

## VI. *Jonah's Complaint*

07-Jan-07          Jonah 4:1-11

*Theme:* God's mercy is not limited only to Israel, and God's justice is not exclusively for the nations; God's perfect justice mingled with mercy is demonstrated on the cross.

*Key Verses:* Jonah 4:10-11 <sup>10</sup>But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. <sup>11</sup>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?"

### Review

Last week we saw how the obedience of Jonah led to the repentance of Nineveh. Jonah was given a second chance, and this time he obeyed God's call and went to Nineveh to preach to that Gentile city. Although Jonah's message was short—"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (3:4)—it was certainly effective! Just like Jonah, Nineveh went on a three-day journey from death to life. Their response to Jonah's message was immediate and complete, encompassing the entire city.

Five different elements are highlighted in the repentance of Nineveh: 1) faithful preaching; 2) belief in God and in God's word; 3) demonstrated sorrow for sin; 4) changed behavior, forsaking specific sin; and 5) a living hope in the grace and mercy of God. The declaration of the king of Nineveh upholds the sovereignty of God to do as He chooses, but clings to the hope that God will forgive the truly repentant.

God in His sovereign mercy chooses to spare repentant Nineveh. Although the text says He "relented," we understand this language to indicate the conditional nature of God's threatened judgment. God is immutable – that is, He does not change. However, from our perspective, it may appear as if He changes His mind in response to our actions. Nonetheless, God's purposes from all eternity are carried out in history; and in this case, God chose to spare Nineveh.

The mercy and grace extended to the Nineveh of Jonah's generation did not run on indefinitely. Eventually the Ninevites fell away from God, and ultimately God judged the city for its wickedness and destroyed the Assyrian capital in 612 BC, about 150 years after Jonah. The fate of Nineveh is a sober reminder for us to remain steadfast in our faith and to use the means of grace at our disposal to train up our children, praying that the Holy Spirit would convert them.

### Introduction

Today, we will complete our study of the book of Jonah by looking at Jonah chapter 4. Our prophet has been on an emotional roller coaster so far. In the first half of the book, Jonah goes from disobedience to thanksgiving; in the second half of the book he goes from obedience to petulance. Jonah's mood swings become even greater in this last chapter, following a chiastic pattern: first he is angry (4:1), then suicidal (4:3), then surprisingly joyous (4:6); he then reverts to being suicidal (4:8) and angry (4:9).

Interestingly, Jonah is only one of two Old Testament books that ends with a question. The other book is Nahum, which is also concerned with the city of Nineveh. While the book of Jonah

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describes the salvation of Nineveh, Nahum describes its destruction. These two books with their opposite themes put before us the contrast between the divine attributes of mercy and justice. The LORD is a God both of mercy and of justice. It is according to His sovereign good pleasure whether an individual or a society receives mercy or justice. Jonah's error is that he presumes upon God's favor, assuming that mercy is what Israel receives and justice is what non-Israelites receive. But Jonah is about to learn a very important lesson: that God's mercy is not limited only to Israel, and God's justice is not exclusively for the nations.

### Exposition

#### A. Jonah's Prayer of Anger (4:1-3)

##### 1. Jonah's Anger (4:1)

<sup>1</sup>But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry (Jonah 4:1).

In the last verse of chapter 3, the Ninevites turned away from "evil" and God relented of the disaster (literally "evil" in Hebrew) that He was going to bring upon them. The Hebrew text in verse 1 continues to play upon the word "evil," because it literally says: "It was evil to Jonah a great evil."

How ironic! The Ninevites repent of evil and that displeases Jonah. God relents from bringing "evil" upon Nineveh, and that displeases Jonah. The cessation of God's anger against Nineveh causes Jonah to become exceedingly angry with God. Just as Jonah's reaction to God's original call was unexpected, Jonah's reaction to God's mercy is also unexpected. Jonah should be jumping for joy at this point. God has demonstrated mercy to the sailors, to himself, and to Nineveh. That is a matter of rejoicing, not of hot anger. Obviously, Jonah is not on the same page as God. His priorities and desires are not aligned with the LORD. But what is causing Jonah to react in this unanticipated manner?

##### 2. Jonah's Prayer (4:2)

<sup>2</sup>So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm (Jonah 4:2).

