

DECEMBER 14

To see where Jonah fits with the other prophets and the history of the OT, look at the chart at the end of this document, "Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets."

Jonah 1-4

In reading Jonah, I really don't have much to say about the story itself. It's pretty straightforward. My thoughts have more to do with what the book of Jonah was meant to say to his people and to us.

Think about this. After the long and decisive years of ministry of Elijah and Elisha, the northern kingdom experienced its best years. Jeroboam II reigned for 41 years, and Assyria, the rising star, was eaten up with internal problems. This meant that everyone had peace and prosperity. So, what happened to the threats of God's coming judgment to northern Israel, this very idolatrous and rebellious nation? If I had been planning it, judgment would have fallen immediately after Elisha died. Israel had been given enough patience, in my opinion. Even so, I wouldn't have given them prosperity. I definitely wouldn't have given them another 70 years before the hammer fell. What was God thinking? What a testimony to His patience and mercy.

At the beginning of Jeroboam's reign God sent three prophets to Israel who all appeared at the same time. Hosea prophesied on and off for about 20 years. At the same time God sent Amos who only preached for a short time, right before the great earthquake. Notably, God said there would come a drought of His Word in the land, and for 50 years, before the end of Israel, there was no prophet. The people would have had to go south to Judah for the Word of God. That was probably the plan.

And then there was Jonah. Jonah is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25, telling Jeroboam that God would restore part of the old borders of Israel. In the book of Jonah, Jonah's preaching wasn't even to Israel. Since we have the book of Jonah, we know that Israel heard the story of what happened to Nineveh, but that wouldn't have disturbed or convicted them. It would have just confirmed for Israel that God didn't really mean business. So, what is the point of this story?

I think the point of Jonah is what Jesus mentioned several times during His ministry. *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.* (Matt. 12:41) Jonah became a sign of the resurrection and of God's judgment and sovereign working. The men of Nineveh, by their repentance and response to the Word, became a sign of judgment against the unbelief of Israel.

The story of Jonah and Nineveh would have made people laugh, but behind the story was a serious testimony and judgment against Israel. God sent a little known, unwilling prophet to speak to this ungodly Gentile city. Assyria had experienced deep problems. Historians say there was an outbreak of the black plague that ravaged the city. They were now recovering and then Jonah arrives, and these people saw the hand of God and repented. Gentiles, the uncircumcised, repented. Yet even Israel with all its privilege and heritage did not heed God's Word. They could make jokes like, "How many Ninevites does it take to put sackcloth on a cow?" But an important, massive judgment against Israel had just been delivered. Ironically, the Assyrians would recover and lead Israel into exile. I think God scripted the events of Jonah to sound funny to the unbelieving, but in the end, they were not laughing.

One more thing to think about regarding Jonah is that he wrote this book. That means that after his "fit" at the end of the book he saw his patriotic childishness, repented, laughed at himself and understood what God was doing. The fact that he wrote this shows he understood God's grace and God's righteous judgment against Israel. The fact that this book was added to the Old

Testament books in the temple in Jerusalem means that godly people in Judah/Jerusalem immediately knew that this book was a word from God and the Word of God.

Jonah 1

Vs. 1-3 Jonah knew God had said Assyria would punish Israel. Amos (3:9) had predicted this. Jonah tried to avert God's plan, like trying to change the future in some sci-fi movie. Tarshish was in Spain, hundreds of miles in the other direction.

Vs. 4-16 Notice that the unbelievers were more God-fearing than Jonah. Obviously this was said in purposeful irony, to show that sometimes the lost are more perceptive of God than the saved. Just for another example of something like this, find the place in 1 Samuel 6:1-6 where the Philistines had captured the ark of the covenant, and look at what they said and did. They weren't "saved" and believing by any stretch of the imagination, but they showed more sense than God's own people. Religious activity doesn't mean that a person is saved.

V. 17 This would have added a lot of humor to the story of Jonah. Talk about having the ultimate bad day. He couldn't even get out of this assignment by drowning. Yet consider that this event was also designed so that years later, Jesus Himself could refer to it. Jesus only ever referred to four prophets by name, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah and Jonah. Jesus said, "*An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.*"⁴⁰ *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.* (Matt. 12:39-40) Jesus' own words make the overall message of Jonah important.

