

Biblical Exegesis Jonah Sermon

Good evening. Take your Bibles if you would and turn to the book of Jonah. We are gonna focus on Jonah chapter 4, but we'll do an overview of the book, so turn to Jonah and we'll start in chapter 1.

This Spring semester at Alliance University, I was in an exegetical class studying with a book of the Bible to choose from, Jonah or I Thessalonians. I chose Jonah and we were to pick a chapter or a passage within Jonah that we were going to research and come up with a thesis on and I chose Jonah chapter 4 because I believe that Jonah chapter 4 really encompasses the reason the author wrote the book and without chapter 4 you would miss completely what the author intended the audience to understand about the book. So, I look forward to going over that with you what I believe the author's purpose of the book is and for the message I have four objectives: I'm going to first of all give you a brief bio of the prophet Jonah, then we'll do an overview of the book, and then we'll make an application in regard to four responses to a question that is asked in chapter 4.

So, to start off with the bio, Jonah is not a fictional character. There's a lot of people that don't believe he was a real person, but there's other places in the Bible, specifically in 2 Kings 14 that shows you that Jonah was an actual, historical figure. He lived in a town called Gath-Hepher which is modern day Mashhad, up near Nazareth, where Jesus was raised. It's interesting that Jonah is from the same area where Jesus is from, considering how Jesus likens himself to Jonah. I find it interesting that they were from the same area. He lives somewhere around 826 BC to 790 BC depending on how different scholars date him. Another great thing about Jonah, he is the greatest type of Christ with respect to Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. There is no greater type than Jonah when it comes to the topic of the resurrection and how Jesus likens himself.

He lived during the reign of King Jeroboam II. He was his close advisor. He lived during a very prosperous time in the Northern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom had split away from the Southern Kingdom during the reign of Solomon's son, Rehoboam. The Northern Kingdom had lots of adversity and the pinnacle of their existence is King Jeroboam II's reign in which Jonah was the advisor/prophet to the king.

I'm a chaplain in the military and I find it interesting how chaplains in the military advise commanders and it goes all the way back to the relationship between prophets and kings. Prophets were the advisors to the kings in those ancient times and our military still kind of follows that format where chaplains aren't only that religious support and the unit ministry team for the battalions, but also part of their job is to advise the commanders. So Jonah's job was to advise King Jeroboam II and under Jonah's advisement rebuilt all of the land of Israel from all the way in Damascus all the way down to the Dead Sea, which encompasses the whole land that God had promised to Abraham way back and that land that Joshua had conquered when he came into the promised land. The enemy/nemesis to Israel was the Assyrians, whose capital

city, by the way, was Nineveh is very important to this book. Jonah advised Jeroboam to rebuild cities that the Assyrians had destroyed. The Assyrians were the world power of the day and all the kingdoms around the Assyrians were vassals to them. They just wrecked havoc and were the ultimate demise of the Northern Kingdom, which explains a lot of Jonah's attitude in going to that capital city to preach repentance.

Jonah was undoubtedly one of the sons of the prophet serving under Elisha. He would have been a young man in the time of Elisha, living in the area in which he ministered. There are no specific mentions of Jonah during Elisha's ministry, but there's no chance that Jonah wouldn't have been one of the sons of the prophet that Elisha trained during his reign. In Jewish literature, Jonah is thought to be the son of the woman from Jerapath, whom Elijah raised from the dead. By tradition, Jonah is also the prophet that anointed Jehu.

So now, let's take a look at the book starting in chapter 1. It's an overview of the book. The human author is unknown. I suggest reading this book as if our glorified Savior wrote it to you personally and that you take Jonah's name out and insert your own. That's how you get the most out of this book, is by putting yourself in Jonah's place. The author is very mysterious. He's like an expert criminal who doesn't leave any forensics behind. There's really no fingerprint that's left in this book about the author, not leaving clues as to who he was. Another interesting thing that he does in the way he writes this portion of the story of Jonah, this season of Jonah's life. I say that because you can't judge Jonah on this one portion of his life. I mean this is a very critical point in Jonah's life, but this moment does not encompass all of his life as a prophet. But this author does something very interesting in this book. As a comparison of how Paul writes his epistles, Paul gives advice. He gives admonishments. He gives instructions. The author of Jonah does none of that. He literally just tells the story and he leaves it completely up to the audience to make applications and opinions for themselves.

