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IS OF

YHWH.

a biblical study on the book of the prophet Jonah.

What is **fundamentals** ?

As a pastor's kid, it is easy to take the greatness of the gospel for granted. The fact that the Master of the universe became man and died for me somehow becomes normal. Crazy stories such as of a little boy defeating a giant, and a man opening a sea with a stick become a fairy tale. When you're used to reading Scripture, it becomes easy not to pay attention to the fascinating teachings, mysteries, and revelations of a God who loves His creation.

The Bible is full of treasures that we skip over because we think we already know the story. Because we read the story of Jacob fighting God in Genesis 32 over and over again we think there's nothing more to learn there.

Because we heard the narrative of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3 sixty-seven times as a kid, we think there's no need to go back to read it and see if there is any new detail we can find there.

Fundamentals started as an initiative of 2 or more Church to provide a biblical study on books and themes of the Bible. The name is founded on our desire for Christians to have a solid foundation on core beliefs (fundamentals) of the Christian faith.

In the same way that you can never overdo the fundamentals of a sport, you can never overdo or overstudy the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

Our goal is not to "reinvent the wheel" and bring some new revelation that was never seen before in Church History. No. The goal is to go to the text and just search for the revelations that are *in* the Text. In doing so, we pray that your desire, hunger, and curiosity to know more about the God who has revealed Himself in His Word may grow.

The goal of Fundamentals is to bring back that child-like spirit of excitement and wonder of when you first heard the story of Elijah going up to heaven in a chariot of fire, or Jesus multiplying the five loaves of bread and two fish. And being, once again, struck by these narratives to honor Christ with your daily living.

The Bible is filled with way too many good stories for us to take for granted.

Blessings,
Abner.

Basic Info

Date of writing: between the eighth and the fourth centuries BC.

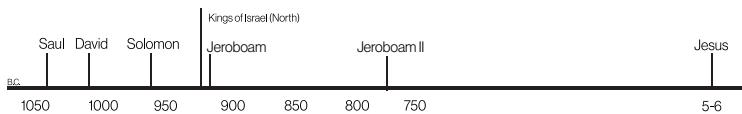
Author: unknown.

Main Characters: YHWH, Jonah, sailors, big fish (or whale if you will), Ninevites.

Historical Context

Israel

Jonah was a prophet to the king of Israel (Northern Kingdom), Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). Historians place Jeroboam II as king near 750 BC. During Jonah's years as a prophet, Israel stood tall among the nations, though in a political rather than a spiritual sense. The reign of Jeroboam II (793–753 BC), who was an evil king before the Lord, saw Israel's borders expand to their greatest extent since the time of Solomon.



Assyria/Nineveh

The Assyrian empire was built by military action. While initially Assyria had actually to achieve her conquests, she soon discovered the usefulness of intimidation to achieve the same ends. The success of this intimidation depended upon Assyria's caned reputation as a brutal and merciless military opponent.

As a prominent Neo-Assyrian city, Nineveh was closely associated with the empire's military activity throughout the first millennium BC. In the eighth century, Nineveh was one of three royal cities in the Assyrian empire, the two others being Calah and Ashur.



Purpose/Interpretations of Jonah

The Sovereignty of God and a Moral Tale: John Calvin and Disney's Pinocchio

This tradition of interpretation presents Jonah as a negative example. Calvin suggests that Jonah wrote this account in order to teach us the futility of fleeing from God. In a secular twist on this view, Walt Disney's movie Pinocchio (which rewrote the original book with Jonah-like themes) portrays a rebellious puppet who is swallowed by a whale. The purpose of Jonah is to make us obedient through the fear of Yahweh.

Intro.

Repentance and Forgiveness of the Ninevites

The amazingly swift repentance and deliverance of the Ninevites is a strong message in Jonah 3. If the Ninevites can repent, anyone can. Their model of repentance has been presented as the main theme of Jonah in the history of interpretation by both Christian and Jewish commentators. According to this view, the purpose of Jonah is, therefore, to demonstrate the love of God for all people and to bring us to repentance before a gracious and merciful God.

Jonah and Typologies: Like a Reluctant Israel or Like Christ?

In this interpretation, Jonah has been reshaped as a type or example of a prideful and haughty Jew (or Israel). This view urges believers not to be narrow-minded in relation to God's forgiveness and grace.

