

# Jonah #1: Introduction

by Ed Miller

---

*The book of Jonah is a missionary book that reveals God's heart for the heathen and the personal crisis of the prophet Jonah, which is a deeper issue than his feelings about the heathen or his theology.*

**Duration:** 1:03:58

**Scripture:** Psalm 67:1-2, Ezekiel 1:1-3, Matthew 12:39-41, Luke 11:29

**Topics:** "Mission Work", "Spiritual Revival"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker introduces the book of Jonah and highlights three general observations about the book. The speaker emphasizes the importance of diligently and humbly preparing to see the Lord and expresses the hope that the Lord will manifest Himself to the listeners. The speaker mentions the crisis in the book of Jonah and suggests that the key to understanding it lies in the New Testament. The speaker references Matthew 12 and Luke 11, where Jesus refers to Jonah as a sign and emphasizes the need for change. The speaker concludes by stating that the main enemy of missions is Christians who are not signs.

---

## Transcript

Good morning, brothers and sisters. Such a joy to be back with you. God spared us all for another HaShuwa, another visitation of Himself.

We're so thankful to the Lord. I'll ask you to open your Bibles, please, to the book of Jonah, if you would. As we come to the study of God's Word, there is a principle of Bible study that we call the indispensable principle.

Absolutely indispensable. We're going to be studying, Lord willing, this weekend, this wonderful book of Jonah, and we have a wonderful illustration of the indispensable principle in this book. And I'm calling attention to the fact that two times in the New Testament, Jonah is mentioned.

Once in Matthew 12, once in Luke 11, and both times by the lips of our Lord Jesus. And in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus explained the book of Jonah. And what I'm suggesting is that because Jesus explained it, we can study it.

There is no possibility of understanding the book of Jonah if all you had was the book of Jonah. Jesus gave us the key. Jesus unveiled the book.

Jesus told us how to understand the book of Jonah. And I call attention to that because that's the indispensable principle. Only Jesus can unlock any portion of this book.

He's the one that opens our eyes, takes the veil away, and reveals Himself. With that, as preparation, I'll ask you to bow with me, please. Let's trust the Lord together.

Our Father, we do thank You so much that You have given us this wonderful book of Jonah, and that You have Yourself given us the understanding, the key, that we might study this book in a way that would unveil the Lord Jesus Christ. We would ask You this morning and throughout this weekend that You would show us in a way we've never seen before Your missionary heart. That You would transform us, each one and all together, that we might have Your heart.

We know, Lord, that this is a great thing to ask, but as we've sung, You're an awesome God. You're able to do great and impossible things. And so we ask You to meet with each one of us and to meet with us corporately and unveil the Lord Jesus transformingly to our spirits.

We claim it in the matchless name of Christ. Amen. Well, for some time you've known that we're going to look at this wonderful book together.

It's my earnest prayer that you have sought the Lord in preparation by going through this book. It's not my purpose to come here and in any way try to be novel or try to give you some insights that I think you might not have thought about or something like that. I hope you've studied to know the Lord.

That's how I've studied. I study to know the Lord. I want to see the Lord.

And it's my prayer that together we'll be able to see Him. And I'm convinced that the Lord will manifest Himself to us and more so in proportion to those who have diligently and humbly prepared to see the Lord. Lord willing, we'll have five opportunities this weekend.

Of course, the Lord could interrupt that at any time. His any moment return or any moment departure. Either way, He can interrupt it.

But Lord willing, all things being equal, we'll have that precious privilege to have five sessions together. And what I'd like to do this morning is sort of introduce this wonderful book to your heart. I'm quite sure that you're familiar with the facts of the book.

In an introduction lesson, we just sort of fly over the whole book. We try to get a sense of the book and pick up general observation. Every book raises these questions.

Why did God give us this book? What's the distinctive revelation of the Savior in this book? What does God want to accomplish in our hearts through the study of this book? How does this book reveal the Lord Jesus that no other book in the Bible revealed in the same way? What would you miss if God dipped down in your Bible and removed forever the book of Jonah from your Bible? It's the idea of an introduction lesson to get a feel for the book. The bottom line, of course, is that we've come to Joshua not to know about Jonah. Not to know about the book of Jonah, but to see the Lord Jesus Christ.