Starting in chapter 1, there are 13 acts of God in the book. When I had first studied the books, I had come up with 12 acts of God in the book and it wasn't until just recently that I discovered a 13th one. There's 12 that are obvious because the author says, "God does..." or "God did..." and we will look at them, but there is a 13th one. I find it very interesting that I found a 13th one because what is 13 the number of in the Bible? Rebellion. And what do you have taking place here? You have a rebellion of God's prophet and God responding to His prophet with 13 acts in the book. So I find that very interesting. In verses 1-3 you see God's first act. In God's first act he calls Jonah to go to Nineveh, which he rebels against and the author does not give us any explanation as to why Jonah fled from the call of God. Then in verse 4 you have God's second act, when Jonah flees God sends out a great wind into the sea to stop Jonah in his tracks and his determination to get away from that call of God. Then you have the third act of God down in verse 7. This is the one that I had missed. This is the one that I didn't notice right away. The sailors come up with this superstitious way of determining why bad things happen to them and they decide to cast lots. By casting lots they are going to determine whose fault it is that they are suffering this hardship with this storm coming upon them. The lot falls on Jonah. It occurred to me that this is the third act of God as we go chronologically through the book, but it's the 13th one that I missed. It's definitely an act of God. I don't think that God typically works by

superstitious acts and by chance, but this is not chance that's taking place here. It is not an accident that the lot fell on Jonah and that the sailors discovered that the reason for this storm is his fault. So that is definitely the third act of God in the book.

In verse 10, Jonah comes clean with the sailors for his reasons for fleeing but the author, interestingly enough, keeps the audience guessing as to what the reason is. It says he tells the sailors in the chapter here, but again the author does not tell us the reason. Why is that? Why does the author keep that a secret from us until the end? But Jonah's reason is so strong that he's willing to die over it. This is no small matter to Jonah that he is willing to be thrown overboard and give up his life. He would rather die than do what God wants him to do. Strong conviction over it.

Then we get to chapter 2. Chapter 2 is a poetic hymn. It's a prayer of thanksgiving and praise that Jonah makes to the Lord in his transition from death back to life again. There is so much that I can say about this chapter, especially in regard to the connection between Jonah and Jesus and the doctrine of the resurrection, but my focus is on chapter 4 and time won't allow for me to do that. There's a lot in this chapter that is reminiscent of the psalms of David as he expressed the things he suffered. David, of course, is a precursor to Christ and a type of Christ as well. Something else that is interesting that I want to point out about chapter 2 is it's connection to Jesus and how he felt and what he went through in his death, burial, and resurrection and his suffering for us. If you want to know what was going on in Christ's mind when he was suffering for us, just read carefully chapter 2 and you'll see Jesus' innermost thoughts in what he did as he took care of your and my sin. It's an amazing chapter and an amazing poetic hymn. Then, in verse 10 you have the 5th act of God in the book. He speaks to the fish and of course it vomits Jonah back up on the ground and Jonah starts making his way to Nineveh to do what God has asked him to do.

In chapter 3, you have two more acts of God. The first one is in verse 2. Jonah is again told by God to rise up and go to Nineveh and then the 7th act of God is in verse 10 which is an interesting thing in what God does here. Jonah, of course, goes to Nineveh and preaches judgment to them and the most miraculous thing happens in terms of a city-wide revival in world history. I don't think in world history there is any greater revival that is recorded that takes place in a city with a large population like Nineveh has in all of world history. Nineveh is the number 1 largest city revival that has taken place. The revival is so big and so drastic that the king even has the animals repenting in this chapter. It causes God to repent, which is the 7th act of God in the book. If you look down in verse 10, "And God saw their works that they turned from their evil ways. God repented of the evil he said he would do unto them, and he did it not." It's incredible that human beings, by their actions, can get a sovereign God to change his mind about something he was going to do. I find that incredible. This isn't the only place in the Bible where that takes place. Moses got God to change his mind about destroying the first generation that came out of Egypt when they made the golden calf and worshiped it in the wilderness. God changed his mind about destroying Jerusalem when David had sinned and numbered the people. God changed his mind about taking Hezekiah's life when he prayed and asked God to have mercy on him and God gave him 15 more years. So there's some examples of when God

changed his mind about what he was going to do based on the free will of mankind. I find that interesting.

