

# Jonah: Missionary God

## Jonah chapter 3

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Our reading is Jonah chapter 3.

Here in chapter 3 of Jonah we find “the most fruitful mission field in the world”. I have heard at least one preacher refer to witnessing in our hometown as the “most difficult mission field in the world”. Let us think about “the most fruitful mission field”.

But let’s review a little bit first.

1. Chapter 1 is about the God of the nations.

God commanded his prophet Jonah to preach against that foreign city of Nineveh. God’s light was to shine through Jonah to that wicked city.

Remember the chorus, This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine ... and ... let it shine all over this world, everywhere ... except ... maybe ... in Nineveh ....

Jonah had already decided: My little light ain’t gona shine in Nineveh!

And he ran away in the opposite direction on a ship!

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God had a plan for Jonah's further training in cross cultural preaching, by giving an audience on board that ship from other nations and other gods. Chapter one verse 8 is full of their questions, "Tell us who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you? They were not Israelites like he was.

God said: Well how about shinin' your little light on the tossing decks of a sinking ship. And when the sermon is over the preacher gets tossed into the sea?

Jonah was heaved overboard after telling them about the God who made the land and the sea, and the storm calmed down, and ... the sailors worshipped Jehovah and made vows to him.

2. Chapter 2 is about the God of Salvation.

It is easy to forget our salvation. It is easy to forget what God has done for us.

Jonah is reminded in that terrible experience in the belly of the fish what it is like to be lost and then saved. It reminded him of how lost, lost people are, and how good it is to be saved.

Some of us were saved when quite young, I accepted Christ at six years of age. I was not pulled out of the gutter.

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Destruction did not stare me in the face when I was saved. But maybe that was true with you. You keenly feel what it is like to be saved. When it comes to sin you got in at the deep end. To you it is very graphic, as is the story of Jonah and the fish.

One of the reasons I believe God allows us as Christians to go through very difficult experiences is in order to remind us of what it is like to be lost and then saved. We cry out to the Lord in our troubles and the Lord saves us out of them. It parallels our being saved experience and reminds us of how badly the unsaved need to be saved!

3. Now chapter 3 is the story of how a whole city repented at the preaching of Jonah. God's light, finally, in this third chapter, comes to Nineveh through Jonah.

Here in this chapter we find the God of whole people groups. This is what I want to emphasize today.

The most fruitful mission field in the world is when a whole people, a whole nation, a whole city, town or whole language group turns to the Lord.

In Nineveh everyone repented from the king on down to the least! They believed God, as did Abraham believe God, as do we, when we turn to the Lord for Salvation.

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But what is a people group? In our mission we have wrestled with these things and have come up with a definition. This is one way to explain it:

A people group is a significantly large grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another, because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, or combinations of these.

In Revelation chapter 5 and verse 9 the writer refers to what Jesus did for us in our people groups and says, "... you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every kindred, tongue (or language), people and nation."

Let's just think about some examples of this from history:

John the Baptist's ministry: Think of the huge crowds from Jerusalem and Judea that poured down to the Jordan river to hear John, repent of their sins and be baptized by him.

Enormous crowds followed Jesus in his ministry. Remember how a people movement took place in that Samaritan city where Jesus met the woman at the well, according to John chapter 4. Later Phillip, the evangelist followed that up and many turned to the Lord in Samaria.

1000's turned to the Lord at Pentecost after Jesus' death and resurrection, at the preaching of the apostles.

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On a smaller scale, whole households turned to the Lord. An example is the household of Cornelius, the centurion in Caesarea, to whom Peter was sent to preach, and that of the jailer in Philippi who turned to the Lord with all his family.

If my memory of history serves me right, Armenia, that land in eastern Turkey, where Mt. Ararat is located, became the first Christian kingdom in history. It does not necessarily mean that each person in Armenia, or for that matter in each family or people group, that turns to Christ is genuinely converted. But as a people they are receptive to the gospel and want to be disciple by dozens, hundreds or even thousands of people.

