

LEARNING FROM JONAH

Despite his eventual success, who wants to be like Jonah? Nobody! His bad attitude are seen through his interaction with various people and things, beginning with the Gentile seamen in chapter one. He was put to shame by Gentiles who were far better in their response to God than he was.

The interactive commentary in this study is from an imaginary [Biblical Leadership](#) class led by Dr. Quest, the son of the first president of fictional Quest Bible College.

Dr. Quest (on the need to study Jonah)

Why study Jonah? We all know the story already, but have you ever read through Jonah with spiritual leadership in mind? You did yesterday, because that was your homework assignment, but I suspect that the first time you did so. There is a lot to learn about leadership in Jonah, especially regarding his attitude (1:1-3, 4:1-3). Who wants to begin the discussion today?

Evan (on Jonah's evangelistic success)

We all know that Jonah had a bad attitude, but I believe the entire city of Nineveh repented (3:5-10, 4:11). That doesn't happen every day! In fact, there were far more people saved through Jonah preached than through Peter's message on the Day of Pentecost. Jonah was even successful with the pagan seamen in the first chapter. They also repented. It's a shame that Jonah did not enjoy the success that God gave (4:1-3), but he was not a failure! There was something wrong with his thinking, but there was something wonderfully right about the results.

**Hundreds of thousands
may have repented!**
(Jonah 4:11)

Frank (on Jonah's conflicted thinking)

Oh, come on! What a miserable excuse for an evangelist and spiritual leader Jonah was! He wanted God to wipe out Nineveh (4:1-3), even though God did not wish to do so (4:11). Sure they were Israel's enemies, but a prophet should want what God desires. Jonah did not. He had an inner conflict of interest and wanted to die (1:12, 4:3) rather than do God's will.

Moreover, Jonah was happy to have pagan seamen as his executioners, because he did not want to kill himself. That is probably why he told them early on that he was running away from God (1:10). He was preparing them to do as he wished, to throw him overboard. He was not trying to evangelize them, Evan! I think I understand Jonah's thought process, and frankly, it is disgusting. He was a selfish manipulator rather than a fool who thought he could really run away from God.

Dr. Quest (on the need to focus on God)

Wow, that's harsh, Frank! And, Evan, I think you were a bit over the top in the opposite direction. So I suspect the truth is somewhere in between. Above all, let's not forget that God was at work in the situation. Jonah was bad, of course, but the Lord was very very good.

Theo (on the need to define 'prophet')

Isn't it contradictory to say that Jonah was a prophet and at the same time acknowledge that he was disobedient? Was he really God's prophet when he was on the ship bound for Tarshish (1:1-3)? I think we need to carefully define the term prophet before we conclude that Jonah was one.

Dr. Quest (on contradictions in people's lives)

In law and theology, we are careful to avoid contradictory term, but contradictions abound in people's lives, including in ours. The seamen were Gentiles who did not know much about God. Yet, they prayed to the Lord (1:14, 16) while Jonah who knew much more did not. Likewise, by definition a godly Christian is one who prays. Yet, how many in this class spent much time in prayer this morning or last night? Jonah's life was full of contradictions (1:9), but how about yours? We should not be like Jonah, but sadly we often are.

Mark the lines below as either correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

A () **Jonah was a disobedient Jewish prophet.**

- A-1 () The Lord had called him (1:1-2).
 A-2 () He willfully disobeyed the Lord (1:1-3, 10).
 A-3 () He did not try to hide his disobedience (1:10).
 A-4 () He was definitely not a good spiritual leader (1:3, 9-16).
 A-5 () There are no other similar disobedient prophets in the Bible.

B () **Jonah was unhelpful and a problem to others.**

- B-1 () He slept and did not pray (1:5-6).
 B-2 () The people on the ship did not respect him.
 B-3 () His presence caused the loss of the ship's cargo.
 B-4 () He was unhelpful because he was out of God's will.
 B-5 () He was not helpful like Paul was in Acts chapter 27.
 B-6 () He rightly told the seamen to throw him overboard (1:11-12).

C () **Jonah was in God's hands.**

- C-1 () Jonah wanted to die (1:12), but God did not let him (1:17).
 C-2 () Jonah could not run away from the Lord (1:3, 10).
 C-3 () Jonah was surrounded by God's creation (1:9).
 C-4 () The Lord was angry at Jonah (1:13, 15).
 C-5 () Jonah's attempt to flee failed.