Now, if the book ended here in chapter 3, you would have a happy ending. Jonah gets right. He repents of his decision to disobey God and goes and preaches a great message. He's the preacher responsible for the greatest city revival in history. God repents of destroying Nineveh. They do the right and get right so if the book ended here, you'd have a happy ending. All the Ts would be crossed. All the Is would be dotted. But then you have chapter 4. You get to chapter 4 and you have an extremely angry Jonah, who dialogues with God in utter displeasure. Let's read this chapter together and we'll comment as we go.

The Bible says, "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was very angry and he prayed unto the Lord and said, 'I pray thee oh Lord, was this not my saying when I was yet in my country?'" And now you are going to get the reason why Jonah didn't want to go to begin with. The author finally reveals it in the words of Jonah. He says, "Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil." That's why he didn't go. He worried that his preaching would lead the people to repenting and God would repent of the evil he said he would do and then not destroy Nineveh. What Jonah fear is exactly what came to pass. He says, "Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live." He is so angry that God did this for these people that he wanted to end his life over it. Now this is the second time he is asking God to take his life. First he tries to take it himself in the sea and now he is saying, God if this is your decision, I don't want to live anymore. He can't stand it. To try to put yourself in Jonah's shoes and imagine how he felt, think about the German-Jews during WWII. Imagine being a German-Jew in WWII and God calling you to go to Nazi Germany to preach repentance unto Hitler and his entourage. Imagine how a German-Jew would react to that calling and for God to bring mercy and repentance to the Germans after all they had suffered. Or think of a Ukrainian pastor being called by God to go to the Kremlin and preach repentance to Russia. Except in Jonah's case, the atrocities were much, much, much worse. Very similar to what the Jews suffered under Hitler. The Assyrians were a brutal, brutal people to the people that they conquered. Jonah hated them. Look at verse 4, "Then said the Lord, 'Doest thou well to be angry?'" He questioned Jonah's anger.

"So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city." This is very odd that Jonah decides to go east out of the city because if you look at the geography of where Jonah is from and where Nineveh is, Nineveh is far east of Israel, Jonah's homeland. You would think that after the message is done and he's fulfilled his obligation of what God wanted him to do, that he would go back home. If he were to exit the city to go home, he would have exited the city to the west. Here it says he is exiting to the east. Why would he do that? I don't know the geography of Nineveh. I have never been to that part of the world or seen the ruins of Nineveh. Maybe there was a place of elevation and Jonah exited out of the east side because he wanted a good vantage point to see if God's destruction would come in 40 days like he had predicted and he hoped the judgment would fall on them, but it didn't fall. Maybe that's why he

went out there. Maybe he had no desire to go back home because he felt that as a prophet his words didn't come to pass. It's very interesting the path he decides to go. While Jonah sits there on the east side of the city waiting for destruction to fall, God gives Jonah a really tough object lesson that He is going to explain at the end of the book and end off with a question.

Let's look at the object lesson in verses 6-8. "And the Lord God prepared a gourd" (9th act of God), and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm (10th act of God) when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind (11th act of God); and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.'" Jonah is so angry that he asks for death a third time and it won't be the last time. There are 4 times in this book that he asks God to take his life.

Then God asks him the question again in verse 9. "And God said to Jonah, 'Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?' And he said, 'I do well to be angry, even unto death.'" The anger that is inside of Jonah is out of control. In verse 9 you have the 12th act of God, setting up Jonah for the point of his object lesson which he is about to conclude the book with in verses 10 & 11.

"Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" He gives you the number of the population of children in the city. He says there is a bunch of innocent kids in that city Jonah. You can have pity on a gourd, but you can't have pity on the innocent of this city? Nevermind that they repented of the evil they had done. It shows God's concern for even the animals in the city that he didn't want to destroy them. But Jonah could care less because of his hatred which was so severe against the Assyrian people. And then the book ends beautifully with a question that is the key to understanding the purpose of God giving us this book. Only two books in the Bible end with a question mark. Anyone have any idea which other book of the Bible ends with a question mark? It's Nahum. Oddly enough, both books that end with a question, Jonah and Nahum, have to do with the city of Nineveh. In Jonah, the city of Nineveh repents from the preaching and from the impending judgment that God is going to throw on it. But, 150 years later, when Nahum is preaching to Nineveh, God is finished with Nineveh and He is getting ready to destroy them. It's funny that Jonah wished he could have had the ministry that Nahum had. Jonah wanted to be in Nahum's shoes, to be able to preach judgment and have that judgment come to pass on Nineveh, but it wasn't God's time yet. There was a generation of Nineveh/Assyrians that would repent and do God's will.

So now, let me point your attention to the purpose of this book. The overwhelming theme and purpose of this book according to commentators is God's sovereignty. The word sovereignty means supreme power or authority. I pointed out 13 acts of God in this book and He certainly did those things in His sovereignty. There is no arguing that. There is a much more specific purpose to this book than just the broad spectrum of God's sovereignty. Some commentators

believe that this book is a parable of God's sovereignty but I don't believe it's a parable because Jonah was a real character. He was a real person. When Jesus speaks a parable or when Nathan told the parable to David, they are fictional characters. Some believe that the book of Jonah is a parody or a satire, a deliberate exaggeration or some sarcastic means to make people look ridiculous in order to make a point about God's sovereignty. I would disagree and argue that Jonah is a historical narrative. Some say that Jonah is an analogy of the nation of Israel and an allegory of the political state of the Northern Kingdom. I don't have a problem with that because the Northern Kingdom was definitely rebellious against God's will and Jonah was rebellious against God's will for his life, so you can make that comparison. I still don't think that is the main point and purpose that the author wrote this book and the main take-away that we should get from the book of Jonah. It's up there on the dartboard, but it's not the bullseye.

If all we had was chapters 1-3 then I would agree that the book is about God's sovereignty and human rebellion and repentance, but not when you add chapter 4. There is something repeated in chapter 4 that is the heart and soul of the book and it's a question that God asks Jonah. Did you catch what that question is? He repeats it two times in verse 4 and verse 9. It's the title of my message: "Doest thou well to be angry?" The author records it twice so you don't miss it. The purpose of this book is this: How will you respond when God's sovereign will opposes yours? How will you respond? That's why the author wrote this book, to ask his audience to make you ponder the answer to that question. To make you think about: What is the appropriate response when what happens to Jonah, happens to you? Anger is not the right response, but it's usually the first response and probably the most popular response when God's will opposes our will.

This leads me to the application. Just think about that for a moment. How would you respond? How are you going to respond when something takes place in your life where God's will completely goes in the opposite direction of yours. God is certainly interested in how you answer that question. Maybe you've answered it already many times in your life. Maybe you've never been asked this question. But, so many people have answered this question like Jonah did: with anger. There's four responses that I want to bring to your attention that people have when God's will opposes theirs.

The first and foremost one is just like Jonah did with anger. "God, why did you allow this to happen to me? Why did you allow this circumstance to take place in my life? I don't deserve to have this happen to me. God, why did you take my leg from me? Why did you take my arm from me? God, I'll never walk again. Why did you allow this to happen? Why did you allow my child to die? God, how could you have done this to me? This is not what I want!" And like Job's wife, who advised her husband to "curse God and die" as a result. Sometimes God's will opposes ours so drastically that it makes people want to end their life as it did with Jonah and as it did with Job. People are so quick to judge God when He does something or allows something that they don't like to have happen in their life. I've literally heard people say, "When I stand before God, he has some explaining to do to me!" I've literally heard people tell me that as a pastor. They say, "I have some questions that I want God to answer and tell me." Funny thing is, there is no question that God can't answer. The author shows you that in a very cool way in chapter 4