Years ago missionaries came to a huge island, located near the Philippines. They preached and after a time some of the village leaders came to them and said that as a village they all wanted to become Christians. The missionaries were not prepared for this! In America they were used to people professing Christ one by one, but not as a whole village or tribe? How could that be? How could all these people understand what it was to be a Christian? So, sadly they sent them away.

It was not long before another village came to the missionaries and said they wanted to become Christians. Again they were sent away. You see the missionaries who came from a more individualistic society were beginning to

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wrestle with how decisions were made in a society where the whole village, or tribe or people group decided to do something together.

The missionaries were used to the evangelistic campaign where individuals went forward.

After about twenty years of little fruit it began to dawn on the missionaries that they should accept the desire of these villages to turn to the Lord as a whole village and begin the work of Christian discipleship immediately. Then they began to see a great harvest.

Teams in south Asia have seen something like this in a couple of towns one of them near a metropolis of the subcontinent. This is the account I heard. One of the villagers happened to get a Bible. He began to read it and shared it with others. They began to hold village meetings where they gathered in the center of the town and read from the Bible. Each person would read a paragraph, and would be allowed to comment on it if they wished. They would pass the Bible all around the circle reading through it day after day.

But they had many unanswered questions about the Bible so we sent a team to work with that village that had turned to the Lord.

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Do you remember how many people were baptized on Pentecost as recorded in Acts chapter 2? There were 3000, and some days later? Another 5000. But isn't it amazing that 6000 people of a tribe, who live in southeast Asia, were baptized in a single day in 1978?

Recently we have heard that up to 9000 of another people group have turned to the Lord in one of the countries of Africa.

What about the Spanish speaking world? Isn't it good to have missionaries in areas where people are quite receptive to the Gospel? They are reaping a harvest. Some of (our) missionaries are translating the Scriptures for whole people groups. Let's keep our missionary lights shining there. But shouldn't we also (begin to) think about lighting another candle somewhere in the darkness of what is called the 10/40 Window? What about those people groups of that area that number into the millions of people in each people group?

Let's think about the 10/40 Window. This is the area where 97% of the unreached people groups of the world live.

What about adopting a people group, like the Baluchis in south Pakistan and begin to pray for them as a people group with no church.

How? Research it. (OPERATION WORLD, prayer cards, The Adopt a People Group Clearing House) Pray for them.

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Discuss it. Visit the area. Plan. Give to it. Find workers. Send them.

(Let's also ask whether people in the countries where our missionaries have been working couldn't join us in this effort to reach a people group that is unreached in the 10/40 Window.)

What about missionaries that are finishing up in one area and could relocate to another? Should they just come home or go to another people and learn a new language and culture?

Get a copy of *Operation World* or *You Can Change the World* in order to learn and pray for these peoples.

4. Finally in chapter 4 of Jonah we read about the God of concern, who is concerned about people, and even cattle!

But what about all the things we already have to be concerned about back here, at home? There are very important and crying needs we have right here, and we must be about our father's business in those matters. But don't allow some of the material blessings we have to become more important than those people for whom God is concerned.

Jonah was more concerned about the plant that shaded him than for the people of Nineveh.

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God said to Jonah, “Should I not be concerned for that great city of Nineveh?”

Jesus said, I have come into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. When Jesus saw the crowds he was moved with compassion for they were as sheep without a shepherd (Matt 9:35-38).

We can go away this morning with a bit more knowledge in our heads about missions, but remember what Paul said about knowledge. It puffs up. Love, however, builds up. The Spirit of God has poured the love of God into our hearts. We can respond in love to the peoples who have don't have that Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who Himself said He was the light of the world.

But you say, “How can I respond to this challenge right now?”

Start by finding a tiny bit of information and by praying. On the Internet there is so much information about countries, peoples, cultures and religions. Look up a country and start praying!