Another typology has its origin in the New Testament. Jesus compared himself to Jonah in a positive light. The early church fathers followed this interpretation of Jonah as a sign (or type) of Jesus' own ministry, death, and resurrection (Matt. 12:39–41; Luke 11:29–32). Jonah—in the ship, in the water, in the fish, and back on dry land (Jonah 1 and 2)—is compared to Jesus' incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection.

What sets Jonah apart:

Jonah is unique among the books of the prophets, which are typically collections of God's words spoken through a prophet. This book doesn't really focus on the words of a prophet; rather, it's a subversive story about a prophet who resents his God for loving his enemies.

Notes:

1 The word of YHWH came to Jonah son of Amitai, (CSB)

- Although we know that the word of YHWH came to Jonah, we don't know how it did;
- The prophet Jonah, son of Amitai, is one of the few canonical prophets mentioned in an Old Testament book other than the one attributed to that prophet.

2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me." (NASB)

- YHWH's interest in Nineveh is so great that He sends a prophet to a non-Israelite city (something quite rare in the OT).

3 "Jonah got up to flee to Tarshish from YHWH's presence. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from YHWH's presence (CSB)

- Modern historians guess it is the Phoenician port in Spain known to the Greeks as Tartessos, which would be far away indeed;
- Joppa was a coastal town that was never under Israelite control, meaning that Jonah goes to a town that he knows is full of foreigners.

4 "But YHWH threw [hurled] a great wind onto the sea, and such a great storm arose on the sea that the ship threatened to break apart. (CSB)

- The God who usually defeats chaos, is now He who creates chaos on the sea.

5 "The sailors were afraid [feared], and each cried out to his god. They threw the ship's cargo into the sea to lighten the load. Meanwhile, Jonah had gone down to the lowest part of the vessel and had stretched out and fallen into a deep sleep. (CSB)

- While the sailors are doing everything they can to stabilize the boat, and they have prayed to their own gods; Jonah's response, by contrast, again appears comical, to the point of satirizing the prophet: he keeps on descending (vv. 3,5).

6 "The captain approached him and said, "What are you doing sound asleep? Get up! Call to your god. Maybe this god will consider us, and we won't perish." (CSB)**7 "Come on!" the sailors said to each other. "Let's cast lots. Then we'll know who is to blame for this trouble we're in." So they cast lots, and the lot singled out Jonah. (CSB)**

- The rulers of ancient Israel used lots that functioned this way to inquire YHWH about who was guilty (1 Sam. 14:40–42) or who was to be king (10:19–21). They also used the casting of lots to choose who would replace Judas (Acts 1:26). Like many other ancient cultures, Israel considers what looks like a game of chance to be a form of divination, understanding the outcome to be under divine control. Here a practice that in other contexts could easily become superstition is the deepest form of religion available.

8 "Then they said to him, "Tell us who is to blame for this trouble we're in. What is your business, and where are you from? What is your country, and what people are you from?" (CSB)

- Although the lot falls upon Jonah, which implicates Jonah as guilty, the sailors do not rush to harm him.

How bad were the Ninevites?

[...] I flayed many right through my land (and) draped their skins over the walls. I brought Ahi-yababa [the ruler of Suru] to Nineveh, flayed him, (and) draped his skin over the wall of Nineveh."

Ashur-nasir-apli II (883-859)

9 He said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear YHWH, the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land.” (NASB)

- Out of the three affirmations it seems like only two are true. He is indeed a Hebrew, and YHWH is the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land, but does he actually fear this God?

10 Then the men were seized by a great fear and said to him, “What is this you’ve done?” The men knew he was fleeing from YHWH’s presence because he had told them. (CSB)

- Jonah boasted about his Yahwistic heritage to the foreigners, yet they were the ones who confronted him about his disobedience.

11 So they said to him, “What should we do to you so that the sea will calm down for us?” For the sea was getting worse and worse. (CSB)

- Ironically, the sailors turn to Jonah (the cause of their problems) and consult him on what to do, requesting him to fulfill his role as a prophet by seeking direction from his deity.

12 He answered them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea so that it will calm down for you, for I know that I’m to blame for this great storm that is against you.” (CSB)

- Jonah has no reason at this point to think that YHWH will deliver him once he is thrown into the sea. Important to note that he does not intercede on behalf of the sailors or on his own behalf.

13 However, the men rowed desperately to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming even stormier against them. (NASB)

- The particular idiom used to explain the sailors' attempts to return to dry land without throwing Jonah overboard conveys a sense of great energy on their part. In doing so, they demonstrate more concern for his life than he shows for his own (or theirs).

