

The Sign of the Prophet Jonah

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Date: 19 February 2012

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[0:00] The past several weeks I've been preaching through a jewel of a book of the Bible, an Old Testament book of the Bible that goes by the name of Jonah.

! And if you've been here over the last, I guess, four Sundays now, this is the fifth, then you already know that. I have one more sermon from this book.

And so with that said, you might be surprised when I tell you to turn in your Bibles to the New Testament book of the Gospel of Matthew, rather than the Old Testament book of Jonah.

So take your Bibles and turn to Matthew chapter 12 and find verse 38. Matthew chapter 12 and verse 38.

The Bible says,

[2:06] Interesting passage, obviously, a reference to the book of Jonah. And that's why we're starting there. Jesus said to his generation of Jews.

He was speaking to Jews. It was the scribes who asked a question of him. Jewish scribes.

The question came from Pharisees, scribes and Pharisees, Jewish scribes and Pharisees. No doubt others who had gathered there were Jews.

Probably all of them were. And so Jesus said to his generation of Jewish people. He said, you demand a sign from me to prove that I am the Christ, the Messiah.

That is, you want me to perform some miracle that will provide for you indisputable proof that I'm the one you've been looking for, longing for. But I'm not going to do it.

[3:17] I'm not going to give you what you ask for. That's what he's saying to them. Rather, I will remind you of a sign already given to you.

Eight hundred years ago. Eight hundred years ago, a sign was given to you. That's the sign I give to you today. So here it is.

I give you the sign of the prophet Jonah. Now, what did Jesus mean by that? What did he mean?

Well, that's what I want us to consider this morning. As we kind of wrap up this series of messages on the book of Jonah. Remember, I said last week to wrap up this series of sermons, I'm going to answer three questions.

The first question really focuses strictly on chapter four, the final chapter of the book of Jonah. And the question is this.

[4:20] What is God saying to Jonah in chapter four? And through him to you and me, to us here today. And this is what we focused on last Sunday. And now, a second question.

Considering the book of Jonah as a whole, not just the fourth chapter, but the whole book, kind of an overview of it. Considering the book of Jonah as a whole, what is God saying to Israel?

What is God saying to Israel? In reality, you see, the prophecy of Jonah is a prophecy to Israel.

Now, I know that Jonah was commanded to go to Gentiles. And he had a message for Gentiles.

And I even made note of the fact that really, as a book of prophecy, there's only half a verse of prophecy in the entire book, strictly speaking.

That one line that Jonah prophesied to the Ninevites. And yet, I want you to understand, and hopefully you will understand by the time we're finished here, that the prophecy of Jonah is really a prophecy to the Jews.

[5:35] To Israel. And so, there's the question. What is God saying to Israel? And then the third question, applying all of that to God's people today.

Jew and Gentile, but more specifically, the church. What is God saying to the church? Those are the two questions. These last two questions are the ones I want to deal with this morning.

And so, what is God saying to Israel? Now, I pointed out last week, if you recall, and if you, all you have to do is look at the last verse of the book of Jonah, and you'll discover that the book ends with

a question.

And they've noted that, and emphasized that, and I think it's, on purpose, that God would end this prophecy, this book, with a question.

Kind of an open-ended thing. And I mentioned that last week. And here's how the book ends. And should I, God is speaking to Jonah, should I not pity Nineveh?

[6:42] That great city in which are more than 120,000 persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left. That is, he's talking about little children.

And much livestock. And by the way, it's kind of an interesting thing he would tack on to the end of that. And I just really think that it's there because God is saying to Jonah, my intent was, or what I threatened to do was to completely annihilate Nineveh.

Not just every man, woman, and child, of which there are 120,000 of them, but even the livestock. That is, the destruction that God promised to Nineveh, threatened to Nineveh, was on the magnitude, the level of what he did to Sodom and Gomorrah.

And so this is how it ends, with a question. Should I not have pity on Nineveh, that great city? And that's how God ends the prophecy with a question.

