel will eventually emerge and be a blessing to the nations of the world as God originally intended.

- Jesus used Jonah's experience in the belly of the great fish to illustrate His own death, burial, and resurrection - saying that the only sign He would give the Jews was that of the prophet Jonah.

There is a Jewish legend that Jonah was the widow's son whom Elijah brought back to life. Whether that is true or not, he is assumed to have been a disciple of Elisha.

In Jonah's time, Israel had split into two kingdoms - Israel in the North, and Judah in the South. The division weakened them both. From the mid-8th century all the kingdoms of the region came under increasing threat from the expanding Assyrian empire. The kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in 722BC. Its capital was destroyed, and both Biblical and Assyrian sources speak of massive deportations. Replacement settlers were brought in from other parts of the empire.

They were the cruelest, most brutal nation on the face of the earth. Listen to this quote from one of Assyria's own kings, Ashurbanipal, found in records which have survived to the present time: "I pierced [their captured leader] with my keen hand dagger. Through his jaw... I passed a rope, put a dog chain upon him and made him occupy a kennel."

Around 780-750BC, God ordered Jonah to reach out to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, and he famously refused.

What was God thinking? He tells you what He was thinking in the very last verse of the book:

Jonah 4:11 “And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left - and much livestock?”

The word “pity” is *compassion*. God singled-out the worst people on the face of the earth and said, “I have compassion for them.”

God puts compassion in action by giving His prophet a commission: “Go!” Jonah is about God’s *compassion* for souls and His *commission* of His servants.

- God’s compassion remains in effect today: “God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).
- God’s commission remains in effect today: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

The only difference is that the commission is not coming to Jonah; **it’s coming to you and I!**

Jonah 1:1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

Jonah 1:2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.”

Jonah understood God’s compassion. Jonah did not want the Assyrians spared and saved. He attempted to flee from God’s commission.

In the New Testament, the disciples were given a commission by the risen Lord:

Acts 1:8 “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Commissioned to take the Gospel to “the end of the earth,” they remained in Jerusalem - reluctant to “Go!” to the Gentiles. God shook-up their world: Stephen was stoned to death, a storm of persecution broke out upon the church in Jerusalem, and *then* they were “scattered abroad” and began preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Jonah 1:3 But Jonah arose 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 from the presence of the LORD.

“Tarshish” is probably the coast of Southern Spain. He headed west as far as he could go, about 2500 miles.

He found a ship; he could afford the fare; and he could sleep in peace. **Circumstances can be deceiving.** You *can't* determine God's will for your life merely by circumstances. His will is found first and foremost in His Word. You need to live on *principle*, not on *perception*. Christians too often allow circumstances to comfort them while they are actively disobeying God.

Jonah 1:4 But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.

Jonah 1:5 Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.

These were experienced sailors. They ate storms for lunch. Their skill failed them as they began to realize that this was unlike any other storm they had ever experienced.

Once their own skill failed, they each cried out to their “god.” They were brought to the point of understanding that there are spiritual realities we each must face.

Terror and tragedy prepare unbelieving hearts for truth. They strip away sources of strength and expose the failure of belief systems.

Jonah 1:6 So the captain came to him, and said to him, “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.”

The unbelieving captain rightly guessed that Jonah’s God was not willing that any should perish. He went to Jonah with God’s message of compassion - when all the while it was Jonah who had been sent to Nineveh with that same message.

Jonah could not miss the irony. He had tried to avoid sharing with Gentiles who were perishing, but God busted

him. If he wouldn't go to the Gentiles, *God would bring the Gentiles to him!*

Jonah 1:7 And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble *has come* upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.

Jonah 1:8 Then they said to him, "Please tell us! For whose cause *is* this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?"

Jonah 1:9 So 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*."

Right about now the "God of heaven Who made the sea and the dry land" was just Who you needed. God was forcing Jonah to give his testimony to Gentiles. As terrible as the storm and potential loss of life, you have to see the humor in this.

Jonah 1:10 Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, "Why have you done this?" For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

No child of God should ever suffer the humiliation of being reproved by an unbeliever. Nevertheless, God will use them if it suits His purposes.

Jonah 1:11 Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?" - for the sea was growing more tempestuous.

Jonah 1:12 And he said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest *is* because of me.”

I’m not sure this was the only answer. How about just turn the ship around and Jonah repent and go to Nineveh? He would rather die than go to Nineveh.

Notice, too, how your sin **always** involves and affects others. We speak of “victimless crimes” and seek to legalize things like drug use and prostitution. There is no such thing as a “victimless crime.”

Jonah 1:13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them.

These pagan sailors put Jonah to shame. They cared more for him than he for them. They were not willing for him to perish – even though he had put them in harm’s way and had hidden the message of salvation from them.

Jonah 1:14 Therefore they cried out to the LORD and said, “We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man’s life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You.”

They had a respect for the sanctity of human life. They acted slowly and deliberately - and prayerfully.

It seems odd that they threw him overboard - until you see the spiritual truth being illustrated. Remember that Jesus would later use the story of Jonah to illustrate His own death, burial, and resurrection:

- In order for these sailors to be safe, Jonah must die.
- In order for them to be saved, Jesus would die.

Jonah 1:15 So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

Jonah 1:16 Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows.

These sailors are converted:

1. They “feared God,” which is used as an expression of saving faith.
2. They “offered a sacrifice,” which was the proper way to approach God.
3. They “took vows.” If they had taken vows *before* the sea grew calm, I would be suspicious. Many people make promises to God while they are in trouble, only to forget them after the trouble has passed. No, they took vows afterward – indicating a true conversion.

Again please note the irony: The very thing Jonah had wanted to avoid had now come to pass. God had used him to minister His grace to the Gentiles and they had gotten saved. Too bad Jonah wasn’t there to see it.

Jonah was languishing. “Languish” means *to grow dull; to no longer be active and vigorous; to lose strength*. You see Jonah languishing: He was sleeping on a ship headed for Tarshish when he should have been serving in the city of Nineveh. God shook-up his world to arouse him from his languishing.

Wherever you are, that’s your Nineveh. Thankfully, no one is piercing your jaw with a keen dagger and kenneling you like a dog. As bad as things might seem, your boss or your

teacher is not flaying you and spreading your skin on the wall.

In your Nineveh, don't languish. Be moved with God's message of compassion and discover your method of communicating it to those who are perishing.