14 So they called out to YHWH: “Please, YHWH, don’t let us perish because of this man’s life, and don’t charge us with innocent blood! For you, YHWH, have done just as you pleased.” (CSB)

- In another irony, besides using the term “innocent blood” when referring to Jonah’s life, the sailors behave in ways that are above reproach.

15 Then they picked up Jonah and threw [hurled] him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging.” (CSB)

- Just as Yahweh had hurled the storm into the sea, the sailors hurl Jonah into the sea.

16 Then the men feared YHWH greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to YHWH and made vows.” (NASB)

- Nowhere else in the Old Testament does the phrase, “they offered a sacrifice” appear as a reference to foreigners sacrificing to Yahweh. The phrase, “made vows” only once (Isa 19:21) refers to the solemn promises of foreigners;

Take away:

Notes:

1⁷ YHWH appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. (CSB)

- While other ancient Near East religions portrayed the “monster of the watery chaos” as one of the greatest enemies of the gods, here the sea monster is a mere puppy used by YHWH in His merciful act toward Jonah;
- The expression “three days and three nights” stands for the longest period of time one can reasonably be expected to survive such a situation.

2¹ Jonah prayed to YHWH his God from the belly of the fish: (CSB)

- The use of “pray” also adds to the ironic portrayal of Jonah. Besides praying only after the sailors, the prophet chooses only to intercede on his own behalf.

Outline of Jonah's prayer:

- Introduction (v.2);
- Recounting of his crisis and deliverance (vv.3-7);
- Vow to worship YHWH for the deliverance (vv.8-9).

2² I called to YHWH in my distress, and he answered me. I cried out for help from deep inside Sheol; you heard my voice. (CSB)

- The term Sheol refers to the abode of the dead. To be in Sheol is simply to be dead, beyond all help unless God can give life to what is dead

3³ When you threw me into the depths, into the heart of the seas, the current overcame me. All your breakers and your billows swept over me.

4⁴ And I said, “I have been banished from your sight, yet I will look once more toward your holy temple.” (CSB)

5⁵ The water engulfed me up to the neck; the watery depths overcame me; seaweed was wrapped around my head.

6⁶ I descended to the foundations of the mountains, the earth's gates shut behind me forever! Then you raised my life from the Pit, YHWH my God! (CSB)

- Jonah keeps on descending... (1:3;1:4;1:5;2:6)
- Yet as powerful and true as the short proclamation of 6b is, it is the shortest section of the psalm and Jonah's attention returns to his own activity for the rest of the psalm.

7⁷ As my life was fading away, I remembered YHWH, and my prayer came to you, to your holy temple. (CSB)

- Remembering Yahweh implies he utters a prayer. The fact that the prayer reaches Yahweh in the temple not only implies that the psalmist utters the prayer, but that Yahweh acted positively on it.

**8 Those who cherish worthless idols abandon their faithful love [*hesed*],
9 but as for me, I will sacrifice to you with a voice of thanksgiving. I will fulfill
what I have vowed. Salvation [Deiverance] belongs to YHWH. (CSB)**

- Who are “those” in the narrative?
- The phrase “cherish worthless idols” also evokes the worship of insubstantial things. It can also imply the uttering of false oaths or vows, whether those oaths are made to false deities or uttered to Yahweh but not fulfilled.
- Jonah says he would do what the sailors had already done!

**10 Then YHWH commanded the fish, and
it vomited Jonah onto dry land. (CSB)**

- The word for the fish’s act means “to vomit.” Being provocative and onomatopoeic, it connotes an action that evokes a certain level of disgust.

The Hebrew word *hesed* has a wide range of meanings such as, kindness, loving-kindness, faithfulness, or covenant loyalty, but it essentially refers to the keeping of covenant stipulations agreed to by parties who have made an agreement.

The first occurrence of the word in the Hebrew Bible is found in Gen. 19:19.

Observations:

- Jonah makes no mention of his own role in the events that brought him to the current situation, concluding that his brush with drowning is a consequence of God’s actions;
- Jonah has assumed that his relationship with God is healthy while that of the (idol-worshipping) sailors is non-existent, while the narrator has shown that the truth is almost the opposite;
- While Jonah uses a flourish of words for his own deliverance, he has only a few reticent words for the Ninevites and sailors.

