



INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JONAH

Week #1; July 20, 2025



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A. INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

1. Some General Considerations

- I expect this series in the book of **Jonah** to be a very personal study for us.
- Solid Bread Community places emphasis on sound teaching and doctrine. That is our standard, and I will always be convinced of the importance of this.
- But **Jonah** is going to FEEL a bit different than some series we've had. Sure, there will be key theologies and truths we will explore – and some of those may be rabbit trails that will surprise you.
- But again, the book of **Jonah** is very relatable - - and so I believe it is going to feel quite personal as we go through it together.
- There are going to be a lot of applications for you and me in this series.
 - **The first and obvious reason** is **Jonah** is a biography. It's a divinely inspired biography that God intended to be part of Scripture; it's the true story of a real person.
 - Since it IS a biography, we will see things in Jonah's life that we will connect with. They're things that remind us of ourselves.
 - Some things, we will like to be reminded of – and some things we will not.
 - But this series in **Jonah** will make us all take an honest look in the mirror from time to time - and I hope those occasions will be healing and growing moments where that needs to happen.
 - **And then the second and less obvious reason this will be such a personal study;** it's because we each have 'skeletons in our closet.'
 - We each have things in our lives that we do not want others to know about – things we want to keep hidden.
 - Some of us have dressed those closet skeletons in casual attire. We're trying to convince ourselves they are not what they are.
 - But since humans have not changed over the ages, neither have the patterns of our sinful nature.
- We will all learn a great deal from Jonah's example. His story is ours.

- You may never get ‘barfed on a beach,’ ‘ralphed on a reef,’ ‘spewed onto sand,’
- You may never get tossed off a ship – in a storm - by its crew - or tell an entire city it’s about to be destroyed, but Jonah is STILL like us. For example:
- **Have you ever felt some anger with God?**
 - You might be uncomfortable with the notion of being ‘angry with God,’ but various people in the Bible are recorded as having those moments. Jonah is one of them.
 - If you’ve ever been DEEPLY frustrated or resentful – feeling God is not doing what he should be doing, or you’ve felt entitled to things you don’t have and situations that aren’t happening – then you qualify.
 - You’ve struggled with this kind of anger yourself. You’ve ALSO been angry with God.
- **Maybe you’ve made some bad decisions, and it’s sent you in the wrong direction.**
 - We’ve all ‘been there, done that.’ We’ve all taken wrong turns.
 - (But) as we’ll see in Jonah’s example, you can correct bad decisions with good ones.
 - It’s a spiritually weak person – OR a spiritually defiant phase – that routinely makes one bad decision, followed by another bad decision, and then repeat...
 - We’ll see that Jonah had these defiant moments too.
- **Perhaps your life feels like a rollercoaster ride.**
 - One minute you’re up – the next minute you’re down. You’re afraid. And this seems to happen more than you’d like.
 - Success is followed by failure. Good choices are followed by bad moves, but then dark valleys ALSO give way to sunny mountaintops.
 - Life is seldom a smooth or level ride, especially if you’re in the thick of serving God – or you are wanting to. So, buckle up!
 - As we learned in a previous lesson, God disciplines those He loves. It’s evidence we truly belong to Him according to **Heb. 12:8**.
 - God cares much more about our eternal outcome than our temporary comfort. Trials are meant to prove our faith.
 - But sometimes it’s our own foolishness that introduces this instability. We’ll see that Jonah was this way too.
- **Here’s a big one: do you ever struggle with prejudice against another person or group of people?**
 - I believe if we were all honest, we’d ALL say, “Yes.”
 - Maybe it’s not a classic prejudice – maybe your issues have nothing to do with race at all.