And Jonah, of course, may have answered that question. We don't know because there's no record of it. It's just left there. In fact, we don't hear another thing about Jonah, other than Jesus' reference to him.

[7:55] And so we don't know how Jonah may have answered the question. But we, the readers, of course, are also called upon to answer that question. It is a question that needs to be answered.

And the only answer, really, that we could give is, yes, God. You should have pity. How could we answer any other way? And, therefore, we, too, should have pity, should have mercy upon this whole city of Ninevites.

And we, today, as readers of Jonah, we ought to answer the question, yes, we, too, should have mercy on sinners. And we talked about that last week. But there is another group of people to whom the question is addressed.

Not just Jonah, in the immediate sense. And not by implication to us here today, but to Israel. The question is given or asked of Israel.

Because the prophecy is to them. And this, I believe, is Jesus' primary point in Matthew 12. The text I read a moment ago.

[9:05] Jesus said to these scribes and Pharisees, You want to know if I'm the Messiah? Well, you should already know that. I'm just reading between the lines.

I think that's the implication. You should already know. But you do not know it, he is saying to them, because you are a wicked and adulterous generation.

And because of that, I give you a different sign. It's not the sign you're asking for. I give you a different one. It is the sign of the prophet Jonah. And so here's what I believe Jesus means.

The prophet Jonah himself, the man, was a living prophecy given to Israel.

That is, his life. That portion of it that's described in the book. His life. That is, the things that happened to him. His actions.

[10:10] That is, the things that Jonah did here in the book of Jonah. All that happened to him as recorded here in the book of Jonah is a prophecy to Israel.

Jonah mirrored the life and history of Israel. That's what I'm saying. And that's why I believe there are so many unexpected turns in the story. Because there have been many turns in the life and history of Israel.

And so Jonah, the man, represents Israel, the nation. And as such, Jonah was a living prophecy to them. To Israel.

Not a prophecy of words so much as a prophecy of works. Or a prophecy in works. The things he did. The things God did. All that happened in the story.

And so Jesus was saying then here in Matthew chapter 12. He was saying to his Jewish audience. Consider Jonah. Consider Jonah.

[11:12] Jonah is a living prophecy of Israel's past, present, and future. Now how does this work? Well, to understand this, I want to give you seven words that begin with the letter R.

Alright? So that you can remember them. Seven words that begin with the letter R. To describe for us, to help us understand how Jonah represents Israel here in this prophecy.

The first word is revelation. Revelation. That is God's revelation. God's word. God's word. That's how the book of Jonah begins, doesn't it?

Do you remember? Chapter 1, verse 1. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah. That's how it begins. That's revelation.

God gave His divine revelation to Jonah. That's how it begins. That's the first thing that happened to Jonah. Jonah.

[12 : 19] And that is the first thing that happened to Israel when they became a nation. Did you know that? Deuteronomy chapter 4.

And we're going to look at a couple of Old Testament passages. A number of them in Deuteronomy. You don't have to turn to it. I'm going to go ahead and read it. But Deuteronomy chapter 4, verse 5 says, Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me. Moses is speaking. That you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them, for this is your wisdom.

These statutes. This is yours. I've given this to you. And your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

Now all these people are the Gentiles. They're going to observe and see that the Jews have been given God's Word. This is what God is saying to them.

[13 : 27] Therefore be careful, he said, to observe these things. And then verse 7, it says, For what great nation is there that has God so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?

And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?

This is a great privilege for the Jews. They have received God's revelation. This is what God is saying here in Deuteronomy 4, verse 5. And you can go on into the New Testament and find a number of references to that there.

You might remember that we're studying through the book of Romans on Sunday nights. And the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 3 and verse 1 asked this question. He asked, What advantage then has the Jew?

And then his answer, Much. That is, much advantage. In fact, he goes on to say, Much in every way.

[14 : 36] That is, in every conceivable way. And then he says chiefly this, Because to them were committed the oracles of God.