Jonah 2

Vs. 1-9 This wasn't a prayer for God to save him; it was Jonah's thanks for being saved.

V. 10 This would have made the hearers laugh themselves out of their sandals. Depending on where Jonah was vomited out, he probably still had a 500-mile walk.

Jonah 3

Vs. 1-5 Nineveh was a huge city and it grew to have suburbs with several markets and community centers. Jonah would have stopped in each of these. Imagine how long it would take you going through Chicago or New York and their suburbs, if you had to stop at every shopping area and preach. This should be understood as saying that Jonah began preaching when he hit the first marketplace and it took him three days to do Nineveh.

Some people think that Jonah's appearance might have added to his message: bleached by the whale's digestive fluids, clothes covered with vomit, etc. But after a long journey, Jonah would have been tubbed and scrubbed, maybe just a little dusty. The response of the people was because of God's work, not Jonah's appearance or preaching. Nineveh was already having problems. Having Jonah show up was like the cherry on the top. Look at Peter's sermon in Acts 2. It was God who worked, not the preacher. God had already gone ahead of Jonah. Jonah didn't realize it, but he was really only following God. That's what we're doing too, following Jesus in the harvest. He opens the doors, not us.

Note that there was nothing in Jonah's message that was tailored to speaking and relating to Ninevites. Jonah did no research on how to understand and relate to these people. The message was very simple and it worked. Today we get so paralyzed in thinking about relating to "boomers," "gen-x," "post-modern," or the next special group, that we say nothing or blame ourselves for the lack of response. Here are three things Jesus said that work in every culture and in every generation to direct and aid us in our witness.

Matthew 4:17 *From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

Luke 24:47 *and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*

John 18:37 *Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to (hears) my voice."*

Jonah didn't need to convince anyone. He just said what the Lord told him to say. That "strategy" still works.

Vs. 6-9 Sackcloth on the animals? King Jeroboam must have laughed when he heard this part of the story. I wonder if he was convicted by this, or if he laughed so hard that his wine backed up and started coming out of his nose.

V. 10 The God of all the earth doesn't desire that any should perish. God had done so much through Elijah and Elisha, so many signs and wonders and yet Israel didn't respond. Here, some ignorant, uncircumcised people were repenting and receiving God's mercy. Go figure.

Jonah 4

Vs. 1-4 This is the reason that Jonah ran. He knew that God was going to use the Assyrians to destroy Israel, and he thought he could change the future by running. I think Jonah "McFly" had watched too many sci-fi "change the future" flicks.

Jonah is a good example of someone who knows the nature of God in his head, and is totally unlike God in his behavior. This should be convicting to us.

Vs. 5-11 This was another humorous move by the Lord. He got Jonah to attach himself emotionally to this plant. I wonder if Jonah named it "Wilson?" While Jonah sank into his moodiness, God explained that all men on this planet are His concern. That last line about the cattle might also have gotten a laugh.

On hearing this story, those who were serious and open to the Lord would have been appalled and begun packing their bags. They would have seen the subtle, yet deep, judgment against them. They would have gathered their families and headed south to Judah, to introduce their kids to Yahweh. Others would have laughed at those dumb "Ninnys" and told this story to their kids.

For us as disciples, this story tells us that God is patient, but that judgment will come. It tells us that we reach out, but it is God who prepares the hearers. Our job is just to go and follow Christ into the harvest. He will do His part, but we need to obey and to follow.

Revelation 5

As we read these chapters in Revelation, remember that God is showing John very specific things that He personally wants us to know. There is symbolism that might be hard to understand, but still, these are very literal events in heaven. The events we'll read of today are fairly easy to understand.

How would you title the event in chapter 4? What was its purpose? It was giving honor to the Father, but I don't think it is something that happens every day or week or month. I think it was a special one-time event that led up to chapter 5. Likewise, what we are reading today is a "once-in-all-of-eternity" event that we have been invited to see in advance. Through faith, this ought to rock our world. It should strengthen and set our hearts on fire. Being human we are wet wood, I know; but that's why it is written, so that we have the luxury and privilege of reading and re-reading what is happening here. This event will lead to chapter 6, which launches the Tribulation, that is, the seven-year "day of the Lord."