We gain insight into Jonah's state of mind through his prayer recorded in verse 2-3. Although this prayer is structurally parallel to the prayer of 2:1-9, it is diametrically opposed in attitude and focus. Jonah's prayer in chapter 2 is a psalm of thanksgiving, praising God for His mercy and His salvation. Jonah's prayer in chapter 4 is a self-centered rant, accusing God of inconsistency and challenging His salvation of Nineveh.

In 2 Kings 14:25, Jonah had prophesied that King Jeroboam II would increase the territory of the northern kingdom of Israel. Jonah was apparently pleased by the extension of Israel's borders and the greater prosperity that Israel enjoyed, despite Jeroboam's wickedness and the general apostasy of the people. In Jonah's worldview, God was supposed to bless the covenant people, even when they were sinful and deserved to be punished. On the other hand, when God spares Nineveh and eventually increases her borders (by destroying Israel!), Jonah is unhappy.

The substance of Jonah's complaint is that God has *not* punished Nineveh as He said He would. Essentially, Jonah is accusing God of being inconsistent – failing to carry out His threatened judgment upon Nineveh. Jonah obviously wanted to see the Ninevites "get what was coming to

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them.” In his mind, there was no room for mercy to be extended to Nineveh, only justice. Jonah was fine with God showing mercy to himself when he disobeyed. Jonah was good with God showing mercy to Israel when the covenant people repeatedly sinned. What Jonah could not stomach was that same mercy and grace being extended to those outside the covenant nation.

The irony of Jonah’s sinful position is that it is rooted in theological orthodoxy. In his prayer Jonah makes his second of two credal statements (the other was in 1:9). Quoting from Exodus 34:6, Jonah lists a number of God’s attributes: “You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm” (4:2b). Similar lists of God’s attributes are repeated throughout the Old Testament (*e.g.*, Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13).

Jonah obviously knew his Bible. In fact, the last phrase “One who relents from doing harm” is not found in the original passage in Exodus and may in fact be quoted from Joel 2:13. Jonah thus demonstrates a fine theoretical knowledge of God’s attributes of mercy, grace, patience, and lovingkindness. He even had a working, experiential knowledge of these attributes through his journey in the great fish. But Jonah had never applied these merciful attributes of God to anyone other than himself or his countrymen.

What Jonah leaves unstated in his recitation of God’s attributes is the end of the Exodus 34 passage which emphasizes God justice, not His mercy: “... by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation” (Ex. 34:7b). Jonah leaves unspoken what he expected for Nineveh based on the message God had given him to preach (3:4). Jonah agreed with that message and expected God to carry it out. But God had other plans.

Jonah’s problem was that he could not reconcile God’s attributes of justice and mercy. Mercy was for the “right” people, the covenant nation of Israel; justice was for the other guys. What Jonah apparently forgot was that no nation, including Israel, deserved mercy. Israel was extremely undeserving (Dt. 7:6-8), and yet God chose to set His love on Israel anyway. That is the very nature and essence of grace – unmerited favor.

Because he cannot reconcile God’s mercy with God’s justice, Jonah accuses God of being inconsistent. Estelle puts it this way: “Jonah does not want God to be true to Himself. Or, at least, he wishes that God be not so generous in His merciful attributes, but a little more liberal in the attributes of justice.” Mackay is more direct: “At root Jonah was finding fault with God for being the way He is.” Boice is the most blunt: “Jonah tried to turn God against God. Or to put the same thing in other language, he tried to quote God’s word back to Him in his warped desire to show that he, Jonah, was right and that God was wrong” (*cp.* Mt. 4:4-7).

Do you see what Jonah has done? He has set himself up as the judge of Nineveh, rather than God, who is the Judge of all the nations (Ps. 96:13; 110:6; Joel 3:12). Jonah has put himself in the place of God, deciding who should be saved and who should be destroyed. But God is an impartial Judge (1 Pe. 1:17); He will save those who repent and believe on Him, whether originally in the covenant people or not.

### 3. Jonah’s Death Wish (4:3)

<sup>3</sup>Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live! (Jonah 4:3).

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Having vented his spleen, Jonah now adopts the martyr's posture and looks for death, since life is so intolerable in a world where God shows mercy to Gentiles. Jonah's response is a parody of his prophetic predecessor Elijah, who made a similar request in 1 Kings 19:4. But the circumstances were completely different.