- But secretly, underneath your carefully managed exterior and your personal ideals – you quietly rage against people who don't share your political views, or your religious convictions, or your standards.
- You can hardly tolerate the right, the left, the young, the old, the rich, the poor, the white collar, the blue collar, the clerical collar, the people with three homes, the homeless, and so on and so on.
- There is a group of people who are not like you – and whether you like to admit it or not, you feel a bias against them.
- The fact is your prejudiced perspective has – in many ways - become your personal prison. You've shut yourself in and you've shut others out.
- Here's another: perhaps you are suspicious of those whose past lives had certain troubles, turns, and trials that your own life did not have, and which your own choices did not produce.
- Maybe it's hard for you to see beyond the surface of some people to the person they are underneath. Your eyes are throwing roadblocks at the things your heart needs to see.
- The reverse is just as true. You might BE that person that has made poor choices or has gone through major traumas. And now, it is hard for you to trust and relate to people who have not experienced YOUR set of pains.
- You've gradually built walls around yourself to protect what you most want to believe about YOU. These things are protecting your choice to nurture biases against anyone who is not like YOU.
- Trust me – we ALL have prejudices, and we have them for various reasons. You're lying if you think none of this describes you.
- We're going to learn a lot about those things in this series on *Jonah*.
- **Here's one more 'biggie.' Have you ever hit rock bottom and wondered if you could climb up again?**
 - Your back is against the wall, and your world has collapsed. By your assessments you are done. You cannot step down one more rung. You feel like fish food.
 - You've thrown up some desperate prayers. This is your last-ditch effort. You've tried everything else, and you've exhausted all your other options.
 - You've willfully done the wrong things, and now you're reluctantly doing the right thing.
 - You're hoping God is still willing to listen to you since you know you didn't listen to Him.
 - (And) now you are pleading with God; you're begging Him for a second chance.

NOTE: If you're honest, there are a few points here which describe you. I know some of them describe me. But the good news is we cannot outrun God's love and mercy, and we'll learn that too.

I've been quite excited about this series because – again - Jonah's story is so much like ours. It makes us confront our own failures and faults. We need to do that from time to time.

But – we are also going to learn some extraordinary and wonderful truths in this series. God is still in the business of accomplishing great things through imperfect people. HE is perfect, and His plan is too – always! - even when we are not.

And so, God puts up with the Jonah in all of us because He still desires to reach a lost world.

2. Now, let's look at who, what, and when?

NOTE: What do we know about this little book of the Bible called *Jonah*?

a. First, let's unpack "Who?"

- **Who was Jonah, and who were the major players of his time?**

- Jonah was a real person. That's important to know because some folks try to argue that the book of Jonah is all allegory, symbolic, and so on. They feel nothing in it is real.
- Of course, that is not true. The story of Jonah really happened, and that's why Jesus referred to *'the sign of Jonah'* the way He did in **Matthew Ch. 12** (more about that later in this series).
- Jonah was a real man and an accredited prophet. That means he prophesied God's Word accurately. He was a true servant of God.

(Cf. 2 Kings 14:25) *"He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Dead Sea, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hepher."*

- The 'he' that starts this verse is King Jeroboam II. He reigned from 793-753BC. Jonah is noted for serving during this king's time.
- On the surface, this king's 40-year reign was marked by prosperity and national security.
- King Jeroboam's successful military campaigns expanded Israel's borders to their greatest extent since the days of King Solomon.
- However, like his predecessors, King Jeroboam II also earned that sad distinction, *"he did evil in the sight of the LORD."*
- There is a pattern seen in OT Israel - - and with Israel & Judah when the nation became divided after King Solomon.
- In the OT, God's people were familiar with both offices of 'king' and 'prophet,' and it was not uncommon that **good prophets** served the Jewish people during the reign of **bad kings**.