How does this book reveal Him? Now, before we get into the introduction, I'm going to ask your patience with me sometime in an introduction lesson. The temptation is, let's roll up our sleeves. Let's wade in.

Tell the Jonah story. Let's begin chapter 1, verse 1, and move along. Well, we'll get to the Jonah story.

But Jonah, the book of Jonah is so full and so rich, and its history is so pregnant with wonderful, wonderful truth. There's so much packed into these chapters, it's not possible in five sessions. It's just not possible to look at everything.

Now, I might jump over things that have blessed your heart. I might not have seen the things that have blessed your heart. I know I've got to jump over things that have blessed my heart.

I've been chewing my tongue to a stump trying what to leave out. There's so much in this wonderful, wonderful book. But I have, under the guidance, I pray, of the Holy Spirit, intentionally selected the facts that are the shortest route to Jesus.

That's why we've gathered to study this book. And so we won't begin in chapter 1, verse 1, and then just go through the book. But I want to give you a feel for the book.

I want to just sort of see the whole book. Hold it up this way, and then turn it that way, and let God's light shine on it from one angle and another angle, and so on, so that we can get the sense of the book. My purpose for calling attention to the general observation is to home in on what I believe is the great message, the single message, the theme.

If you can leave this morning and get a sense of what God wants to do through the book of Jonah, then I'll feel like the Lord has accomplished at least the purpose I think is on my heart for this introduction lesson. For those that like logical connection, I'm going to give three general observations about the book as a whole. And then I'll discuss each one, and Lord willing, we'll see the Lord together.

The first observation is this. The theme of the book of Jonah revolves around a crisis that was, I wouldn't say raging, but it was very, very much alive in the prophet's heart. There was something going on in Jonah's heart.

Now let me talk about that a little bit and put it in perspective with the other prophets. God made a promise one time, and Amos spells it out. Amos the prophet.

In Amos chapter 3, verse 7, we have these words, "...surely the Lord God does nothing unless he reveals his secret counsels to his servants, the prophets." In other words, God said, He's not going to do anything without first telling the prophets. So every time God ever did anything, He told the prophets, and then the prophets told the people. They represented God before the people.

In every case, a crisis would arise, and God would address the crisis, and say, I'm planning to do something about that. And so He'd tell the prophet, and the prophet would tell the people. There has to be a crisis.

If you want to understand the prophets, find the crisis. And if you find the crisis, you'll understand the message of that particular prophet. There's always a crisis, and God addresses the crisis, and then He does something about it.

Over and over again, you'll see the same thing. That's why most of the prophets begin with some historical reference. For example, Isaiah chapter 1, verse 1, "...the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem, which he saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." If you're going to understand Isaiah, you better understand the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

That's why He told you that. He's not just giving information. He's not trying to make you smart about Bible history.

He's saying, something's going on, I've got to tell my prophet, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah. Study those days. That's why He gave you kings, and that's why He gave you chronicles, and that's what He's inviting you to do when He gives you that historical reference.

And so we study the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and we see Babylon coming on the scene, and the invasion that was going to come, and then we come to Isaiah, and it begins to make sense. We've learned what the crisis was. Same thing was true in Ezekiel, chapter 1. You think he's just throwing out all these facts for nothing? Verse 1, it came about in the 30th year, on the 5th day of the 4th month, while I was by the river Chabar among the exiles.

The heavens were opened. I saw visions of God on the 5th day of the month, in the 5th year of King Jehoiachin's reign. The word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chabar.

Why is he telling you all that? There's a crisis. Find the crisis, and the book will explode. That's the point of all of this.

There's always a crisis. Either the Assyrians are attacking, or the Babylonians are threatening, or the Edomites are coming, or the Philistines are there, or the Persians, or the Assyrians, or something like that. Find the crisis, understand the prophet.

Now, there are two prophets that among all the prophets, major and minor, are unique among the prophets. One is the prophet Habakkuk. He's different.

And one is the prophet Jonah. He's different. So different is Jonah, people wonder why he's even called a prophet.

Why is his book in the prophets? It reads like a history. It should be somewhere near Ezra and Nehemiah. It looks like a testimony, or Esther, or something like that.

It doesn't read like a prophecy. We know he's a prophet because the first time he's mentioned in the Bible, in 2 Kings 14, he's called a prophet. So we know he's a prophet.

