

# The Book of Jonah

*Introduction and Jonah 1:1-3*

## Devotion

- **Opening Prayer:** Almighty God, our heavenly Father, without Your help our labor is useless, and without Your light our search is in vain. Invigorate our study of Your holy Word that, by due diligence and right discernment, we may establish ourselves and others in Your holy faith; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.
- **Small Catechism:** What is Baptism?
- **Hymn:** God's Own Child I Gladly Say It (LSB 594)

## Opening

- **Question: Name for me a Book of the Twelve (AKA – Minor Prophets)?**
- While there are twelve of these prophets, Jonah is one of the first that come to mind.
- We find this book in our children bibles. We're familiar with this account.
- **Question: What is it about Jonah that makes it stand out?**
  - Possible answers:
    - Quick narrative (4 chapters, 48 verses).
    - Exciting plot
    - Jesus compares himself to Jonah. Matthew 12:40 states, "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."
- This book is all about death and resurrection, dying and rising.

## Chapter 1:1-3

*Read Chapter 1:1-3*

### Verse 1

- The story here begins abruptly.
- "The Word of the LORD" [ דְּבַר־יְהוָה ]
  - When we hear this phrase we simply think the prophet is just sitting there, then all of a sudden from out of nowhere God speaks, or he's having a vision or dream.
  - I think we should understand "the Word of the LORD" as the preincarnate Son of God – the Second Person of the Trinity standing before Jonah. He is speaking directly to Jonah.
  - Jesus is the Word of God made flesh.
  - Jonah is receiving a direct call by Yahweh. It marks him as a true prophet.
- "Yahweh"
  - In our English translations this is written in all caps.
  - God's personal name is used – Yahweh. How He revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush.
  - Yahweh is mentioned 22 times, God 13 times, and combination Yahweh God four times for a total of 39 references to the deity in four chapters.
    - Compared to Jonah which is used only 16 times.
    - This book is clearly about God and his grace for all people.

- “Jonah the son of Amittai” [ יוֹנָה בֶּן-אֲמִתַּי ]
  - The name Jonah is Hebrew for Dove:
    - **Question: Where do we see doves in Scripture?**
      - Gen. 8:8 – Noah and the ark.
      - Matt. 3:16 – Holy Spirit descends on Jesus at His baptism.
      - Song of Songs 1:15 – Referred to the Bride (God’s people). Eyes are like doves
      - Hosea 7:11 - Ephraim is like a dove, silly and without sense.
        - This is interesting given doves are often a symbol of peace.
  - Jonah’s story actually begins in another place - 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 14:23-28
    - Jonah preached to Jeroboam II – King of Israel (The Northern Kingdom).
    - While Jeroboam II was economically successful, he was spiritually bankrupt.
    - This places Jonah around the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC
  - He was a contemporary of the Prophets Amos and Hosea.
  - While he was a prophet, we’ll see He doesn’t act like one:
    - Abandons Yahweh’s call.
    - Sleeps during a storm while unbelievers pray to their gods
    - He flees from Yahweh, yet confesses Him as Lord.
    - Jonah appears unrepentant, while sailors and Ninevites repent and believe.
    - Angry over the conversion of the Ninevites.
  - Ultimately, Jonah can be seen as a Christian.
    - Simultaneously sinner and saint.
    - He’s accounted righteous through faith. He’ll sometimes display this righteousness by his conduct and words
    - Other times, his old sinful nature prevails. He behaves unfaithfully.

## Verse 2

- “Nineveh, that great city” [ תְּיַנְנֶה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה ]
  - Basic info about Nineveh:
    - Its ruins now lie in modern day Iraq
    - Excavations reveal a walled city with a perimeter of approximately seven and three-quarters miles during the city’s height in the seventh century.
    - Texts indicate that Nineveh endured for thousands of years.
    - It’s referenced by both the Prophets Nahum and Zephaniah.
      - These books emphasize Nineveh’s role as the symbol of the Assyrian Empire, the enemy of Israel.
      - It was renowned for brutal conquest – cutting the heads off of enemy soldiers, burning young men and women.
      - It was a city of cruelty, prostitution, materialism, arrogance, and ultimately opposed to God.
    - Needless to say, Nineveh was wicked, full of evil.
- “and call out against it” [ וִקְרָא עָלֶיהָ ]
  - Jonah as Yahweh’s called prophet, was to go and proclaim God’s Word to these people. To call them to repent of their sinful ways.