Take away:

Notes:

1 And the word of YHWH came to Jonah a second time saying, 2 “Rise. Go to Nineveh, the grand city, and call out to her the message that I am speaking to you.” (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)

- In verse 2, the narrator prepares the reader for a surprise to come, the repentance of the Ninevites, by reintroducing the city and its inhabitants in a less hostile manner.

3 Jonah got up and went to Nineveh according to YHWH's command. Now Nineveh was an extremely great city [to God, or to the gods], a three-day walk. (CSB)

- Maybe the phrase could be translated as “a grand city belonging to God.”

4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown [or overturned]." (NASB)

- Jonah's sermon represents the briefest biblical sermon on record, consisting of merely five words: תְּכַפֵּה הַגִּינָּנוּ סֹי סִיעָרָא דֹעַ

- Recent commentators argue that the Hebrew verb that stands for “overturned, overthrown,” can mean “to be overthrown” (and hence destroyed) or it can mean “to be changed or altered” (e.g., a change of heart in Exod 14:5; Hos 11:8).

5 Then the people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least. (CSB)

- The phrase [then the people of Nineveh believed God] implies, at its core, the idea of trust.

- Ancient Near Eastern people would offer sacrifices and confess when confronted with suffering or threats of punishment, but their polytheism and a lack of revelation made it challenging to pinpoint the offended god and the nature of the transgression.

6 When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes.

7 He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. 8 But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn [שׁׁוּב] from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. 9 Who knows? God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish." (NASB)

- “Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him, so you can offer a grain offering and a drink offering to the Lord your God.” (Joel 2:14 CSB)

- The Hebrew term that describes their reaction is **שׁׁוּב**, the most common term for “repentance.” When this phrase occurs elsewhere in the OT, it describes the kind of repentance God called for.

10 And God saw their deeds, how they repented [šub] from their evil way. And then God relented concerning the evil that he had said he would do to them, but did not do. (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)

- Among other prophetic texts, Jonah stands out for its unique portrayal of foreign nations truly repenting and transforming their relationship with YHWH.

Observations:

- God relents, but the Ninevites' prior sins remain unpunished.
- Nineveh believed in God, and turned from her sin in some degree, but did not fully turn to God. The reform of the Ninevites makes no mention of putting away their other gods.
- **The sailors and Nineveh's experience:** though the word 'repent' is not employed in Jonah 1, the sailors' actions clearly show a reorientation of heart and life in the context of a monotheistic relationship with YHWH.

Does God change His mind?

- "YHWH's sovereignty is not exercised arbitrarily, but responsibly and responsively, interacting with the moral, or immoral, actions of human beings." R. W. L. Moberly
- "Belief in God's immutability does not negate the importance of historical contingencies or especially the importance of human choices. Under the sovereign control of God, the choices people make determine the directions history will take." Richard Pratt Jr.

Take away:

Notes:

1 And it was displeasing to Jonah, a great calamity [evil], and he seethed [was filled with intense unexpressed anger].² And he prayed to YHWH and said: “Alas, YHWH, is this not what I said when I was in my own land? That’s why I first went to flee toward Tarshish, because I knew that you are a God who is gracious and compassionate, who is slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and who relents concerning evil.³ So, YHWH, take my life from me because my death is better than my life.” (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)

- Did Jonah really know that?

- “Because Your lovingkindness [hesed] is better than life, My lips shall praise You.” (Psalm 63:3 NKJV). While YHWH’s hesed was better than life to David, YHWH’s hesed (toward the Ninevites) was worse than death to Jonah...

EXODUS 34:6-7	JOEL 2:13	JONAH 4:2
[...]The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and <i>truth</i> ; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."	[...] For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil.	[...] You are a God who is gracious and compassionate, who is slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and who relents concerning evil.

4 But YHWH said, “Is it good for you to seethe [be angry]?⁵ And then Jonah went forth from the city, and he sat down east of the city. And, there, he made a booth [sukâ] for himself. And he sat down under it until he could see what would happen in the city. (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)

- The word booth (sukâ) refers to a temporary structure made of interwoven tree branches that would provide shade from the heat of the sun.

- This is a rather overdramatized verse: Jonah exits, sits, builds, sits, then stares at the city. The effect is once more of movements as if Jonah is taking his time or is not sure how best to proceed.

6 So YHWH ēlōhîm appointed a plant [qîqâyôن] and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant. (NASB)

- The title YHWH ēlōhîm is unique in the prophetic corpus.