And in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus talked about the sign of the prophet Jonah. The book of Jonah doesn't call him a prophet. The only hint we get is the word of the Lord came to him, so we get the idea he's a prophet.

He only made two prophecies in the book. One came to pass, one didn't. The one that didn't come to pass was, in 40 days, Nineveh was overthrown.

So much for that prophecy. The other one was, throw me overboard and the storm will stop. That one came to pass.

Jonah was a prophet, not because of what he said. You say, well, his book's a history. Yeah, and that history is a prophecy.

The whole history's a prophecy. His whole testimony is a prophecy of the Lord Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection, as you know. And so he's a prophet as much as Isaiah is a prophet in that sense.

Jonah was a prophet. Don't be fooled by where his book appears in your Bible. You might get the idea he's a late prophet because his book appears pretty far down the road.

No, he's an early prophet. Very early, according to 2 Kings. He's the first prophet that ever wrote a book.

You got the book of Jonah, that's the first prophet that ever wrote a book. There's a good chance he was contemporary with Elisha. That's how far back he goes in the days of Jeroboam II.

We know he was a contemporary with Hosea, who prophesied to the ten tribes up in the north. But Jonah's uniqueness is not in the fact that he doesn't look like a prophet except that his whole life, his experience, was prophetic. But he's unique, and Habakkuk is unique because of the crisis.

No crisis, no prophecy. You've got to find the crisis. God was about to act.

God was about to do something. He said, I can't act. I never will act until I tell a prophet.

I've got to tell somebody. You look at Jonah and say, what's the crisis? It doesn't say, the word of the Lord came to Jonah in the days of this king and that king. It doesn't say that because the crisis is not out there.

The crisis is not political. The crisis doesn't have to do with Assyria or Babylon or the Philistines or Egypt or some political thing out there in the sense of Isaiah's prophecy or Jeremiah's or Zachariah's. We're at a loss to find the crisis if we look out there.

What the prophet Habakkuk and the prophet Jonah have in common is this. There's a crisis, all right. There's got to be a crisis.

But it's in their heart. It's a personal crisis going on in the heart of Habakkuk. There's a personal crisis going on in the heart of Jonah.

The message from God, from heaven in the book of Jonah is not addressed to Judah at all. Go tell Judah. He doesn't say that.

Go tell Israel. He doesn't say that. He's not warning about some sin like he does in some prophets.

He's not calling them to turn away from idolatry as he does in some prophets. He's not warning them not to join an unholy allegiance with some heathen nation. There's a different kind of crisis.

The emergency, the problem, the crisis, the spiritual struggle that was going on is in the heart of Jonah. That's my first observation. And I'll tell you, brothers and sisters in Christ, if we can't identify that crisis, we will not understand the book of Jonah.

We'll be able to tell the story, and we'll be able to get all the facts, and we'll know about the fish and all of that. But if you don't grab the problem, if you can't see the heart crisis, then we will not get the revelation of Christ. So what's the crisis? Well, there's a whole group of commentators that agree, and they say, of course, there's a group of commentators that don't agree.

Isn't it amazing how much light God's Word sheds on the commentaries? A majority of the commentaries take the position that Jonah's heart problem was how he felt about the heathen. Bigotry. Prejudice.

In other words, Jonah was a full-blooded Jew. Even the Pharisees in Jesus' day, in John chapter 7, when they were mocking the Lord Jesus, they said, search the Scriptures. Does a prophet come out of Galilee? Ha, ha, ha.

Well, they should have searched the Scriptures because Jonah was from Galilee. There was a prophet that came out of Galilee. But some think that was his problem, this Jewish exclusivism.

Now, glance, if you would, at chapter 1, verse 1. Don't read this la, la, la. The word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come before me. That was a non-Jewish commission.

Never before Jonah, never after Jonah, was any prophet ever called to go to a heathen land with a message. He's the only one in the Word of God that was ever called to do that. I'm not saying God never reached out to the heathen.

Certainly He did. Through Moses, He reached out to Egypt, and through the ark of God, He reached out to the Philistines, and through Elisha, He reached out to the Syrians, and through Daniel to Babylon and Persia, and so on. He certainly reached out to the heathen.

