

# "God's Love Story Sermon Outlines"

by Doug Hamilton

## Section 20: God's Love Story of Mercy (The Book of Jonah)

### Basic Summary for the Book of Jonah

#### 1) Jonah was running away from God (1:1-4).

- The passage tells us that there was a prophet of God named Jonah. He was the most popular prophet of his day due to his optimistic predictions regarding the military successes of Jeroboam II (2 Kgs 14:25). Any prophet can be popular if the message is always positive in their favor, but that was about to change. Jonah's name meant "*dove*", the symbol of peace, which is ironic since God sent him on a proclamation of destruction of the Assyrian capitol, Nineveh.
- Nineveh was founded by Nimrod (Gen 10:8-10). They were a prosperous pagan nation that was known for great violence. In less than forty years this nation would destroy the northern kingdom of Israel, carrying them away in the most brutal fashion, chaining the people together with fish hooks and skinning other alive. This would not have been a good place to speak against sin of a nation, particularly if one was a Jew.
- Jonah decided that he would try to "flee from the Lord" (NIV). He ditched his responsibilities by hopping a ship in the opposite direction.

2) Jonah was in rebellion to God (1:5-7). And the LORD hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up. <sup>5</sup> Then the sailors became afraid, and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten {it} for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down, and fallen sound asleep. <sup>6</sup> So the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps {your} god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish." <sup>7</sup> And each man said to his mate, "Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity {has struck} us." So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

- The text states that God hurled a great storm upon the ship. It was quite common for pagan sailors in that day to pray to their false gods for help when dire circumstances arose on the sea. This was a bad storm and they threw the cargo over the side to lighten the weight, finding Jonah asleep below the deck. The captain of the ship asked Jonah to call on the name of his god as well. As the storm grew worse, they cast lots to see who had angered their god; it was confirmed that Jonah was the culprit.

#### 3) Jonah was putting souls at risk (1:8-10).

- The crew was informed by Jonah that he was a Hebrew, a follower of the One that made the sea and dry land. He confessed that it was him for which God sent the storm. They were extremely upset because Jonah had put them at risk of losing their own lives.

#### 4) Jonah accepted blame for his actions (1:11-16)

- They cast lots and it revealed that Jonah was the culprit. It was quite common in the days of Jonah for sailors to throw people overboard who were believed to have angered the pagan sea gods. Not only did it lighten the ship, but more importantly the victim would become a sacrifice to angry sea, possibly making appeasement. Jonah, knowing that his

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plan to run from God had come to an end, beat them to the punch and offered to be thrown over. He was accepting blame for what he had done. When they threw him overboard and Jonah disappeared under the waves, the sea subsided. The amazed heathen feared Jehovah God and offered vows and sacrifices to Him.

### 5) Jonah repented and turned back to God (1:17-2:10).

- God did not leave Jonah to drown, but sent a great fish to swallow him. For three days and nights Jonah lie helplessly in the belly of the great fish. From there he reached out to God in prayer and repentance. Little did Jonah realize that the fish not only preserved his life, but also a taxi, for it took him back in the right direction toward Nineveh (2:10).
- There is an account from February 1891 about an incident from a whaling ship two-hundred miles off the coast of the Falkland Islands called the *Star of the East*. The story says a man named James Bartley was accidentally swallowed by a whale after being thrown overboard from the harpoon vessel when the creature hit it with its tail. Fifteen hours later, when processing the carcass, they removed the stomach and noticed a moving bulge within. They cut it open and out came the sailor, unconscious, but alive. They threw sea water on him, reviving him, though he really did not come to his senses for another month, babbling and making little sense to the other crew members. He went on to live another eighteen years, though his skin was permanently lightened from the acids in the whale's stomach. It is said that his tombstone reads "James Bartley, 1870-1909, A Modern Day Jonah".
- That account has mixed reviews to the authenticity. There have been many that have attempted to connect this account to the event of Jonah, but the text indicates it was a cold-blooded fish, not a warm-blooded whale that did the swallowing. It was also three days and nights, not fifteen hours. More importantly Jonah was vomited out on the shore and not cut out of the stomach. This is truly a miracle that cannot be explained through natural processes.

### 6) Jonah went out and preached the word (3:1-4).

- God gave Jonah a second opportunity to go and preach to Nineveh. This "great city" (Jonah 3:2) had many suburbs leading to the center of town. The inner city was surrounded by a wall over eight miles long and forty to fifty foot high. It could have easily hosted the 120,000 (4:11). It would have been a day's journey from the outlying suburbs to the center of town just as the scripture stated.
- Jonah proclaimed the coming judgments of the LORD. In forty days, the city and the nation will fall unless the repent of their evil.