Don't worry about the word oracles. It's from the word logos. It means word. To them has been given. Has been committed. The word of God.

And later on in the book of Romans in chapter 9, And we studied this just a number of weeks, a couple of weeks ago. Paul lists there in Romans chapter 9, Several divine privileges of the Jews. His brethren, he says. His countrymen according to the flesh. And among the nine privileges that he lists there, He says, To whom belongs the giving of the law?

That's a privilege given to the Jews. And I don't think that the law here just means, You know, specifically the Ten Commandments.

[15 : 40] When he uses the word law, Paul is talking about all that we now call the Word of God. This was committed, was given, They were privileged, the Jews, With this revelation, the Word of God.

Listen, with really only a couple of exceptions, And even these are arguable. All the books of the Bible were written by Jews.

By Jews. And so Jonah represents Israel in this sense. God is speaking to Israel through his life. And what is he saying? He's saying, Like Jonah, You have received my revelation.

My word. That's the first word. Revelation. Second word. Rebellion. I mean, you can read through the book of Jonah And see how these fall in logical order.

In sequence. First revelation. Then rebellion. And God is saying to Israel, Like Jonah, You are guilty of rebellion.

[16 : 50] You have received my word. You have rebelled against my word. And you have refused the purpose for which I gave you my word.

And what was that purpose? To proclaim it to the nations. That was his purpose for giving the Jew his word. His revelation. It was not given to them so that they could just be self-consumed by it. That it was somehow their possession to be shared with no one else. From the very beginning, God gave the Jews his word for this purpose.

That they would proclaim it to all nations. And that's, by the way, what Jonah was to do. Right? And what he did not do with God's word.

Remember in chapter 1, This is what God said to Jonah. He said, Rise and go to Nineveh, that great city. And cry out against it that is preached my word.

[17 : 50] And what did Jonah do? Well, the Bible says, But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. And later on in chapter 4, he says, This is the reason why I left.

Why I fled. Because I did not want to go to Nineveh and preach your word to them. Clear rebellion. God gave Jonah his inspired word.

And God instructed Jonah to preach that word to the Gentiles. And Jonah refused. Jonah rebelled. And dear people, that is what Israel has been doing with God's word throughout their history.

Eight centuries later, after Jonah, when Jesus came on the scene as the Messiah and came and walked this earth. Eight centuries after Jonah, the Jews still despise the Gentiles.

That is all the other nations. In fact, in Jesus' day, when Jews would travel through a Gentile nation and then upon returning to their home nation, their country, before crossing over the border, they would shake the dust off of their robes and off of their feet because they did not want to carry any, quote, defiled soil into their land.

[19 : 13] That's how the Jews felt about the Gentiles. In Jesus' day. And beyond that. An Orthodox Jew would never, ever enter a Gentile home.

Never, ever eat or drink with a Gentile. In fact, that was one of the charges that the Jews exacted against Jesus. Right? And they would never so much as even touch the hand of a Gentile in Jesus' day.

And every morning, most Jewish men would pray this prayer. Lord, I thank Thee that I am not a woman, a slave, or a Gentile. Sorry, ladies.

And they would never seek to share the redemptive truth of God's Word with Gentiles.

They would never, ever do that. Why? Well, Jonah tells us. Jonah, in chapter 4, verse 2, he said, I know you, God.

[20 : 23] I know you, God, that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, one who relents from doing harm. I know that if I preach the Word to these Gentiles, you'll save them.

And he did not want to do that. He hated the Assyrians. He hated and had no use for Gentiles.

And that had not changed in Jesus' day. And so Jesus says, I'll give you a sign. It's the sign of Jonah. See, Israel became self-consumed with the revelation of God that God had privileged them with.

It was all for them. This is how they felt. But God did not give them His Word so that they could be consumed with it, that they would hoard it for themselves.

God said to Israel way back in Exodus 19, verse 6, and you shall be a kingdom of priests. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests.