But this is the only time a prophet was ever called, I want you to go and bring this message to that foreign people. Some think that was his heart problem, how he felt about the heathen. He had strong national feelings.

He was a patriot. He was a Jew. He was not a Gentile.

And they try to explain that that's the reason he grudged mercy on Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Remember what Assyria was. Isaiah said, from their point of view, they existed only to cut off nations.

As a whole purpose, from their point of view, of their existence. And Nahum addresses Assyria, Nineveh, as well as Jonah. Nahum calls it the bloody city, the devastators.

They were a cruel people. They were a violent people. They were terrorists.

They left these terrible things behind in the song that Carol wrote. She had some reference to the heads. They used to take the heads of their victims and line up for a long ways.

Before you came into the city, you would see the heads on the poles of all these people. And that was their calling card. And say, you better get out of our way, you better do what we want.

And they had their guns pointed at Israel. And now God says to Jonah, I want you to go to Nineveh. Perhaps Jonah thought that God's tenderness to Nineveh would be the destruction of his people.

In fact, there are some that explain his flight exactly that way, as a Jewish sacrifice. I'm willing to sacrifice myself for my people. If they repent, we're dead.

It's our ruin. And that's how Jonah felt. And so, in many minds, he was just a zealot, a hero for Israel.

You can see where they get that. Look at verse 3 of chapter 1. Remember when he was given his commission, he fled the presence of the Lord. He wants nothing to do with going to Nineveh.

And then in chapter 3, verse 4, when he finally does go, his only message, yet 40 days in Nineveh will be overthrown. And then, when God didn't judge them, look in chapter 4, verse 1. It displeased Jonah. And he's angry.

You know, on our t-shirts, we have God's missionary heart. And you know that God is reaching out somehow to the heathen in this book. It's an amazing book, because it's probably, Acts maybe might be an exception, or the fully developed form, it's probably one of the most missionary books in the Bible.

This is a missionary book. And wouldn't you think that a missionary book might be about a man that had a missionary heart? It's a missionary. Jonah, go to the heathen.

He didn't say turn or burn, he just said burn. I have never seen a more non-missionary heart than Jonah. It's not only non-missionary, it's anti-missionary.

He wants them to go to hell. He not only doesn't want them saved, he wants them judged. God said, now here's a missionary book for you.

In a sense, we're studying missions this weekend. And you look at a book like this, you say, here's a man with a non-missionary heart and an anti-missionary heart. I love to read Christian biographies, and among them I love to read missionary Christian biographies.

But when I read about David Brainerd, or Adoniram Judson, or Hudson Taylor, or somebody like that, I don't see somebody fleeing from the presence of the Lord, who's wanting the mission field to be cursed. When you read these wonderful stories about Dr. Olson, you see his vision for Bangladesh. When you read about Patton, you see that he loved the sinners in the South Sea Islands.

They prayed, they fasted, they sacrificed, they gave, because they loved the sinners and they wanted them to come to the Lord. But Jonah seems the opposite of that. And when God does show mercy, he's sad, he's angry, he pouts, he's depressed, he wants to die.

God had mercy on the sinner. That is certainly a problem. But I'm suggesting to you that that is not the crisis.

How I feel about the heathen. So you can come to this book and say, well, that's what God's going to accomplish. We don't have a burden for souls, and maybe this weekend God will give us a burden for souls, and we'll change our attitude about the heathen.

Well, maybe He will, but that's not the crisis of the book. No question He had a problem about how He felt about those He was commissioned to reach. But the crisis is deeper than that.

There are those that say, well, his crisis is not so much his bigotry and how he felt about the heathen, but he had a problem in his theology. He had an incomplete vision of the Lord, and that's not hard to prove either. Chapter 1, verse 3, Jonah rose up from Parshish to flee from the presence of the Lord.

Can any prophet be that dumb? Think about it. To flee from the presence of the Lord. Is he thinking about his omnipresence? Doesn't he, as a prophet of God, and he had a successful ministry up there in the north? The tribes up there, he gave a prophecy the Bible spelled out that was fulfilled.

Did he think he could run from God's presence? Well, some say that's not what that means. You know, a prophet was one who ministered in the presence of the Lord, and to run from His presence means, I quit

my job. And that he quit being a prophet.

