

## **Jonah** **3:1–5, 10**

Jonah was a prophet of the Lord at the time of Jeroboam II of Israel (see 2 Kings 14:25), a time when Damascus, the capital of Syria, had fallen to the Assyrians. Jeroboam was able to regain much of the northern territory that had been lost to the Syrians. But looming on the northern horizon was the awesome might of Assyria, which was taking on the proportions of a true world power.

The Book of Jonah tells the story of the prophet who tried to run away from the Lord and from his assigned duties as the Lord's prophet. He had been ordered to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, with a call to repentance. Jonah wanted Assyria to be judged and destroyed by the Lord, not to hear a call to repentance with its implicit assurance that the Lord would have mercy on them if they would repent. Fleeing, Jonah sailed for Spain. When the ship was threatened by a severe storm, Jonah was identified as the cause of all this and was thrown overboard. He was swallowed by a great fish the Lord had prepared. He was kept alive inside the fish, and, when he repented and prayed for the Lord's forgiveness and help, he was vomited by the fish upon the seashore. Having learned his lesson, Jonah was ready to do things God's way—even if it resulted in God's being merciful to Israel's enemies.

While some scholars consider the story of Jonah a parable, the story is a true, historical, dramatic and miraculous display of the depth of the Lord's concern even for nations who do not know Him. Jesus' comparing Himself to Jonah, using Jonah's experience in the fish's belly as a type of His burial, makes it impossible to think of Jonah in less than historical terms (see Matthew 12:38–41). Jesus' own words compel us to see the Ninevites in the Book of Jonah as real people who had really repented as a result of the real preaching of a real Jonah, who had spent three days inside a real sea creature.

1. Jonah is clearly preoccupied with what he thinks people deserve or don't deserve. Why is it so easy for us to fall into the trap of assigning blame and merit? Worth/Identity/Action analysis.
  
2. Was Jonah's mission to the Gentiles unique? Read Genesis 12:1-3 and 13:14-16.
  - a. "nation" in 12:2. God could have used the word "family" or "clan." Instead, He uses the word nation. This is important considering that the Tower of Babel was Genesis 11. Since Yahweh broke up humanity into many nations, He promises to unite them into one nation. (Acts 2:1-5)
  
  - b. "bless" in 12:2-3. Blessing is the antonym of curse. In Genesis 3:17, God presents curses on creation. What does God's promise of blessing imply in light of Adam and Eve's sin in Genesis 3?

- c. “seed” in 13:15-16. The word offspring is literally seed (as in the seed of Abraham). This is the same word used in Genesis to talk about Eve’s offspring. Dr. Reed Lessing will argue, “This one seed is realized through a succession of representatives who are down payment until Christ himself comes in that same line as the consummation” (Jonah 153). Read Romans 9:4-5 and Galatians 3:5-16. What does this mean for us?
- d. Lessing will describe NT missions as “centrifugal,” that is Jesus sends “evangelists and witnesses out to the far-flung corners of the earth” (Jonah 153). But he classifies most missions in the OT as centripetal “with God drawing all peoples in toward the center—the land where Abraham and his seed dwell” (Jonah 153).

What are ways the nation of Israel failed at their centripetal mission?

How do we fall into these same traps?

- 3. What does it say about Nineveh that it was “three days’ journey in breadth”?

Jonah proclaimed, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” Because of the Hebrews’ tendency to speak in concrete terms, “forty days” is seen as implying “a time long enough to accomplish what is intended.” Here, since it is used as a deadline in connection with an urgent warning, a specific amount of time appears to have been meant.

- 4. How could one man’s preaching have such impact on a powerful pagan people?
- 5. What is the point of their calling for a fast and putting on sackcloth?
- 6. The changeless God is described here and in some other places in the Scriptures as “relenting,” “repenting,” and “changing His mind” about things. This is called “anthropomorphism,” which means “modes of speaking that describe God for us in human terms. For because our weakness does not attain to his exalted state, the description of him that is given to us must be accommodated to our capacity so that we may understand it.”

How do you feel about this kind of anthropomorphism?

- 7. Under what circumstances has God been happy to “change His mind” about His judgment of our sins? Read Luke 14:1-10.
- 8. How does this Old Testament lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?