In 1 Kings, Elijah fights a long and uphill battle against the heresy of Baal worship. Although he has moments of success, overall he is worn down by the struggle and feels all alone. No one has joined him, and now Queen Jezebel seeks to kill him. On the other hand, Jonah has just been at the epicenter of a great revival, witnessing mass conversion of Gentiles and wholesale repentance. Elijah is understandably depressed at the lack of progress he is seeing. Meanwhile, "Jonah is peevishly disappointed with the very success of his mission. He is unworthy of the mantle of Elijah; Jonah is no Elijah" (Allen).

What can we say about our wayward prophet? Was his earlier change of heart in chapter 2 genuine? Keddie answers this question:

His return to the Lord was genuine. His commitment to the Lord's Word for Nineveh was genuine. But in neither department was he *perfect*. He was not committed in his heart to *whatever* God might do in Nineveh as a result of his preaching. Jonah had a hidden agenda for Nineveh in his own mind. We should not regard Jonah's sin as something unique. The best of men can have the worst of lapses. In any case, it is a fact of our everyday experience that we sin more against what we know to be wrong than we sin in ignorance. Jonah's sin emphasizes the sinfulness of sin and its prevalent danger for each and every one of us.

### B. God's Lesson for Jonah (4:4-11)

Because Jonah does not understand how God's mercy and justice work together, the LORD gives Jonah a concrete object lesson in the last section of the book. God does this by asking three questions and appointing three acts of nature – a plant, a worm, and a wind – to teach Jonah that mercy is a wonderful gift of God that no one has any right to, apart from the sovereign grace of the LORD.

#### 1. *Jonah's Booth (4:4-5)*

<sup>4</sup>Then the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" <sup>5</sup>So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city (Jonah 4:4-5).

God's first question comes in verse 4. "Is it right for you to be angry?" Of course, the answer is "no!" It is obvious that "man has no right to challenge God on the way He extends His mercy" (Mackay). In a confrontation between God and man, God is always right. Job learned this (Job 38-41), and now Jonah is going to learn a similar lesson. "Let God be true but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4).

Jonah finds that he has no answer to God's question, so he slinks away and leave the city, going to the east side. Often in Scripture, when men head east, they travel away from God and into trouble. Adam and Eve are driven out of the Garden and prevented from entering on the east side (Gen. 3:24). After Cain killed Abel, he dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden (Gen. 4:16). The builders of the tower of Babel traveled east (Gen. 11:2). When Lot left his uncle Abraham, he journeyed east towards Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 13:11). Conversely, to approach God, you traveled from east to west, since the gate of the Tabernacle and the Temple was on the east side. So, it is not a good sign when Jonah leaves the city and camps on the eastern side.

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To pass away the time, Jonah prepares a “shelter” or “booth.” The Hebrew word is *sukkah*, which is the root of *sukkot* – the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. Jonah probably took some leaves and branches from nearby vegetation and made a little lean-to, or what John Johnston might call a “hobo hut.” It was a temporary shelter that provided a little relief from the hot sun. Of course, the main purpose of building such a booth was to remember the great salvation and deliverance of Israel from Egypt and to celebrate God’s continued goodness (Lev. 23:42-43; Dt. 16:13-15; Neh. 8:14-18). Here is another irony. Jonah builds a booth, but not to celebrate deliverance. Quite the opposite! He builds his booth in silent protest of God’s salvation of Nineveh.

Why did Jonah leave the city at all? Was there no place in Nineveh for the prophet of God? Was there no room for the spokesman of the LORD? Was there no family or house willing to offer a bed for Jonah? Was there no other shelter from the hot sun in that great city? Of course there was. But Jonah did not want any part of Ninevite hospitality. He was still hoping that God would change His mind (again!) and bring about disaster on the city. And so he sat down outside the city and began to watch and wait. The contrast between Jonah and the Ninevites is significant. Nixon comments:

The three references to ‘the city’ in verse 5 remind the reader of the focus of attention. Inside the city walls, the king of Nineveh sits in great discomfort in sackcloth and ashes, hoping that, just perhaps, his city will be saved. Jonah, meanwhile, sits in silence outside the city walls, waiting for it to be destroyed.