And he felt like God wouldn't speak if he was out of the Holy Land. And so let's get out of the Holy Land, out of earshot, so God won't speak to us. Well, that certainly is an incomplete view of the Lord.

But even if he thought he couldn't escape from God's omnipresence, look at chapter 4. He had a poor vision of the Lord. Chapter 4, verses 1 and 2. If greatly displeased Jonah, he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, Please, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this, I fled to Tarshish.

I knew that Thou art a gracious and a compassionate God, slow to anger, abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. His view of God was that God was soft on sin. That God was so compassionate that He became capricious.

That He was mutable. That He was changing. That He didn't follow through on His threats.

That God threatened to do one thing, but then when it came right down to it, why He loved them so much, He couldn't really judge them. God was too merciful, Jonah thought, to judge sin. There are many who think that was the reason he fled from God.

Sort of a spiritual twist. That he was really defending God. If God threatens this and He doesn't do it, that makes me look bad, because I'm His messenger.

It also makes him look bad, because he's changing and the heathen will think that God changes. So I'll flee from God to protect His honor. I'll run from the Lord for His sake.

Some think that was His reason. Well, I don't know if we're off on our view concerning His omni-attributes or if we doubt His integrity as Jonah did, but I'll promise you this, we'll always have an incomplete view of God. No matter how far we come, we're going to have an incomplete view of God.

You can know His fullness, but you can't know Him fully. And the reason that's so is because you're finite and He's infinite. He's the infinite God.

I have no doubt that Jonah had a faulty theology. He believed some strange things. He believed there was inconsistency with God.

He believed he could slow down, forestall God's purposes by what he did. He thought he could escape God's presence. But I don't think that was the crisis.

You're not going to understand Jonah. You cannot see the revelation of God unless you find the crisis. Because God said, I see the crisis, I'm going to do something.

And God wants to do something. But it's not change the way He feels about the heathen. That's not the crisis.

And he doesn't even want to change his theology. It's amazing that he had these strange views about God. And God never tried to correct them in this book.

Not one time did God try to justify Himself. Say, no, no, no. You've got to understand, I've got a severe side and a tender side, and here's how it comes together.

He never did that in the book. He doesn't justify Himself. Brothers and sisters in Christ, if you're going to understand Jonah, you've got to find the crisis.

And the crisis is not how I feel. And the crisis is not what I believe. The crisis is who I am.

Who I am. Who you are. I'm going to tell you what I think the crisis was.

And then God gracing us, we're going to take the rest of the weekend to show how God spoke to that crisis. And how God met that crisis. The key, as I suggested, is in the New Testament.

Listen as I read these verses. 1 Matthew chapter 11. No, chapter 12.

Verse 39 to 41. He answered and said to them, An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign, and yet no sign will be given unto it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a sea monster, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And behold, something greater than Jonah is here. Jesus said in Matthew 12 that Jonah was a sign.

The sign of Jonah. Listen as I read Luke 11, verse 29. The crowds were increasing.

He began to say, This generation is a wicked generation. It seeks for a sign, yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be in his generation.

And I believe the key from the lips of the Word of the Lord Jesus are these words. Jonah became a sign to Nineveh. Jonah became a sign.

It's not how he felt. It's not what he believed. It's what he became.

It's what he was. It's a deep crisis. It has to do with being.

It has to do with who you are. Jonah became a sign. When he was first sent to Nineveh, he was a prophet, but he wasn't a sign.

If he had obeyed God the first time, he wasn't a sign. They would not have repented. They would not have.

That's not the issue. The issue is not obedience and going where God sends you. That's not the issue.

It's deeper than that. There's something going on in his heart. And here's a man who's a servant, who's a prophet, but he's not a sign.

And God said, that's a crisis, and I've got to deal with it. That's the message of Jonah. How God turned this prophet into a sign.

Now, I'm not going to tell you what the sign is just yet. We're going to get into that. But that's what God wants to accomplish this weekend.

Say, I'm a servant of the Lord. Are you a sign? I'm a prophet of the Lord. I'm a preacher.

I'm a teacher. I'm an elder. Are you a sign? Because that's the crisis.

And God wants to turn us into a sign. May God help us understand Jonah. How does God transform us into a sign? That's what this book is all about.