[21 : 31] That is, preachers and missionaries and evangelists to the nations. That was God's intent from the very beginning. God had given them a commission and they had rebelled against it.

Israel prided themselves in their Abrahamic lineage. And yet God had said to Abraham, way back there in Genesis chapter 18 and verse 18, all the nations of the earth are to be blessed in you, Abraham.

All nations. Not just the Jews. You see, it has always been God's plan that His Word should be proclaimed to all nations.

It's always been God's plan. It has always been God's plan to save both Jews and Gentiles. That's not just a New Testament plan of God. It was His plan from the very beginning.

And listen, centuries before He commissioned Jonah to go to the Ninevites, He had commissioned His chosen people, Israel, to proclaim His Word to all nations.

[22 : 41] But they rebelled. Israel rebelled. God gave Israel the law, and Israel defied the law. God gave Israel the land, and Israel defiled the land.

God gave Israel His Lord, the Lord, the Messiah, and they denied the Lord. Jonah represents for them that rebellion.

Consider Jonah the sign of Jonah. And so this is the sign of the prophet Jonah to God's people Israel.

And Jesus said, the people of Nineveh, they repented, and they will rise at your judgment. So, revelation.

Rebellion. Here's a third word. Retribution. That naturally follows. Or supernaturally follows.

[23 : 45] Divine retribution. As a result of Jonah's rebellion, what happened to him? I tell you, Jonah found trouble at every turn.

A great wind. A mighty storm at sea. The fears and dangers of a shipwreck. Certain shipwreck. Angry sailors. The depths of the sea after they threw him overboard. The belly of a great fish. All this happening, you know, in a short space of time.

But Jonah, when he rebelled, he saw nothing but trouble, trouble, trouble. He went down, down, down, down, and listen. This has happened to Israel over their history.

In fact, the Bible says, tells us that this will happen. In Deuteronomy 28, in verse 15, listen to what God said about Israel, what would happen to Israel if they rebelled against Him.

[24 : 57] But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.

Cursed shall you be in the city and cursed shall you be in the country. No safe place. No way to escape this cursing. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Cursed shall you be when you come in and cursed shall you be when you go out.

The Lord will send on you cursing and confusion and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly because of the wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken Me.

Now skip on over to verse 37 of chapter 28. And you shall become an astonishment, a proverb, a byword among all nations where the Lord will drive you.

[26 : 15] A byword of retribution because of rebellion. That's what Israel will become. Everyone who thinks of the Jews will think of disobedience and God's judgment.

A byword, a proverb among the nations. Verse 64 of that same chapter, Then the Lord will scatter you among all peoples from one end of the earth to the other.

And there you shall serve other gods which neither you nor your fathers have known. Wood and stone and among these nations, those nations, you shall find no rest.

Nor shall the soul of your foot have a resting place. But there the Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, an anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you.

You shall fear day and night and have no assurance of life. In the morning you shall say, oh, that it were evening. And at evening you shall say, oh, that it were morning because of the fear which terrifies your heart and because of the sight which your eyes see.

[27 : 24] And I'm skipping a lot of those verses but you get the idea. God is saying, you disobey me, you rebel against me and my word, my statutes and all that I have given it for which I have given it to you and this is what's going to happen to you and that has happened.

Hasn't it? I mean, think of the history of Israel. The Jewish people have known sorrow beyond compare under Egypt's Pharaoh, under Syria's and Assyria's kings, under the Babylonians Nebuchadnezzar, under Rome's Nero and many other Caesars, under Russia's Tsar, under Italy's Mussolini, under Germany's Hitler, under the Palestinians, the Egyptians, the Syrians, the Iranians and on and on it goes.

Divine retribution. Israel received the revelation. Israel responded in rebellion and as a result, God's retribution. Jonah pictures all of this today.

In that one man and in the things that happened to him and in the events that unfold for us in the book of Jonah, we see the life and history of Israel.

But all is not lost. Let me give you a fourth word. Reservation. Reservation. That is, reservation, the reservation of the nation Israel.