- The use of the compound divine name serves to signal to the reader that Jonah is being treated like Nineveh.

- The name of the plant, qîqâyôن, is unique to Jonah. Scholars generally interpret the term as a reference to a plant that produces castor beans. It has leaves that are six to eight inches long so it would have been quite capable of providing shade from the hot sun.

7 When dawn came the next day, ēlōhîm appointed a worm that attacked the plant, and it withered. 8 When the sun came up ēlōhîm appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and wanted [begged with all his soul] to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life." 9 Then ēlōhîm asked Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "Yes, it's right!" he replied. "I'm angry enough to die!" (CSB)

- While in verse 3, Jonah asks YHWH directly to take his life, in verse 8, Jonah literally asks his soul to die.

10 And then YHWH said, "You had pity [hûs] over the plant over which you did not toil and which you did not raise. It came into existence one night and perished the next. 11 So, should I not have pity [hûs] over Nineveh, the great city that has 120,000 people who do not know their right hand from their left hand, and many cattle as well?" (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)

- The verb pity (hûs) describes an emotional reaction when someone sees suffering that moves the person to act to stop the suffering. In keeping with his character, however, Jonah did not do anything in response to the plant dying, except to express his own desire to die (4:8–9).

Observations:

- The book begins with YHWH having the first words and ends with YHWH having the last say.
- Jonah has no trouble accepting divine compassion when it is directed his way, but he burns with anger in response to YHWH's compassion upon a group Jonah deems unworthy.
- A prophetic pronouncement of judgment always carries with it an implicit call to repentance. Yahweh's compassion in Jonah is motivated by the repentance of the Ninevites. If YHWH can change YHWH's mind about Nineveh, then YHWH can change any prophetic judgment. What motivates YHWH's actions is compassion, not wrath.

vv.2-3	Jonah's monologue	39 words
v.4	YHWH'S question	3 words
v.8	Jonah's question	3 words
v.9	dialogue: YHWH	5 words
	dialogue: Jonah	5 words
vv.10-11	YHWH's monologue	39 words

Take away:

Notes:

Jeremiah sought the honor of [God] and the honor of [Israel]...
Elijah sought the honor of [God] and not the honor of [Israel]...
Jonah sought the honor of [Israel] and not the honor of [God].

Adapted from *Mekilta, Pisha*; cited from Halperin 1980: 90

The alternative to Jonah's absurdity is the absurdity of God.

Good 1981: 55

The fundamental purpose of the book of Jonah is not found in its missionary or universalistic teaching. It is rather to show that Jonah being cast in the depths of Sheol and yet brought out alive is an illustration of the death of the Messiah for sins not His own and of the Messiah's resurrection.

E. J. Young 1960: 263

The Book of Jonah is an expression of what may be called "*la condition prophétique*." The prophet cannot escape his mission and is bound to suffer when he attempts to fulfill it.

Berlin 1976: 234-35

The story of Jonah is not only a religious manifesto but also a psychological tableau of the human condition. Jonah is not just a Jew from Palestine called out of anonymity by a commissioning voice from without. He is a human being, every person... He is also a paradigm of our resistance to election by God, for nothing is more repulsive to us than to be so designated (elected, chosen) by the Outer Voice for a self-transcending task when we would rather follow our inner voice and our biological dictates ("what feels good") for our self-satisfaction and our self-aggrandizement.

Lacocque and Lacocque 1981: 126-27

Beginning as a punitive affair between God and Nineveh, temporarily interrupted by the go-between's recalcitrance, Jonah evolves before our eyes into a story of a prophet's education.

Sternberg 1987: 320

Jonah's example shows that those who have a close external connection to God (Jonah was born among God's chosen people and served as a prophet among them), know the Scriptures well and firmly believe that God exists, can still persevere in calm, reasoned rebellion against that same God.

Timer 2011: 145

Key verses:

1⁴ So they called out to YHWH: "Please, YHWH, don't let us perish because of this man's life, and don't charge us with innocent blood! **For you, YHWH, have done just as you pleased.** (CSB)

2⁹ but as for me, I will sacrifice to you with a voice of thanksgiving. I will fulfill what I have vowed. **Salvation [Deiverance] belongs to YHWH. (CSB)**

3⁹ "Who knows? God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish." (NASB)

4¹¹ "So, should I not have pity over Nineveh, the great city that has 120,000 people who do not know their right hand from their left hand, and many cattle as well?" (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)

Notes: