

JONAH

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Jonah 1.4-6

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I. Connecting With One Another

As we begin this week's study on the Book of Jonah, think back (or ahead!?) to your high school physics class. Sir Isaac Newton's third law of motion states, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction."

Can you recall a time when something you said or did caused a reaction? Was it a reaction you expected or one you weren't expecting? Was the reaction "equal" in size – or bigger!? How did you respond to that reaction?

Before continuing in this study, spend some time in prayer:

- a. Thank the Spirit of God for drawing many new families to our new Saturday evening gathering,
- b. That God would continue to stir the hearts of those gathering at each of our three weekend worship opportunities to Connect with Him, grow in faith and serve in love,
- c. For those leading our weekend worship gatherings and children's classroom times – that God would guide their planning, preparation and leadership.

II. Introduction to this Study

After last week's introduction to the book (click onto gdshp.ch/Jonah113 if you missed it), in Jonah 1.4-6 we see the LORD's reaction to Jonah's decision to flee to(ward) Tarshish. These three verses detail God's sending a "great" wind upon the sea, causing a "violent storm" that threatens to "break up" the boat in which Jonah and his fellow sailors travel.

We read of their three reactions to this dangerous situation: First, they are understandably fearful; Second, they pray, each "to his own god"; and Third, they seek to save the ship by tossing the cargo overboard. Jonah, meanwhile, is rocked to sleep by these giant waves!

Verse six features an(other) ironic situation: The captain, who does not worship YHWH, the one true God of Israel, calls the sulking Hebrew prophet to prayer (in fact, the original Hebrew reads like an invocation of sorts)! The captain cries out much akin to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, "All lost! To prayer, to prayer! All lost!"

III. Study the Text

- a. Verse 3 clearly communicates that the "great" wind hurled onto the sea was in response to Jonah's decision to "flee from the LORD" (see verse 3).

This "great" wind is one of many "greats" in the Book of Jonah. Last week we read of the "great" city of Nineveh, this week we read of the "great" wind, storm, and fear of the sailors, and we will soon read of a "great" fish, aristocracy of Nineveh, evil that Jonah finds in Nineveh's salvation, and gourd that protects him. Why do you think the author uses this same word over and over? What could it be communicating to us, the reader, that all these things are so "great"? Could there be some "theological insinuation" as well?

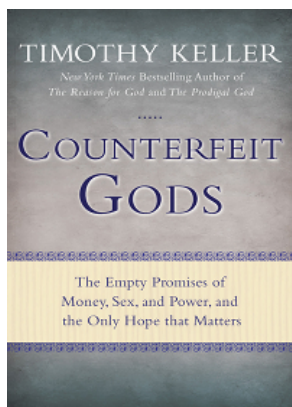
Does it seem fair to you that the LORD sends a “great” wind on the sea? Why or why not? Is it fair that this wind involves these other sailors who are not to blame?

Read Psalm 107.23-32 for an interesting parallel. How do verses 31 and 32 change our perception of fair and unfair?

- b. Though not obvious in our English translations, the narrator inverts the word order of verse 4 by placing “the LORD” ahead of the clause, insinuating that God was one step ahead of Jonah. Are there times in your life where you have experienced the same thing? Have you ever tried to outrun God and found Him “one step ahead” of you?
- c. During this time in the Ancient Near East many were polytheistic, believing in many gods. These were categorized into personal, familial, and nationalistic deities. Each were believed to reside in their given temple, built, of course, on land. How does knowing that reframe the sailors actions in verse 5? Does it reframe the captain’s “call to prayer” in verse 6?
- d. The sailors, who almost certainly depended on the ship’s cargo for their livelihood, seem more than willing to dispense with it to save themselves and the boat. Are there times you have “tossed something overboard” when the seas of life got rough? Are things you would do well to “toss overboard” now?
- e. Jonah, the unwilling prophet, is found sleeping below deck when the boat is “breaking up” all around him, very much like Jesus’ disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane (see Matthew 26.36-46, Mark 14.32-42, and/or Luke 22.39-46). Why do you think Jonah could sleep at a time like this? Could you?! If Jonah is indeed a symbol for God’s people, are there ways the church has slept while the world was “breaking up” all around us?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. What types of things does our culture view as “great”? How about you? Is there anything you can think of that’s even “greater” and beyond comprehension? (It’s a “Sunday School answer,” I know, but very important for us to reflect on, don’t you think?)
- b. Why have you sought to “outrun” God before? How did you feel when you realized He was one step ahead of you? Why did you feel that way?
- c. Are there ways God has used others – even non-Christians! – to challenge or encourage your faith? How did He do so? What was the result?
- d. How have the “rough seas” of life revealed where your faith is? Are there times you’ve even thanked God for difficulties because it drew you deeper into relationship with Him?
- e. Are there ways you need to “wake up”? Read and reflect on Ephesians 5.1-20 for the Apostle Paul’s understanding of what it means to be “awake.”



In his book *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters*, Pastor Timothy Keller writes,

Our contemporary society is not fundamentally different from ancient ones. Each culture is dominated by its own set of idols. Each has its “priesthoods,” its totems and rituals. Each one has its shrines – whether office towers, spas and gyms, studios or stadiums – where sacrifices must be made in order to procure the blessings of the good life and ward off disaster. What are the gods of beauty, power, money, and achievement but these same things that have assumed mythic proportions in our individual lives and in our society? (page xii)