When we come to chapter 3, we'll spell it all out exactly. What does it mean? That's the whole thing of being a sign. But brothers and sisters, you'd have to be blind not to know it.

There are thousands of missionaries out on the field today that have never become a sign. There are thousands of elders and pastors in the churches, shepherding the church of God. And they don't have a clue what it means to be a sign.

Christians living an everyday life, serving the Lord, giving and praying and sharing and testifying and teaching. They're not a sign. That's the crisis.

I don't have any doubt He wants to change how we feel about the evening. And probably wants to turn our theology around, too. But that's not the issue.

That's not the issue. Not how you feel. That's a symptom.

What you believe, that's not the issue. The issue is what you are. Oh, may God help us.

That's the first observation in the book. It deals with a heart crisis. Second observation.

You can't read the book of Jonah and not know that this is a book of miracles. Every place you look in Jonah, miracles, miracles, miracles. The power of God is all through this book.

The sovereignty of God is all through this book. Now, the book mentions three kinds of miracles. Physical miracles.

Miracles on nature are all through this book. Glance, if you would, at chapter 1, verse 4. The Lord hurled a great wind on the sea. There was a great storm on the sea.

I love that. The Lord hurled a great wind on the sea. He not only initiated the storm, but according to verse 11, the sea was becoming increasingly stormy.

He's controlling it. Verse 13, and it became even stormier. He's controlling it.

And then verse 15, they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. There's a miracle of God. Who initiates the storm? Who controls the storm? Who says when the storm ends? That's the Lord, the Almighty.

I think when the average person thinks about Jonah, almost immediately they think about the fish. You can't hardly say Jonah without thinking the fish. He's swallowed by the fish.

In fact, that's probably the only thing some people see in the whole book. They come with a tape measure to measure the size of the fish's mouth. You're going to understand Jonah.

Bring your tape measure, but prepare to put it around the heart of God, not the fish's mouth. Some people say, well, there's no fish that big, whether it's a shark or whether it's a whale or sea monster or whatever. There's no such thing as hard or easy when you're talking miracles.

It's Jonah in the fish, not God. God didn't get swallowed by any fish in this book. Only two times the fish is mentioned in the whole book.

God appointed a fish, and God commanded the fish to vomit him. That's it. That's all you know about the fish in this book.

But it's a mighty miracle. God speaks to a storm. God speaks to a fish.

I don't have any doubt God could have preserved Jonah's life underwater without a fish for three days and three nights if He wanted to. This is a book on the mighty miracles of God. God speaks to a storm.

God speaks to a fish. And then in verse 6 of chapter 4, He talks to a plant. This is the power of God.

The Lord appointed a plant, and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head. Forget for now the many speculations. What kind of a plant? Was it a gourd or was it a vine or was it a cucumber or a mushroom or whatever you think it might be? It's a divine plant that God raised up to give a supernatural shade.

It had a supernatural existence and a supernatural growth. It's the power of God. Then chapter 4, verse 7, He talks to a worm.

And then in 4, 8, a scorching east wind. Same verse, He talks to the rays of the sun to become hot upon Jonah. In chapter 1, verse 7, He supernaturally guided the lot when those heathens were casting the lot.

This is the power of God. You can't read Jonah and not see miracles. God talks to the storm.

And He talks to a fish and He talks to a plant and He talks to a worm and He talks to the east wind. And He talks to the sun and He guides it all. It's the power of God.

All through the book. Those miracles are great, but they're not the greatest in this book. You see, a greater miracle is the moral miracle that took place.

Chapter 3, verses 5-10. The most amazing thing. This is unparalleled in Bible and in human history.

A whole city coming to the Lord. Look at chapter 4, verse 11, please. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh? The great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right hand and their left hand as well as many animals.

There are a couple of ways to look at that 120,000, as you know. They don't know their right from their left. Some think that's the total population of Nineveh.

120,000. They're morally blind. They're so stupid they don't know their right from their left.

Well, that's one possibility, but another is that it refers to infants. That it refers to babies. Those who have not reached an accountable age, who are so young that they don't even know the right hand from the left hand yet.

And if that's the case, and it looks like it is, then they judge the entire population. That's about one-fifth. So it's that times five.

There's more than 600,000 people in Nineveh. Throughout this weekend, I'll just be saying more than half a million. That's easier than remembering all these numbers.