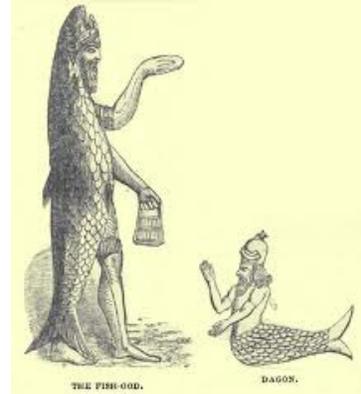
### 7) The Ninevites repented of their wickedness and were spared (3:5-10).

- The passage said they believed in God and repented in sackcloth and fasting. Even the King repented, laying his robe down for sackcloth and ashes. He commanded the entire nation to fast and humble themselves in sackcloth for forgiveness. He even extended this to the livestock. This was serious repentance. The result was God relenting of His judgment against them for that generation. It would be many years before they fell as a nation.

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- There has been much question as to why this sinful pagan nation would have listened to Hebrew prophet. This culture worshipped a half-fish/half-man god called *Dagon*. Sometimes he was depicted like a merman and other times with garments of a fish. The word for the fish that swallowed Jonah is *DAG*, hence *DAGON*, the fish/man god. Perhaps much attention was focused on Jonah's message because they thought that he was connected to this fish god in some way, being puked up on the shore by a fish.



## 8) Jonah was judgmental (Jonah 4:1-4).

- Jonah was “*greatly displeased*” that God would spare this wicked people. He can't seem to get it out of his head what the horrible Assyrians had done to his people. He reasoned that they were a vile, violent and wicked nation in need of a divine thrashing.
- It is interesting to note what Jonah said to God, “*for I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.*” He knew God would be willing to spare any nation if only they turn from their wicked ways in repentance. Because of this, he begged God to just let him die. “*And the LORD said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?"*”

## 9) God is concerned about all souls (Jonah 4:5-11).

- Jonah waited in a small shelter in the hot sun outside the city, waiting to see what God would do. Apparently it was a lean-to or tent, for it did not block the hot sun from his head, causing discomfort.
- God caused a fast growing vine to spring up over the shelter, giving him much appreciated shade for his head. It was only temporary though because God also sent a worm to gnaw on the stem of the vine, causing it to wither and retract the shade. Jonah was angry that the vine had died.
- God used this event to communicate his love even for wicked people of Nineveh, people that were much more important than a plant which was there for a moment and gone forever.

### Application:

Jonah is a good example that God's Love Story is a message of mercy. The definition of the word *mercy* means to show compassion, to extend kindness. A simple four point outline of the Book of Jonah can be built around mercy.

Chapter 1) The crew of the ship sought the mercy of God before and after the storm and received it from God. They understood the nature of God's Love Story.

Chapter 2) Jonah cried out for mercy in the belly of the fish and received it from God. He personally experienced God's Love Story from the belly of a fish.

Chapter 3) The King of Nineveh and his nation desired the mercy of God and received it. They learned God's Love Story and it changed their outcome.

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Chapter 4) God reminds Jonah through the lesson of the vine that He wants to extend His mercy to all. God has made His intentions clear that His Love Story is a story of Mercy.

It has always been that way, from the beginning and to the end as demonstrated throughout His Bible.

- Exodus 25:17 –The Ark of the Covenant, which was symbolic as the throne of God, was referred to as the “mercy seat”.
- Matthew 23:23 –Mercy was of the weightier measures of the Law.
- Dt. 13:17 –God desired to show mercy and compassion to the children of Israel.
- Hosea 6:6 –He desires mercy over sacrifice.
- 2 Samuel 24:14 –God’s mercies are great.
- Ephesians 2:4 –He is rich in mercy.
- James 5:11 –Our God is full of tender mercy.
- Ps 100:5 –His mercy is everlasting.
- 1 Peter 1:3 –Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross is the greatest demonstration of tender mercy.
- Ps 103:4 –We were crowned with the lovingkindness and mercy of the Lord.
- Matthew 5:7 –Jesus said “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*”
- Luke 6:36 -We are to be merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful.
- Luke 10:37 –He wants us to be merciful like the Good Samaritan.
- Rom 12:1 –It is by God’s mercies that we present ourselves as a living sacrifice.

God Love Story has always included mercy. He wants to extend it and we need Him to extend it. He wants us to spend eternity with Him in heaven. He has made that clear ever since the beginning. Apply this by living a merciful life to others and to God.