if you look at the Hebrew wording of chapter 4. If you look at the Hebrew wording in chapter 4, every word that Jonah says is matched word for word by God. Look it up sometime. If you want to do a little study, check out the Hebrew words. Every time that Jonah speaks and match them to the words that God speaks. He matches them word for word. What does that show you? That shows me that you cannot outwit God. You cannot outsmart God. You cannot out debate God. You cannot out argue God. It's a waste of time and ludicrous to question God. The thought of God answering our questions or us demanding answers from God is ludicrous. It's like an insect crawling in my house demanding answers from me when I shuffle him out the door or squash him in a paper towel. An insect would have a much more valid argument with me than I or you would ever have with God in questioning him. I imagine Jonah had this dispute with God long before he ever boarded the ship to Tarshish. Jonah did not believe that the Ninevites had the right or should have the opportunity to repent and God had to bring this to his attention about the innocent children and animals. But anger, anger is the first response people have when God's will opposes theirs.

The second one that I noticed from the book of Job, we won't turn there but how does Job respond when God's will opposes his own? He responds with being perplexed, confused, and everything just stops. That's another way that people respond. They just freeze and everything stops. That's an understandable response and I'm sympathetic to Job's response, but this still is not the appropriate response. Job, just like Jonah wished for death as well. God does not want you wishing for death when trials and tragedies hit your life. When God's will opposes yours, sovereign God, who knows what's best, sovereign God who sees every perspective at every angle. We can only see our own, like a horse with blinders. God sees the full 360 degrees. Every time God does something that you don't like, it's not time for us to throw a temper tantrum and say, "My life needs to end." It doesn't mean that we have to go around perplexed or confused or stopping everything.

So, anger, perplexion; a third response is given in an example of Elijah in I Kings 19. He's had this great victory defeating the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, thinking finally the leadership in Israel will get right and see that God Almighty is in control and stop following Baal and stop sinning and doing things that are displeasing and disobedient to God's covenant and God's instructions to them and finally the leaders in Israel will do the right thing. But that doesn't happen. They hate Elijah for it and Jezebel and Ahab hunt him and he runs for his life down into the wilderness. Just like Jonah, and just like Job, he wants his life to end. His response isn't anger. His response isn't perplexion. His response is depression. His response is, "Woe is me. I'm the only one who wants to do right. God, just end my life. I want to give up." That is another response that people have when God's will opposes their own. These are not the responses that God is looking for. These are not the responses that the Holy Spirit would lead us in our lives when God's will opposes our own.

So, how should we answer this question? How should we respond? Turn in your Bibles in closing to Matthew 26. Look at Matthew 26:36, this is Jesus and his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called the Garden of Gethsemane and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here while I go pray up yonder and he took with him Peter

and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he to them, my soul is exceedingly sorrowful even unto death. Tarry ye here and watch with me. And he went a little further and he fell on his face, and prayed saying O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples and findeth them asleep and saith unto Peter, what, could ye not watch with me not one hour? Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." Jesus gives us the proper response. Jesus tells his followers in an oration that he gives them at one point that "greater than Jonah is here." Why is Jesus greater than Jonah? Jesus is greater than Jonah because he is the resurrection and the life, but he is also greater than Jonah because of his response when God's will opposed his own. Jesus did not want to take of that cup. What was the cup that he was asked to take of? The cup that he was asked to take of was to have all the sins of the world put on him and the wrath of God to be poured out upon him. So much so that when he was hanging on the cross he says, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Someone who has never spent a second apart from the Father, the second person of the Trinity, always with the Father. The Father who said, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased" is now pouring out his wrath upon him and all the wrath of all the sins of the world thrown upon him and he was asked to take of that cup and drink it and he did not want to do it. It wasn't Jesus' will to take that, it was God the Father's will that he take that cup. But what was his response? His response was humility. His response was surrender. His response was complete and utter trust in God despite going through the hell he had to go through for your and my sins. That's how you respond when God's will opposes your will. You respond with trust. You trust that God is a God who doesn't make mistakes. You trust that God is a God who loves you with all His heart. He loves you like you were his only child. You trust that he has your best interest at heart, which he does and you trust that there is some reason, even if you don't find out what that reason is in this life, you will find out in the life to come and God will be proved true and everyone else proved a liar. That's how you respond when God's will opposes your own. Let's pray.