But do you get the power of that? A half a million people turn to the Lord in one day when one stranger comes in with one sentence and leaves. And a half a million people turn to the Lord. That's better than Pentecost.

And even the days following Pentecost. I mean, you had 3,000 and 5,000 and then about 10,000. This is a half a million people.

There's never been a miracle like that before or since. And you're not going to see a pouring out of God's Spirit like that until the Great Tribulation, which I won't get into now. When we come to the text, I'll show you why God worked that mighty miracle.

But for now, just recognize what a miracle it was. Imagine if Bridgeville turned to the Lord in one day. The whole city, from the homeless person in the street right up to the mayor's office.

Everybody turned to the Lord, even the animals in sackcloth and acid. You'd say, what a miracle that was. Well, that's what you have here.

The fact that Nineveh, the whole city, repented in such dim light is one of the greatest moral miracles of all time. We just sort of say, oh, we're going to study Jonah. Do you know what's in this book? This is the greatest miracle that has ever happened.

It's a book of miracles. Physical miracles. God talking to the storm and God talking to a fish and talking to a plant and talking to a worm in the east wind.

It's full of miracles. And in this whole city, a heathen city, a wicked city, they were enemies of God. They were idolaters and blasphemers, violent, bloodthirsty people.

One day they turned to the Lord. Brothers and sisters in Christ, that's not the greatest miracle in this book. That's a great miracle.

No doubt about it. But you're going to miss the message of Jonah if you think that's the great miracle. If you come to this book and say the great miracle is the fish, that's not the great miracle.

The great miracle is a half a million people turning to Christ in one day. Great miracle indeed. That's not the miracle of this book.

That's not the crisis of this book. That's not why God spoke. There's another miracle in this book which I consider to be the heart of the book and the greatest miracle of all.

And that's the miracle when God made Jonah a sign. There would have been no conversion if God had not done that. This is a book about God dealing with a man.

A man who had a deep spiritual crisis in his heart. He didn't even know what it was. Sure he had bad feelings about people.

Sure he had terrible theology. God bypassed all of that and said there's another problem and it has to do with who you are. And I am going to come down.

There's a crisis. I'm going to speak and I'm going to tell my prophet. And God did a work in Jonah and transformed him into a sign and told him to write his testimony.

When God can take a non-missionary heart and an anti-missionary heart and transform it into a missionary heart like God's heart. I tell you there is a miracle of miracles. And by the grace of the Lord, that's what he did and that's what he wants to do this weekend.

Let me give you a little outline for the book. God wants to make a sign out of a man. I'm going to give you an outline but it's going to be all blank.

In order to do this, God had to change this man. In chapter 1, amazing, he made that change. Put that in your notes.

That change. In chapter 2, he made that change. You getting it? In chapter 3, he made that change.

In chapter 4, he made that change. The reason I want you to know that is because every time God makes a sign, he makes that change first. They're in order.

He has to do that first. And when we've learned that, he says, I'm not done yet. I've got to do this.

And he does it. And then he does this and he does that. That's what this book is all about.

And so we've got four lessons. I like to talk about that change, that change, that change, and that change. May God help us.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the main enemy of missions is not the devil. The main enemy of missions is not the unsundered pocketbook. The main enemy of missions is not false doctrine.

The main enemy of missions is not ignorance. The main enemy of missions is not the love of this world and materialism. The main enemy of missions is that there are Christians who are not signs.

That's the main enemy of missions, who I am, who you are. And the greatest miracle in this book is the miracle when God transformed Jonah into a sign. Let me give the final observation and we'll wrap up the introduction lesson.

If you're going to understand Jonah, you need to see the crisis. It's a heart crisis. If you're going to understand Jonah, you can't bypass all these miracles.

God needs to do a miracle, and that miracle is to transform Jonah into a sign. One other observation about the book as a whole. No one who has studied under the guidance of the Holy Spirit can study Jonah without realizing and seeing that from start to finish, this is a book about the undeserved mercy.

Everyone who studies this book sees the great mercy of God in this book. You say, chapter 4, verse 2, yes, great book on mercy. Mercy on the Ninevites.