- For example, the prophet Samuel served during the reign of Saul, Elijah served during Ahab, Jeremiah during Jehoiakim, and so on.
- It was a check and balance thing. When the kings dropped the ball, God's prophets kept spiritual accountability in the mix.
- If the prophets said and did what God told them to say and do, the national condition was never completely hopeless.
- Things could get bad – and they sometimes did! - yet God's loyal prophets could prompt a carnal generation to turn completely around.
- Jonah was a 'good' prophet in the time of a 'bad' king. He helped to keep the spiritual and moral accountability of his nation front and center. That's why he's called God's 'servant.'
- That's an important thing to keep in view here as we go into this series. The book of Jonah gives a partial picture of him.
- **What else do we know about Jonah? (Read Jonah 1:1-3, even though we're going to focus on the first verse today)**
 - (Not much in **vs. 1** that the **2 Kings** passage didn't already tell us, so here's what we do know:)
 - First, we *don't* know much about his father, Amittai. He's mentioned twice in the Bible: in those two passages we have just read.
 - The Jewish rabbis teach that – traditionally - when a prophet is identified in part by his father's name (A, son of B), it means that the father was also a prophet.
 - Perhaps Amittai was also a prophet of Israel. We just don't know.
 - As for Jonah himself, his name means "dove." This name is meant to reflect the peaceful and gentle nature associated with the dove.
 - It seems a little ironic, doesn't it? The book of Jonah shows him to be a proud rebel – a stubborn, disobedient, unfaithful, grumbling, bad-tempered, prejudiced, and cranky guy.
 - But it's here that we need to keep everything in perspective. Jonah, as we've already learned, served God faithfully as a prophet.
 - He helped to keep a nation on track spiritually when its leadership failed. He's also recorded in Scripture for THAT.

NOTE: Here is something to think about, and if we blink, we miss it. Jonah authored this book which bears his own name. He was divinely inspired to record a very difficult phase of his life when he had little success to celebrate, and no reason to be known as a 'dove.'

It's easy to catalog Jonah as being a runaway prophet - - and most of us do. But, we would not have known about his failures if he had not told us. Would YOU dare to write down your darkest times and worst decisions and make those available for everyone to see?

It is self-evident that in writing the details of this book - after the facts as he did - Jonah ultimately arrived at a point where he no longer sought his own interests the way he did in his book. He had grown. No person who habitually asserts their own choices and desires can be called a true servant of God.

So, Jonah, by recording the worst of his life, shows us the best of who he ultimately became.

b. Second, let's look at "When?"

NOTE: When was the book of Jonah written? When did Jonah live? (and so on).

- There are several interesting timeline issues to take note of concerning this larger question of 'When?'
 - Jonah's ministry as a prophet seems to have been about the same time as the prophetic ministry of Elisha. And, like Elisha, Jonah was based in the northern kingdom of Israel.
 - I mentioned earlier that King Jeroboam II reigned from 793-753BC.
 - Most scholars feel the book of Jonah was written around 760BC.
 - This places the events of this book **before** that year, before 760BC.
 - It places them *squarely within* the time Jonah was doing what was right for the nation of Israel.
 - Furthermore, the expansionist wars of King Jeroboam II, the ones Jonah had prophesied about in **2 Kings 14:25**, probably took place around the middle years of King Jeroboam's reign (*Cogan and Tadmor*, 164).
 - Essentially, all of this date stuff means this: Jonah fell flat right around the time he was doing a bunch of other things quite well.
 - Moreover - and this is rather important - it's **AFTER** the Bible shows Jonah **DOING** what God wanted him to do that the Bible then shows Jonah **NOT** doing what God wanted him to do.
 - The point is - it is sometimes **AFTER** our biggest spiritual victories that we have our greatest spiritual setbacks. For example:
 - Elijah feared for his life and he wanted to die right after he had publicly stood for God Almighty, and he had exposed 450 prophets of Baal as complete frauds.
 - King David brought the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem with a great spiritual celebration, then he turned around and committed adultery with Bathsheba.
 - You and I are not very different. Sometimes we have a major spiritual victory on Thursday, and a total spiritual meltdown on Friday.