### 2. *God’s Plant (4:6)*

<sup>6</sup>And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant (Jonah 4:6).

In verse 6, we have the first of three provisions or appointments by God. The LORD prepares or “appoints” a plant to provide shade for Jonah. This word “appoint” is the same word used back in 1:17 to describe God’s sovereign provision of the great fish. Although we do not know what type of plant it was (any more than we know the kind of fish), it once again demonstrates God’s power over creation. This was no ordinary plant. It sprung up and grew in Jack-and-the-beanstalk fashion. The provision and growth of the plant is miraculous.

The purpose of the plant is to provide shade for Jonah. No doubt the heat of the sun was intense and the shelter provided by the plant was most welcome to Jonah. Apparently, God’s provision was better than the booth built by Jonah, because Jonah was “very grateful for the plant.”

Jonah’s mood has swung from anger through suicide now to happiness. But notice the source of Jonah’s joy. He is behaving in a very self-centered manner; Jonah is glad because he has been provided with comfort. His gladness still has nothing to do with the mercy God has shown others. How petty and shallow this is! And yet, how often do we act like Jonah, placing our own comforts and concerns above others? This attitude is in direct contradiction to the example of Christ and the exhortation of Scripture:

<sup>3</sup>Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:3-5).

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### 3. God's Worm & Wind (4:7-8)

<sup>7</sup>But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. <sup>8</sup>And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live" (Jonah 4:7-8).

Why did God appoint a plant for Jonah? Why did God provide him shade? Because God was going to give him a direct object lesson about grace and mercy. Did Jonah deserve the plant? Had he merited the comfort of shade? Of course not; yet God gave it to him anyway. And what the LORD gives, the LORD can take away....

God makes two other natural appointments to drive home the lesson that mercy is undeserved. God first prepares a worm to eat the plant and kill it. Jonah wanted to see the city of Nineveh destroyed; instead he got a taste of his own medicine when the plant was destroyed instead. God does this "to see how Jonah likes his theology coming true in the physical realm" (Allen).

Verses 6 and 7 highlight the two aspects of God's character that are in view here: mercy and justice. The plant demonstrates God's mercy, while the worm shows His justice. Alexander comments: "In a work which stresses divine compassion and mercy, the destruction of the [plant] appears strangely out of place. It dramatically reveals, however, that God's sovereignty is not restricted to acts of compassion."

God later calls the prophet Jeremiah to exactly this sort of ministry:

<sup>10</sup>See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant (Jeremiah 1:10).

To add insult to injury, God appoints an east wind to blow, bringing further discomfort to Jonah. God had originally sent the wind of the sea tempest to afflict Jonah (1:5); now a desert wind blasted him. Without the plant to protect him, the hot sun beat down on Jonah's head and the heat of the sirocco wind made him grow faint. Jonah began to suffer heat exhaustion.

Once again Jonah grows suicidal, wishing to die. His first death wish was in anger over God's compassion towards Nineveh. His latest mood swing is the result of despair over his personal comfort. Of course, the irony is that Jonah is neither happy with God's mercy (to Nineveh) or God's justice (towards himself). "Whereas in verse 3 he questions God's right to deliver, here he challenges God's right to destroy" (Allen).

### 4. God's Compassion (4:9-11)

<sup>9</sup>Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!" (Jonah 4:9).

In verse 9, God repeats His earlier question: "Is it right for you to be angry?" Of course, this time, Jonah's anger is directed towards the destruction of the plant, not toward the salvation of Nineveh. Jonah cannot contain himself and he declares that his anger is just, even to the point of death. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. It is clear that Jonah's anger is sinful and selfish.

<sup>10</sup>But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night (Jonah 4:10).

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Through His response to Jonah's angry outburst, God reveals the pettiness of Jonah's heart. Jonah had no right to the plant. Jonah had not planted it, had not watered it, had not caused it to grow. It grew up one day and was destroyed the next. Jonah had no one but himself to blame for sitting outside in the hot sun instead of seeking shelter inside the city of Nineveh. "The vine was a free gift, but Jonah acted as if God owed him the vine. The vine, therefore, preached grace to ungracious Jonah" (Keddie).