### Verse 3

“Presences of the Lord” (ESV) or “Face of Yahweh” (Heb) [ מִלְפָּנֵי יְהוָה ]

- In the OT, there were at least two modes of Yahweh’s presence:
  - His powerful omnipresence through the world
  - His gracious, localize presence, which was the focus of Israel’s life of worship.
- In the OT, Yahweh dwelt in the sanctuary and later in the Jerusalem temple.
  - Believers could:
    - encounter him,
    - receive his forgiveness for their sins
    - rejoice in everlasting life.
- In the Gospel accounts, God reveals to us that He took on human flesh and blood in the Jesus Christ, in whom resides the fullness of divine grace and truth.
  - John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”
- Today, our risen and ascended Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, hasn’t set aside His human nature but retains both His Human and Divine Natures.
- Christ is present through His Word and the Sacrament – Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
  - He comes to His gathered church.

“Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish” [ וַיָּקָם יוֹנָה לְבָרֶחַ תַּרְשִׁישָׁה ]

- As a Hebrew, Jonah would have liked to see God pour out is wrath on the pagan Ninevites.
- Yet, Jonah knew that if they repented, God would be gracious and merciful and would relent punishing them.
  - This highlights understanding of Epiphany, that God reveals Himself in the person of Jesus Christ to save all people – Jew and Gentile.
- Unlike any other prophet, Jonah disobeyed God’s calling. This is the opposite of:
  - Moses who repeated deflected Yawhey’s wrath against Israel by seeking grace and mercy for the people (Ex. 32:11-14)
  - Samuel interceding when th Philistines marched against Israel (1 Sam. 7:7-9)
- For Jonah to flee the presence of the Lord, he seeks a spot where he’ll no longer have to listen to such words of grace and forgiveness, especially for the evil pagan Ninevites.
- This is the sinful flesh:
  - Adam and Eve fled God’s presence in the garden after they heard Him coming.
  - We are fleeing from His presence when break the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment – We despise preaching and His Word. When our sinful flesh despise church, the place where God dwells.
- Luther’s comments are helpful:
  - “It is therefore possible to flee from God in the sense that we may run off to a place where there is neither Word, faith, and Spirit nor the knowledge of God. In that way Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord, that is, he ran away from the people and the land of Judah, in which God’s Word and Spirit and faith and

knowledge were present; he fled to the sea among the Gentiles, where there was no faith, Word, and Spirit of God.”<sup>1</sup>

“Tarshish” [ תַּרְשִׁישָׁה ]

- There’s no certainty on where Tarshish was.
- Some Say Asia Minor
- Others say southwest Spain, both far removed from Nineveh.

“He went down” [ יָרַד ]

- To “go down,” is a significant phrase in Scripture.
  - You often hear of it when people are traveling down to Egypt.
  - Gen 12:10 - Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.
- To “go down” contrast obviously with the verb “to go up.”
  - which is normally employed for travel up to Jerusalem and the temple so that Israelites may encounter the presence of Yahweh.
- In Jonah 1:3, “to go down” strengthens the idea that Jonah is going in the opposite direction: not up to Yahweh but down and away from Yahweh.
- This movement downward is a movement toward death

“To Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish...”

- Joppa was later Peter’s point of departure to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10:5).
- Refusing to obey the Divine Word, Jonah jumps on a boat...
  - For Israelites, the sea was a fearful and threatening realm, the habitation of the primordial serpent of chaos (See Is. 27:1).
  - Yet, appearing unafraid, Jonah jumps on a boat and takes off for Tarshish, away from the presence of God.

#### **Final Thoughts / Questions**

- What will happen to a prophet that disobeys God’s command?
- What will happen to Nineveh, the great, but wicked city?
- Come back next week!

#### **Closing Prayer**

Almighty God, your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. We thank you for this good gift that reveals for Christ sake you have had mercy on us. We confess that we don’t always delight in your word. We pray that you would forgive us our sins. As you are present among us today in your house, strengthen us through your gifts, that we may always hold your word sacred and gladly hear and learn it. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 19: Minor Prophets II: Jonah and Habakkuk*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 19 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 45.