- I have shared with a few of you from time to time that Mondays are often very hard for me.
- A lot of preparation and prayer goes into these lessons. I want to honor God. I want to use my gifts well, teach what is right, and serve you to the best of my abilities.
- Sunday it all comes out and I am left drained. Mondays, I often feel a spiritual letdown. I've become aware that's a time when I'm vulnerable to various spiritual attacks.
- But back to Jonah. It's not the good stuff about Jonah that the Bible details. Instead, it's this phase of his life where things REALLY got off track for him. God wants to call to our attention to THAT time.
- God knows we are each like Jonah. We each have his qualities, and his tendencies. We need to learn from his example.

c. Then lastly here, let's glance at "What?"

NOTE: What was the backdrop, and what were the main things going on during Jonah's time?

- **Let's briefly assess the political and social matters – (besides things we've already learned)**
 - Jonah lived about midway between the point when Israel and Judah split, and Israel's subsequent captivity by Assyria.
 - Israel, at this time, was in a very wretched and oppressed condition – not just spiritually, but in nearly every respect they were afflicted on every side by their enemies.
 - One can sort of step into Jonah's mind at this point and understand – at least a bit – why he was inclined to regard Ninevah as he did.
 - Jonah was a proud Hebrew, and he had been ministering to the Hebrews. He had a successful track record of doing that according to God's commands.
 - And let's remind ourselves once more: Jonah was God's prophet to Israel. His whole identity was bound up in the salvation of his own people
 - No doubt, Jonah had an intense love of his land and for his people, and this probably made him question the wisdom of God's command.
 - To do something completely out of his ordinary routines, to go and warn the violent and godless Ninevites of their impending doom (as God wanted him to) seemed outrageous to Jonah.
 - The pagans of Ninevah were, to him, the "untouchables." The very idea that God should take an interest in them seemed unthinkable.
 - Jonah may have also known that Ninevah, the capital city of Assyria, would soon play a key role in Israel's punishment to come (**Cf. Hosea 9:3**).

- That is, I think, a likely conclusion. The prophets Hosea and Amos were also contemporaries of Jonah – and both men had declared that God would use Assyria as an instrument of punishment against his people (**Cf. Hosea 11:5; Amos 5:27**).
- It's therefore reasonable to see that any patriotic Israelite would have longed for Assyria's destruction!
- So, Jonah's attitudes were partly a cultural posture, partly a pride in the Hebrew laws of separation and distinction, and perhaps partly a prophetic knowledge of specific judgement to come.
- (NOTE: We'll learn more about Ninevah next week.)
- **Do we know anything more about Jonah's personal life?**
 - Jonah was a native of Gath-Hepher, a Galilean village, about four miles north of Nazareth. The name of this village means 'wine press,' so it probably had an agricultural heritage.
 - INTERESTING: Jewish tradition says that Jonah was the son of the widow of Zarephath that Elijah restored to life (**Cf. 1 Kings 17:8-24**).
 - We have no Biblical mention of this tradition, but being that Jonah's ministry came after Elijah's, and he was a contemporary of Elisha, Jonah was probably acquainted with them both.
 - Jonah is one of the minor prophets - like Hosea and Amos - and it is likely that he was trained in the schools of the prophets.

NOTE: That all amounts to a bullet-point background to the book of Jonah and the man it is about. But what are some basic takeaways that we – already – can run with from this little intro? **Here are three:**

1. First, when we stay in God's presence, we stay in God's blessing.

NOTE: (Getting ahead of myself since this application is introduced more in **vs. 3**).

- (But) Staying in God's presence is a matter of personal will and choice.
- This point has nothing to do with God's omnipresence. It has everything to do with '*keeping yourself in God's love*' as we learned from **Jude vs. 21**.
- Just as you choose to sin and fall out of the blessing of God, so you choose to stay in God's presence, in His love, and in His blessing.
- One thing we've already noted in this intro is Jonah was faithfully exercising the presence and blessing of God in his prophetic role to Israel.
- Jonah had a routine which was working for him. Things added up. The elements of his ministry made sense to him.
- But then God shattered Jonah's paradigm. God commanded Jonah to do something completely outside of Jonah's routines and understanding.
- God touched Jonah where his prejudice lay, where his fears formed, and where his rebellion had root.
- At that point, Jonah's will refused to conform to God's instructions.