Red (on leadership among the seamen)

Since this is a leadership class, I read through the chapter looking for leaders. The first one I noticed was the captain in 1:6 as he confronted the sleeping prophet. The captain is never mentioned again, however, and the seamen seemed to function without any clearly defined leader. Yet, amazingly, despite being out of God's will, Jonah became a leader. The seamen listened to him (1:9-10)!

Dr. Quest (on Jonah as spiritual leader on the ship)

Jonah was still God's prophet, and he could not escape from God's call no matter where he went. (It was not just the storm that shows that he could not run away from God.) The seamen needed insight about what was happening and what to do and Jonah was the only one on the ship who could give it. Was Jonah a problem? Yes, of course, he was! Yet, there was no other person on the ship like Jonah, and the seamen knew it. So they listened.

Mark the lines below as either correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

D () The Gentile seamen were fearful.

- D-1 () They were afraid of dying in the storm (1:5-6).
 D-2 () They were afraid because of Jonah's words (1:9-10).
 D-3 () They were afraid of throwing Jonah overboard (1:13-14).
 D-4 () The Lord showed them that they were weak (1:13-15).
 D-5 () At the end, they were afraid of the Lord (1:16).
 D-6 () Believers today fear the Lord like they did.

E () The Gentile seamen were changed.

- E-1 () They went through various stages of fear in the chapter.
 E-2 () Their praying at the end (1:14, 16) was better than at first (1:5-6).
 E-3 () They made vows and sacrifices (1:16) because they were thankful.
 E-4 () Outward changes probably indicate that they became true believers.
 E-5 () The step-by-step changes in Jonah ch. one are like those in John ch. nine.

F () The Gentile seamen were better than the Jewish prophet.

- F-1 () They knew much less, but they acted much better.
 F-2 () They repented in chapter one (1:16), but Jonah did not (2:9).
 F-3 () They listened to Jonah (1:8-16), but Jonah did not listen to God (1:3).
 F-4 () They lacked spiritual leadership (1:6, 9-10, 13-16), but they still repented.
 F-5 () The Book of Jonah is a call to repent like the seamen and the Ninevites did.

Commentary from various perspectives as overheard in a Leadership class at imaginary Quest Bible College

Dr. Quest (on even good leaders being flawed)

Even the best human leaders are flawed, and Jonah was not one of the best. Yet, God's gracious and merciful program still goes forward (C-5, F-4). What can we learn about this from Jonah?

Red (on Jonah presenting himself as a negative example)

We have studied the failures of Gideon, David, and others. Yet, in all that I have read, Jonah seems to be the only one who deliberately presented himself as a sinful example in order to teach his audience to not be like himself (A-5). His repentance in chapter two is probably the only thing that his original readers were supposed to emulate (F-2).

Dr. Quest (on the repentance of biblical heroes)

Do you remember reading Psalms 32 and 51 when we studied David? To me these psalms sound a lot like Jonah chapter two. So Jonah is not totally unique after all (A-5). Biblical heroes like David repent; villains like the Pharaoh of the exodus do not.

Frank (on Jonah not being a hero)

The seamen seemed to repent in 1:16, but Jonah thought that he could avoid going to Nineveh by drowning. Frankly, he wanted to die (C-1), rather than do God's will (1:12). Even at the end of the book (4:1, 9), he still had a bad attitude. Jonah is no hero (A, A-3, A-4)!

Cal (on God as the true Hero in Jonah)

Jonah is not the hero in the book, because God is (C)! The Lord was the one who did great things and was the only one who could do whatever he pleased (1:14). Jonah could not (C-5), and neither could the seamen (1:13, D-4). Moreover, God had the last word in 4:11.

Wes (on why Jonah ended with a question)

Yes, but the final verse in Jonah (4:11) is a question, and I suspect the prophet ended it that way as a sign of repentance, much like Job fell silent at the end. Would Jonah have been willing to write such a negative book about himself otherwise (F-5)? I don't think so.

Cal (on God being in charge instead of Jonah)

What about the great fish in the final verse of chapter one? The prophet was willing and even hoping to die, as Frank said, but God did not allow it (C-1). The Lord was in charge (C). Even the pagan seamen said so (1:14). Jonah's will was not the deciding factor.

Dr. Quest (on why we have the book of Jonah)

We could argue about man's will and God's sovereignty forever, but let's conclude by thinking about why we have the book of Jonah. It is because the prophet was unwilling to do as God commanded and because the Israelites to whom he wrote were just like him. The prophet and the people both needed to repent (F-5). We often do as well. We have been called to serve like Jonah was, but like Jonah we often resist (D-6). There are too many contradictions in our lives.