

COMPASSION IN JONAH

Matthew W. Bassford

After I finished going through Jonah in my daily Bible reading, I posted on Facebook, "I love the book of Jonah! It is both warm and subtle." In what is perhaps a sign that I deadpan too much, most who responded thought I was joking. Those who took me seriously, seriously disagreed. Apparently, an explanation is in order!

I think part of the problem is that when most Christians think of Jonah, they think of the eponymic prophet and his encounter with the not-whale. The story is dramatic, but it is admittedly not very cozy. However, the book is not about Jonah's ingestion by a great fish, nor even about his preaching mission to Nineveh. As impressive as those things are, they're not the point. Instead, the theme of the book is God's efforts to teach His wayward prophet compassion.

Think about it. In the opening scene of the book, God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh, and Jonah heads in the opposite direction, presumably because he isn't terribly interested in saving the Ninevites. At this point, God would have been fully justified in turning Jonah into a grease spot. However, he doesn't. Instead, He sends Jonah on his undersea journey to give him time to repent, just as He wants to give Nineveh time to repent.

Jonah does, and once he's back on dry land, he grudgingly goes to Nineveh. Then, he warns the people of God's impending judgment, even though he really wants to see them destroyed. However, the outcome is exactly what God wants to see, and exactly what Jonah doesn't want to see. The city repents en masse, and disaster is averted.

Jonah, however, remains as hard-hearted as ever. He camps out on the hills above the city, hoping that God will change His mind and destroy it (the opposite of Abraham's perspective on Sodom, if you think about it). In one last attempt to correct His wayward prophet, God raises up a plant to shade him and then kills it. When Jonah gets upset, God points out that if Jonah is right to get emotionally attached to a plant, God is right to feel compassion for a city filled with human beings.

This is a story that gives me a great deal of hope. It clearly reveals the depth of God's compassion, not only for Nineveh, but for one of His own who repeatedly refuses to get it. I'm glad I serve a God like that, not least because of all the times when I have repeatedly refused, and

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WHEN JEREMIAH WANTED TO QUIT PREACHING

Terry Wane Benton

It wasn't just mental fatigue and having to deal with obnoxious attitudes, but having to constantly deal with brethren undermining him and working against him, some even looking for ways to get rid of him for good! It got to where he dreaded preaching the needed message of repentance. It was a negative message God called him to preach because the nation had drifted so far that doom was their future. They laughed him off, saying, "*Violence and plunder*" is all he ever says (Jeremiah 20:8). Jeremiah wanted to just quit. He said, "*I will not make mention of Him nor speak anymore in His name.*" I've been there a few times. Sometimes it seems useless because people don't seem to listen and appreciate your efforts to save their souls. You feel pretty lonely when you ought to feel appreciated and loved. Jeremiah was feeling very unloved, except for God!

When a man truly understands the significance, truth, wonder, and power of the word, he can't always just suppress it. Jeremiah tried but the word was in his heart, and when it is in the heart it is "*like a burning fire shut up in the bones,*" and you get tired of holding it in (9). Jeremiah tried to quit, but his message was too important, too needed, too powerful to suppress. He could no longer watch the light go out when such a message was desperately needed. We need more Jeremiahs who can't hold back from preaching the most needed message that still lives and abides for the saving of souls. We don't need people who can preach or not, but people who can't keep themselves from it. Do you understand what Jeremiah was feeling? Do you feel that same way?

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probably still do repeatedly refuse, to get it. I am a daily witness to the greatness of His mercy.

Second, the story of Jonah illustrates God's patience. Despite multiple provocations, God doesn't give up on Jonah. Instead, He continues teaching him, right up to the last sentence of the book. As a disciple of Jesus, I know that I am very much a work in progress, and I am thankful that God will patiently continue His work in me and not give up on me.

Is a book filled with storms and judgments stereotypically warm? Well, no, but every time I read it, I find myself warmed anyway. The conflict in it isn't God's fault, but Jonah's. The compassion, though, all belongs to God.

**"WHAT MUST I DO
TO BE SAVED?"**

ACTS 16:30

LEARN THE GOSPEL

John 6:45; Romans 10:17

BELIEVE IN CHRIST

Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16

CONFESS CHRIST

Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 3:19; 17:30

BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-6

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

**"THE ASSEMBLING OF
OURSELVES TOGETHER"**

HEBREWS 10:24-25

SUNDAY

Worship @ 10:00 a.m.

Studies @ 11:45 a.m.

WEDNESDAY

Studies & Worship @ 7:00 p.m.

75 Sherrod Boulevard
Belén, New Mexico

**Seekers Welcome.
Members Expected.**

**"IF A MAN IS OVERTAKEN IN
ANY TRESPASS...
RESTORE SUCH A ONE"**

GALATIANS 6:1

CONFESS TRESPASSES

James 5:16; 1st John 1:9

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 8:22

PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS

Acts 8:22

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

**"A WORD FITLY SPOKEN IS
LIKE APPLES OF GOLD IN
SETTINGS OF SILVER"**

PROVERBS 25:11

"If a person knows nothing about religion except what he's read in the New Testament, he simply does not know enough to be a member of any denomination."

– Spencer Blackwelder

"WHOLE COUNSEL"

ACTS 20:27

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**"JEHOVAH HAD PREPARED A
GREAT FISH TO SWALLOW JONAH"**

Bryan Matthew Dockens

Skeptics claim a whale is not a fish and even if a whale was intended by the inspired text (Jonah 1:17), whales, despite their massive size, are incapable of swallowing a man whole as they are built to feed on plankton.

A number of possibilities can be reasonably considered.

1. Whatever kind of fish consumed the prophet may now be extinct.
2. Conversely, the species that ingested Jonah may yet remain undiscovered.
3. God might have formed a special creation for this singular event.
4. Since taxonomy is a relatively modern science, whales could well have fit under the general classification of "fish" in antiquity.
5. The Lord, who is obeyed by immense sea creatures on prophet-swallowing missions, is able to miraculously alter the anatomy of existing creatures, thereby enabling them to swallow a man whole.

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