- And so, Jonah sought to *‘flee from the presence of the Lord.’* That choice led to all sorts of challenges and trials which were Jonah’s doing.
- There is no protection, no peace, and no true satisfaction outside of the will of God. When we strive against God, we remain in turmoil.
- When we choose to stay in God’s presence – whether we understand His directions or not - we will have blessing and perfect leading from Him.

2. Second, God doesn’t NEED us to do His work, rather, we RECEIVE the privilege from Him to do it.

- Let’s be honest, God could’ve chosen someone else to go to Ninevah.
- Jonah already had a ‘good gig going.’ It was effective, and he was called *‘God’s servant.’*
- But God interrupted Jonah’s good routines to stretch him, to grow him, and to touch him where he most needed to be touched.
- Jonah, as we have perceived already, ultimately became a better man for the challenges he faced and the lessons he learned.
- But again -- God didn’t NEED Jonah. God had infinite means to accomplish his will. Jonah – in the big picture – RECEIVED the privilege to do God’s work.
- I don’t know what your routines are, or the things that have made you comfortable. I don’t know where and how you may feel you have a ‘good gig going.’
- I don’t know where that line lies between your comfort and discomfort.
- **But a key lesson is this:** it’s when we are MOST comfortable, it’s when things are working well, it’s when our life is making sense to US – that’s when we tend to resist God. That’s when we don’t want change!
- It’s in times like that when we are tempted to push back on a new calling, and to resist new directions from God to grow us and to do His work.
- When God stretches us, when He makes us color outside the lines that we like to stay within – that’s when it’s hard to see that we are facing a great privilege.
- Do we see serving God (even in uncomfortable ways and circumstances) as an opportunity? Do we see it as a privilege? If we have the right view of God – we will.

3. And lastly, our bad attitudes lead to bad decisions.

- This principle is true for life in general, but here I want to apply it to our faith journey.
- It’s going to be clear from our whole series in this book that Jonah fanned prejudices, nurtured anger, resisted change, cultivated selfishness, and wallowed in self-pity. It’s things like these I’m calling his ‘bad attitudes.’

- And we'll see each time that Jonah exercised these bad attitudes that he became less effective as a servant of God, he posed risks to himself and to others, and he learned his lessons the hard way.
- There is an overarching principle at stake here, and I'll use **Eph. 4:26-27** to clarify my premise. In this passage in **Ephesians**, we see that our anger *"gives the devil an opportunity."*
- The larger issue here is Satan is always looking for holes in our spiritual defenses that he can invade and take advantage of.
- When we justify our bad attitudes, when we let our sin and our natural responses become our habits and control us, there is no end to the bad decisions we will make. There is no way we can be used effectively by God.
- I know quite a few people that say they want to reach a lost world, they want to be used by God, they want to have a positive impact on others (and so on) - but they won't take an honest look at themselves and their bad attitudes.
- They stay where they are – they never change – they display shallowness and immaturity as their norm, and they routinely make poor choices in life and conduct.
- These are people who have willfully kept God off the throne of their lives. They want to co-lead, they want to collaborate with God before any decision is made, and so they leave their bad attitudes 'as they are.'
- **We cannot be ineffective IN Christ and be effective FOR Christ.**

NEXT WEEK: "Jonah Runs from God" (we'll look at God's instruction and Jonah's reaction)



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Solid Bread Community was started with a passion to teach the truth of God's Word – every part of it, as it was divinely inspired to be understood.

The rules are simple. First, teach what IS there. Don't pretend the Bible is not saying what it is saying.

Second, don't teach what is NOT there. Don't force a passage to mean something it really doesn't.

And – number three, if the Bible states it plainly, we should too.

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