Vs. 1-2 The Father holds the *scroll*. Apparently, on one end of the scroll there were wax *seals* at different places, kind of like paper clips, so that the scroll could only be rolled open to a certain place. The angel crying out like this is making an official, judicial challenge to all of created

reality. The scroll is the judgment of God on mankind. Who would be *worthy* to open that scroll? God could have judged, but how much better if there were a human who had defeated sin and Satan, and who could now re-claim human rule and authority as the second Adam. "Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He."

Vs. 3-5 I find it interesting that the phrase, *in heaven or on earth or under the earth*, is used. Paul uses this phrase also in Philippians 2:10. Also, it is interesting that John is heartbroken, sobbing. Why do you think that was? Is judgment something that we should desire? Or could it be that it is actually more than judgment? Was it more like a fulfillment and finally fixing the long tragic story of mankind?

Vs. 6-7 I find it interesting that Jesus is *among the elders*, standing right there with them. We've seen these *seven spirits* before and it seems to me that they have something to do with the mission of the gospel. Taking that scroll is a world-changing event. I really wonder what is happening on earth during these events.

Vs. 8-10 Notice that the taking of the scroll is mentioned again. It was a decisive act that set off a one of a kind expression of worship and praise. This is a big event.

V. 9 The *new song* was given at that time. The song seems to say three things. First, Jesus was slain. Second, by His blood He ransomed people. This mix of people is the church. Third, He made them a kingdom of priests. The redeemed serve mankind before God, reaching out to those yet lost. That is being a priest in the simplest, servant sense of the world. Another way of putting it is being ambassadors for Christ.

The entire song is saying why He has the right to open the seals. Not only did He sacrifice Himself, but His death brought forgiveness and righteousness to those who accepted the offer. His victory in producing these people is the proof that redemption was possible. Redemption becomes the proof that God is righteous in judging those who refused to be redeemed. The human condition is impossible, but God found a way around the impossible in the sacrifice of His Son and the redemptive power of the Spirit as evidenced by us, the church.

V. 10 We will reign with Him on earth. I think this is where the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:13-26) comes in. During the Millennial Kingdom we already know that the disciples will govern the twelve tribes (Luke 22:30) and that David will govern Israel (Ez. 34:23-24). Apparently those who have invested wisely, following Christ in the harvest during this time of the church, will be given responsibilities in governing and leading around the world during the Millennium. Jesus will make sure it is a time and world of perfect justice and mercy.

Vs. 11-14 Our Lord, and what He did, brings all history together for the angels, for mankind, for all of creation. Taking that scroll in hand celebrates the commencement of the end of this entire drama. This is like Jesus officially taking the throne, taking His ruling seat as Son of Man. All of these things have been promised and were sure, but now they become actual. Even though the removal of that first seal will begin the Tribulation, what is beginning is the healing of everything and every order that God created. And they all worship together.

Psalm 133

David wrote this song for the worshipers coming to Jerusalem to appreciate the miracle of God's unity. There was no one who could have known the wonder of unity better than David. We've looked at his life and know of his long years of running from Saul. Having read David's psalms, especially Psalm 119, we know that he suffered from all of the lies spread against him, yet he kept himself in the Word, crying out desperately to God. Then there were the seven years of civil war as David reigned in Hebron as king of Judah. Finally, God brought peace, and David immediately worked to bring Israel together in worship to the Lord.

Vs. 1-3 Although, as a pastor, I don't fully identify with the oil poured on Aaron's head and running down his face and on to his clothes as blessing. I still appreciate the miracle of unity. Should the Lord put me in a situation where everyone is working in the harvest, seeing people come to Christ and making disciples, who make disciples, and we have this kind of God-given unity, then I'll go to Sam's, get a 55-gallon barrel of olive oil and let the elders douse me regularly.

Proverbs 29:26-27

Looking at the verses in reverse order, it looks like God is saying that there will always be conflict between the righteous and the unrighteous. So on earth, we should understand that whenever justice wins the day, it isn't because of men, but because of God.

Thinking about Psalm 133, it is probably also the case that if there is peace among believers working together in the harvest, it isn't because of our people skills, or "chemistry," or leadership skills. It is because of the Lord and His desire to see disciples making disciples of the lost.