[28:57] God reserved Israel in spite of their rebellion. And we see that in their history as well, don't we? God reserved and preserved Israel in the very midst of their retribution.

And so you see, what God did for Jonah, God has been doing for Israel. God supernaturally kept Jonah alive in the belly of that great fish for three days and three nights.

And God has supernaturally kept Israel alive as His chosen people throughout many, many long years of their history. Through wanderings and captivities and exiles and persecution beyond compare, God has reserved them.

And you know what? We don't hear any more about the Assyrians. They're gone. We don't hear any more about the Ninevites.

They're gone. The Babylonians are gone. The Hittites are gone. The Amorites are gone. And the Perizzites are gone. And the Amalekites are gone.

[30:12] And all the other ites are gone. Nazi Hitler is gone. But the Jew still lives.

The Jew is still with us. All those who have oppressed them over their history, all those who have persecuted the Jews throughout their history are gone or are going.

But Israel is still with us. God has reserved them for Himself. God is not through with Israel.

Not through with His people. And that leads to a fifth word. Restoration. Jonah chapter 2 and verse 10 says, So the Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

After preserving and reserving Jonah in the belly of the great fish, preserving his life, God put Jonah back in His land.

[31:23] Jonah was given back to His land. And Israel was given back her land. And God said that He would do this.

Deuteronomy chapter 30 and verse 3 that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you.

If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven and from there, from there, the Lord your God will gather you and from there He will bring you.

Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.

And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all that you may all live.

[32:33] And this is what God has done for them. Restored them. He regathered them from the furthest parts of the world under heaven.

Most of us, many of us in this room have seen that happen. Some of you remember the day when Israel once again became a nation.

God did that. And it's incredible to think about the supernatural, almost supernatural way that came about.

Restoration. Let me give you two more words quickly. Regeneration. The passage I just read alludes to it. Regeneration.

Regeneration. One day, Israel's heart will be changed. Now that hasn't happened yet. But one day it will.

[33:42] Like Jonah, they will repent. Like Jonah, they will obey. And like with Jonah, God is going to give them a second chance.

God is going to use them again. He will. Now, this is future. Future for us today.

This did not happen in Jesus' day. The Jews crucified Him. This has not happened in our day. The Jews, by and large, have still rejected Jesus as Messiah.

So this has not happened yet. But one day it will. In fact, Paul speaks of it in Romans chapter 11 and verse 25.

Listen to it. For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion.

[34:45] What mystery? That blindness in part has happened to Israel until. Until. Until what?

The fullness of the Gentiles has come in. That's a reference to the church. The church age.

The Gentile church. Certainly, there are Jews who are part of the church, but it's primarily Gentiles.

Blindness, he says, has come in part on the Jews until God's finished with his program with the Gentiles, with the church.

And so, that is, after that, he says in this tremendous statement, somewhat misunderstood by many, but, and so, he says, all Israel will be saved as it is written.

Not all Jews who have ever lived, but those who will be alive at a certain time after the time of the Gentiles. That's a reference to the tribulation time.

[36:05] God's finished with the Gentiles. When the fullness of the Gentiles has come, that is, the church, he's going to take us out of here.

And then we'll begin the time the Bible calls the time of Jacob's trouble or the great tribulation. And it will be then that their eyes will be open they will quote, look upon him whom they have pierced and crucified and they will all believe.

They will all believe. They will all be regenerated. This is going to happen one day. It hasn't happened yet, but it will.

And that leads to the final word. And the completion of the sign of the prophet Jonah. And it's this word. Recommission.

Recommission. See, in Jonah chapter 3, Jonah is recommissioned, isn't he? God gives him a second chance. The word comes a second time. And it's go and preach to the Ninevites.

[37:26] And Jonah goes and he preaches. He is recommissioned. Jonah is recommissioned. And Jonah becomes a great missionary and evangelist to date, the greatest who's ever lived.