God had mercy on the Ninevites. They're wicked, they're bloodthirsty, and God saved them. Then you look at verse 11 of chapter 4 and you say, oh, look at the mercy of God on little babies.

Innocent little children. God has mercy. Now, everyone look up here.

Don't peek at your Bible now. This is a test. Anyone familiar with the last word in the book of Jonah? Last word.

The last word in the book of Jonah is animals. What a picture of the mercy of the Lord. God didn't want to judge because He didn't want to destroy animals.

God has regard for dogs and cats and cows and sheep and gerbils and pets and all kinds of things. But as I have suggested all through, the great revelation of the mercy of God is not His mercy on Ninevites. And it's not His mercy on babies.

And it's not His mercy on animals. You know where we are? The great revelation of the mercy of God in this book is His mercy on the prophet Jonah. You're not going to understand the book if you don't see his heart crisis.

You're not going to understand the book if you don't understand the miracle that God did when He addressed that heart crisis. You're not going to understand the book if you don't see the great miracle of God as God patiently takes this non-missionary heart, this anti-missionary heart, and works this change, this change, this change, and this change in order to give Him a heart like God's. God has a missionary heart.

That's the great mercy of God. Before God ever shows mercy on the heathen, He has to show mercy on the missionary. This, my friends, is one of the ways of God.

If God wants to reach those around me, He doesn't first deal with them. He deals with me. If God wants to reach those around you, He doesn't first deal with those around you.

He deals with you. And corporately, if God wants to deal with a neighborhood, He doesn't first deal with the neighborhood. He deals with that corporate body in the neighborhood to turn them into a sign.

Now, I know I said one more thing will be done. But, as Paul said in Philippians, finally, my brothers, finally, my brothers, finally. He said it three times.

So, I'm only on my second finally. I'm going to ask you to turn in your Bibles, please, and we'll close with this. It's a missionary psalm, and it's Psalm 67.

If you'll turn to Psalm 67. You may want to do what I did in my Bible. I wrote Psalm 67 right in the front of the book of Jonah.

This is the psalm. It's a Jonah psalm. Psalm 67, verses 1 and 2. Look how the psalm begins.

God be gracious to us and bless us. I like King James in this particular case. God have mercy on us and bless us.

Cause His face to shine upon us. Selah. Then look at verse 2. That your way may be known on all the earth.

Your salvation among all nations. God have mercy on us and bless us. That your way might be known on all the earth.

And your salvation to all nations. Look how the psalm ends. Verse 6. The earth has yielded its produce.

God, our God, blesses us. God blesses us that all the ends of the earth may fear Him. God has mercy on us.

It's redemptive mercy. It's not for us, it's for them. God blesses us that they might know.

God deals with Jonah for none of us. But you're not going to understand Jonah unless you see that. Now if I were to walk up to you and I just say, well, good to see you Bill.

The Lord bless you. How would you feel about that? What if I came up and said, Bill, the Lord have mercy on you and bless you. You see the difference? This doesn't start with the Lord bless you.

It's God have mercy on you and bless you. We don't deserve the blessing of God. When we do some missionary thing, when we pray or give or write or go, we're not doing God a favor.

We're not doing the heathen a favor. We need to press and see God's heart in all of this. God wants to turn us into a sign.

God has a missionary heart. Yes, He wants to reach out there, but He starts with Jonah. The crisis of the book is the crisis in his heart.

He's a prophet. He's a servant. He loves the Lord.

He's confused about a few things, but he's open. He loves the Lord. But he's not a sign.

God says, I've got to address that. I've got to deal with that. He's got to become a sign.

That's the crisis. How does He deal with it? A miracle. There's no other way.

He's got to transform. And I'm suggesting these four stages of His transformation. Why does He do it? His great, unbounded mercy.

We don't deserve it. God blesses us. He has mercy on us, blesses us, causes His face to shine upon us, that His salvation might be known in all the earth.

God help us as we go through this marvelous book. And may God do for us what He did for His servant Jonah. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for this wonderful book, for giving us the key in the New Testament. We pray as we study together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that You would indeed repeat Your work and transform us into signs, cause Your face to shine upon us, that Your salvation might be known in all the earth. We know this will affect how we think about the heathen.

We know this will affect our theology. But do the deeper work. Change who we are.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/11/SID11409.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ed-miller/jonah-1-introduction/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**