Nixon gets to the heart of the matter:

Jonah could not accept that the law of grace should work in favor of his enemies, but neither could he accept life without grace. God's graciousness to Nineveh was unacceptable. God's withdrawal of grace to Jonah was also unacceptable. He longed for a God who was partial like himself, instead of a God who was gracious, merciful and responsive to the cries of all creation. He wanted his own personal God rather than the God who made heaven and earth, the sea and the dry land.

Keddie gives us an obvious lesson we can learn from the negative example of the prophet Jonah:

Here, then, is a simple test that we can all apply to our own lives – a test that will tell us how much we really recognize the grace of God for what it is. How do you react to gifts and benefits in your life, both when they are given and when they are removed? We worship our vine rather than our God. But the vine may wither. We must look beyond the gifts themselves to the grace of the God who gives. We must look beyond the manifestations of God's grace to his deeper purposes of grace (*cp.* Job 13:15; 19:25).

God nails down His argument in the closing verse of the book by asking His third and final question:

<sup>11</sup>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?" (Jonah 4:11).

The logic God uses is called an *a fortiori* argument – that is, arguing "from the lesser to the greater." God sets up the contrast between the plant and Nineveh to demonstrate the greatness of His mercy. Jonah had pity on a plant. Jonah was concerned about his own individual comfort and well-being. On the other hand, Jonah has no compassion about the inhabitants of Nineveh. He remains hard-hearted towards his fellow men, image-bearers of the LORD God.

Meanwhile, God is the one who is full of compassion for the people of Nineveh. God is the one who looks upon these pagan Gentiles in their ignorance – unable to make moral distinctions as typified by not discerning the right from the left – and accepts their confession and repentance. The mercy and grace of the LORD are wonderfully displayed.

What about Jonah? Did Jonah have a change of heart? Did he come to accept that grace – God's unmerited favor – could be extended to people outside the nation of Israel? Did he grow to understand that God's mercy to Nineveh was ultimately the same mercy that was extended to the covenant people? Did he repent of his sins, ask forgiveness, and become reconciled to God once again? We don't know. Our prophet disappears from the pages of Scripture, as God gets in the last word. And that is appropriate, because the purpose of the book is not to keep us informed of Jonah's mood swings, but to set us straight on God's sovereign mercy and grace. Praise God that He chooses to extend mercy to the unmerciful and grace to the ungracious! As Jonah declared, truly "salvation is of the LORD" (2:9).

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### Conclusion

As we conclude our four-week study of Jonah, I want to highlight four main messages of the book. They are: 1) the sovereignty of God; 2) the balance of God's justice and mercy; 3) the salvation of Gentiles; and 4) the foreshadowing of Jesus Christ.

1) First, the book of Jonah highlights the sovereignty of God. The book is filled with the miraculous: a great storm (1:5), a great fish (1:17), a great repentance (3:6), a fast growing plant (4:6), a ravenous worm (4:7), and a divine wind (4:8). All of these phenomena occur at the bidding of "the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (1:9). God is the focus of the book and His sovereignty is on center stage. Allen quotes G. Campbell Morgan: "Men have been looking so hard at the great fish that they have failed to see the great God."

Although God demonstrates His sovereign power over all creation throughout the book of Jonah, He is not an arbitrary despot. On the contrary, God is directing all aspects of creation for the furtherance of His holy and righteous will. God sends Jonah to Nineveh to preach against the wickedness of that city. When Nineveh repents, God relents of His judgment against them and showers His mercy upon them. Everything that God does has a purpose; it furthers the accomplishment of His will. Even the recalcitrance of Jonah is used to demonstrate His sovereign right to deliver and destroy as He pleases.

2) Secondly, the book of Jonah examines the relationship between divine justice and divine mercy. Throughout the book God is continually granting mercy when He justly could punish sinners. The sailors worshiped other gods, but they received mercy when the storm ceased (1:15). Jonah disobeyed the commission of God and ran away, but he received mercy by being rescued by the great fish and by being given a second chance (3:1). The Ninevites were under a divine death sentence because of their wickedness, but they received mercy when God relented from bringing disaster upon them (3:10).

Notice the response of each of these recipients to the mercy extended to them by God. The sailors "feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows" (1:16). Jonah prayed in the belly of the great fish and thanked God for His salvation, promising to make sacrifices and fulfill vows (2:9). The Ninevites repented, demonstrated sorrow for their sin, turned away from violence, and cried out to God for mercy (3:7-9).