Because an entire city repents and believes. Some 600,000 people are saved. Jonah is recommissioned and he goes and he preaches and God saves 600,000 people.

tremendous. One man. Just one man. One Jew. Do you know who the great missionaries and evangelists will be during the tribulation?

The Jews. Revelation 7, and also a reference in chapter 14, tells us about 144,000 Jewish evangelists who will preach the gospel during the tribulation and they will preach to all people and the harvest of souls, the Bible tells us, will be more than any man can count.

Recommissioned. Recommissioned. Jesus said to his Jewish critics in Matthew 12, he said, the men of Nineveh will rise up in judgment with you this generation and condemn it.

[39:12] Because they, the Ninevites, repented at the preaching of one man, Jonah. And indeed, a greater than Jonah is here.

What a condemnation against the generation of Jews when Christ came. One day, it will be different.

Jews will be great evangelists. That leads to the final question that I need to ask.

And that is, what is God saying to the church? You might be thinking, well, you know, that's interesting, Brother Don. Interesting to hear about the Jews, but I'm not a Jew.

kind of a neat thing to see how Jonah mirrors the life and history of Israel, and that's awesome. And at least that causes me to have a greater confidence in God and His Word.

[40:29] And what an incredible thing. And one day all this is going to happen. But what does that have to do with me? Well, I think God is saying several things to us.

But let me just give you two to think about. God is saying something to us about our commission. How could we deny this?

Our commission. I've been talking about the commission He gave to the Jews, one that they rebelled against. He gave the same commission to us.

It is now our commission. You know, today God's redemptive plan, His purposes are being worked out through the church.

It resides with us now. The church made up of Jews and Gentiles, but mostly Gentiles. And so, we would have to admit that just as God gave and entrusted Israel with His revelation, His Word, along with it, what they were to do with it, proclaim it to the nations.

[41:56] His revelation, His Word, His Gospel has been entrusted to us, His church. He has commissioned us to go and proclaim the Gospel to all nations.

There's no denying that. And here's what He's saying to us. Let us not fail as Israel failed.

Let us not be self-consumed with His Word and with ministry so that it is all inward. Which is exactly what Israel did.

But God is saying something else. God is saying something about our compassion. And the two go together.

our compassion. You know, we read here in Jonah that He cared more about plants than He did people. And we are amazed at that.

[43:18] We read how the book of Jonah comes to an end and we think, I wish that chapter was not there. It doesn't make any sense. And we read about Jonah, in effect, caring more about his own personal comfort than about lost souls who are about to be annihilated.

And we are bewildered, a bit bewildered about that. I mean, honestly, how could he do that? How could he feel that way? God And we read how Jonah, in effect, desired the destruction of an entire city of people, including 120,000 innocent little children.

And we are appalled by that. Right? We should be. It's meant to appall us, to astonish us.

And we ask, how could Jonah feel this way? How could he think this way? Let me ask you a question.

[44:37] Would you experience any measure of delight if tomorrow morning when you got up, you heard on Fox or CNN that while you slept, Iran was nuked by the Israeli Air Force?

Would you experience any kind of gratification by that? Yeah? Be honest. Some of you are looking really pious right now.

Have you not been expecting to hear that any day? And be honest with yourself.

Have you entertained any kind of thoughts about, yes, get where they deserve? And every day we hear news about it and we're hoping, oh, Israel, they need to get over there and take care of those Iranians.

Wife them out! Now, you may not go that far, but would you experience any feelings of delight about that?

[45:58] Now, maybe Israel has a right to protect itself from an enemy that has vowed to annihilate them. I think they clearly do. But I'm not talking about what a nation has a right to do.

I'm talking about your heart. My heart. I'm talking about compassion.

I'm talking about your heart aching over hundreds and thousands and maybe more Muslim people dying every day and entering into a Christless eternity.

I'm talking about that and a church somehow delighting in that, rejoicing over that.

Did that hit home with any of you? And God says, should I not have pity on none of that great sea?

[47:13] but but but but but but Thank you.