What do all three recipients of mercy—the sailors, Jonah, and the Ninevites—have in common? They all did not deserve God's mercy, and they all responded appropriately when they received it. The first point is key – they did not deserve God's mercy. That's what grace is, unmerited or undeserved favor. They all deserved to die. But instead, God showed them mercy. When God is merciful to us, how are we to respond? Exactly like the sailors, Jonah, and the Ninevites – we are to worship God and thank Him for our great salvation.

The tension between justice and mercy is drawn for us in chapter 4 when Jonah rebelled against the mercy God granted to the Ninevites. God thus gave him a small taste of his own medicine, raising up the plant only to destroy it. "Jonah typifies those who see the divine attributes of justice and mercy as functioning for their own convenience; mercy for themselves, but justice for their enemies. As the book of Jonah makes plainly obvious, God is sovereign, His justice is totally impartial, and his mercy may extend to anyone" (Alexander).

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Ultimately, the perfect display of God's mercy mingled with justice is on the cross, where Jesus Christ endured the wrath of God and took the punishment for our sins upon Himself. God's justice was satisfied so that His mercy may be extended to all those who believe on Jesus.

3) In the third place, the book of Jonah stresses the salvation of Gentiles. The Mosaic Law made provision for Gentiles being added to the covenant people (*e.g.*, Ex. 12:43-49). There are isolated instances in the Old Testament of Gentiles being added to Israel: for example Rahab (Jos. 6:25) and Ruth (Ruth 1:16-17). Elijah brought blessings to the Gentile widow of Zarephath (1 Ki. 17:8-24). Elisha healed Naaman the Syrian general (2 Ki. 5:1-19). Other Old Testament prophets looked forward to the New Testament age in which the Gentiles are added into the kingdom of God in great numbers (*e.g.*, Is. 2:1-4; 60:1-7; Mi. 4:1-3; Hag. 2:6-9; Zech. 14:16-19).

Israel was intended to be a light unto the nations. And yet, for much of her history, Israel was anything but. However, in the book of Jonah, we have this tremendous emphasis upon the mercy of God being extended, not to the covenant people, but to a pagan city. God demonstrates through His wayward prophet Jonah that salvation can and will come to the nations. As such, Nineveh is a foretaste of the New Testament age, when the gospel goes out to all the nations of the world (Mt. 28:18-20).

Furthermore, the salvation of the Gentiles is a rebuke to the covenant people of Israel. Israel was called out of the nations, to be different than the nations, to be holy and set apart. And yet her history was often one of failure, of seeking other gods and failing to live according to the terms of the covenant. This was the case in the days of Jonah. The northern kingdom of Israel was ruled by Jeroboam II, a capable ruler who expanded the borders of Israel, yet failed in what mattered most: "he did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin" (2 Ki. 14:24). Because the people of Israel would not heed the word of God, that word is graciously extended to Nineveh. The Ninevites believed and repented, while Israel remained in her sin. God would thus judge Israel and use Nineveh to destroy the northern kingdom within two generations.

4) Finally, the book of Jonah points us to Jesus Christ. We should constantly be reading the Old Testament to learn about Jesus Christ (*cp.* Lk. 24:25-27). We've previously seen how the sign of Jonah being in the belly of the great fish three days and three nights pointed ahead to the greater resurrection of Jesus Christ (Mt. 12:38-41). As E. J. Young puts it (quoted by Keddie), the central meaning of the book of Jonah is "to show that Jonah being cast into the depths of Sheol and yet brought up alive is an illustration of the death of the Messiah for sins not His own and of the Messiah's resurrection."

Jonah, for all his faults, for all his waywardness, for all his sins, nonetheless points us to a greater Jonah. Jonah needed a Savior because he was a sinful man. We all need a Savior because we are sinful people. Praise God that "Christ, the risen One who is greater than Jonah, brings salvation through judgment and mercy to His people, those inside and outside of Israel who call on His name" (Estelle). As Jonah declares, "Salvation is from the LORD" (2:9). The name of the Savior is Jesus. Amen.

Next week: Lesson 7 – Covenant Love – Malachi 1:1-5

Close in Prayer.