

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

The Ultimate Solution

Jonah 1:4-16

Intro: Last time, we emphasized the veracity and historical reality of the story of Jonah from the words of Jesus Himself. But, being a historical figure, at what point in Israel's history did Jonah live? It seems that the story of Jonah took place somewhere around 790 B.C. At this time, Assyria had lost some of her former glory and had not yet rebounded to her future period of even greater power when the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel would be carried off into captivity by them. Still, Elijah and Elisha were no longer on the scene in Israel. Elijah was carried off in a chariot of fire straight into heaven and Elisha has died a natural death.

But Jonah was a proven prophet and he was still present. The northern kingdom of Israel had enjoyed a period of prosperity and expansion under the reign of King Jeroboam II. The national borders had been extended north to the limit that was once attained under King Solomon many years before and all of this had been predicted, prophesied by Jonah ([II Kings 14:25](#)). Now the God of Israel, Jehovah, had a new mission for Jonah, a unique mission that Jonah would never had anticipated and one that he was not excited about joining up for. Despite Jonah's reticence to accept and obey God's commission, God has a way of seeing His purposes accomplished one way or another.

In the first 3 verses of [ch1](#) we saw some great principles related to God's sovereignty and man's response to it. We discussed the impossibility of running from God's presence and the consequences that come from attempting to do so. 1st) the road we travel away from God is always downhill; 2nd) we never get to our desired destination; 3rd) we always pay our own fare. It was at this dreadful point that we left Jonah to stew in his rebellion. But now it's God's turn to intervene into the story and He does so in such a supernatural way that the lessons we find in the rest of ch1 are as great as those at the beginning. We'll learn that disobedience always involves others in our troubles and we'll see how God acts when His will is opposed.

Of course, this leads us to the issue of God's sovereignty again, but it

carries us a little farther in our understanding of it. 1st, we saw that God's sovereignty expresses itself in what we might call a natural spiritual order. This principle states that no path of disobedience is ever blessed by God. I don't know why rebellious Christians always assume that God is going to continue to bless them in their rebellion but they almost always do. Now we're going to also see that God will intervene in special ways to insure the accomplishment of His purposes. This special intervention occurs twice in ch1. 1st, in the way God dealt with Jonah's rebellion. 2nd, in the way God dealt with the sailors.

4 – There is no denying that Jonah had sinned. According to some “Christian” theologies, one's in which salvation depends more on man's obedience to God and less on God's elective purposes with man, this should have been the end of the matter. If Jonah sinned, God could just say, “Jonah, you've done it now. You've forfeited the right to be called My child. I am casting you off.” That response makes sense to a man-centered (works) theology. But that's not how God operates. God choose Jonah for a special task and He determined that the task will be accomplished. God took His selection of Jonah so seriously that He was willing to sink the very ship the disobedient prophet was sailing on, if necessary, rather than allow him to get on to his own destination.

There's no question that we are allowed to resist God or disobey Him. We all do it and we do it easily. But, when we disobey God, He doesn't rearrange the stars into a flashing sign that says, “Cease and desist!” No, He lets us go. At first He doesn't put any great obstacles in our way. If we decide to stop reading our Bibles, He doesn't send a special prophet to get us reading again. If we stop praying, He doesn't send trouble into our lives to make us turn to Him. Not initially! He just allows us to continue going downhill and to pay for our own foolish choices. But, if we persist in our disobedience, He'll turn the screws. He begins gently, just as we gently disobey. Eventually, He sends a tempest!

The ultimate result of this great storm was that by it, God accomplished His purposes with Jonah. He accomplished His purposes with the people of Nineveh. Ironically, He even accomplished His purposes with the unbelieving sailors, for, as we will see, the story suggests that they actually came to believe on Him.

5 – Here we see another great spiritual principle: the disobedience of one of God’s servants always involves others in peril, even innocent people. Because of Achan’s sin, all Israel was defeated at Ai and 36 Israelite warriors lost their life. For David’s sin in numbering the people, 70,000 died of pestilence. Here, because of Jonah’s sin, innocent sailors were on the verge of drowning. They knew how to sail a ship, but this storm was beyond their abilities and they were so afraid of it that they each “cried out to his god, and... threw the cargo...into the sea to lighten the load.”

These sailors were hard-working, courageous men who knew their business well. They had been in storms before. They knew what to do. They knew that in great storms the logical solution for saving the ship was to lighten it by throwing the cargo overboard, which they did. This was a clear sign of their desperation as this cargo was the sole reason for their journey in the first place. Still, the storm was so great it frightened them, even though they had done all they could to salvage the situation. When they could do nothing more, they called on their gods. We can’t blame the sailors for acting this way - this trouble only came upon them because of Jonah.

But, while this storm was raging, Jonah was asleep deep within the hold of the ship. How many of God’s people are asleep today? How many are impervious while the tempest rages? Note the similarities between Jonah and sleeping Christians today. Jonah slept in a place where he hoped no one would see him or bother him. “Sleeping” Christians like to hide out in the church. Jonah slept where he couldn’t be easily called on to help with the work that needed to be done. “Sleeping” Christians stay away from the Lord’s work. Jonah slept while there was a prayer meeting up on deck. “Sleeping” Christians are too busy for prayer meetings. Jonah had no idea of the problems around him. “Sleeping” Christians also don’t know what’s going on. Jonah slept while he was in great danger and while the lost needed him. “Sleeping” Christians snooze while the world needs their message!

The real problem is: “Sleeping” Christians are the first to protest that they’re not asleep! A “Sleeping” Christian can say, “I talk about Jesus. I walk with Him. I have a passion for Him. I rejoice in Him. I think about Him often.” That may be true but you can do all those things in your sleep. Talk (annoying), walk (dangerous), cry, laugh (creepy), think (dream). How can you know if you are a sleeping Christian or not? If you are steadfastly serving the Lord,

and are determined to continue to serve Him no matter what, then and only then can you claim to be wide awake. It's sad that so many who carry the name of Jesus never seem to carry it very far or for very long.

6-7 – While Jonah was down in the hold of the ship asleep, indifferent to the calling of God, he believed he was alone and safe, at least for the time being. But his slumber was rudely interrupted by the captain. This man was a pagan, like the sailors. He didn't know the true God. His ideas of religion were filled with superstitions. Still, he believed enough in the benefit of united prayer to want everyone on board to pray together. Since he didn't know Jonah or the god he worshipped, maybe he worshiped a god who could do something if the others failed. Clearly, he's upset that Jonah could sleep in such danger. Even a Christian is not allowed to ignore reality forever.

Meanwhile, up on deck, the sailors had concluded that this storm wasn't like any other storms they had experienced. They'd been able to handle other storms. But this storm was supernaturally ferocious. **V4** literally says the Lord ***hurled*** the tempest. The sailors concluded that the storm was a judgment against someone who'd done something horrible. They decided to cast lots to discover the culprit. It was at this point that Jonah appeared on deck. Nothing in life ever happens by chance. So when the lot was cast, it inevitably singled out Jonah.

People may think these things are determined by chance, be it luck or mathematical odds. But God tells us that He controls what happens. **Prov 16:33** says: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD". In other words: "man throws the dice; but its God who makes the spots come up" (Barnhouse).

8-11 – with the toss of the dice, Jonah became the man of the hour! These desperate sailors became very interested in knowing everything about him and they hit him with a flurry of questions. Note the irony. Jonah had run away from God and was in this difficult position because he wouldn't preach to pagans. But here he was, in spite of himself, about to do exactly that. It's even possible there were men from Nineveh among these sailors. God's about to show that His purposes will always be accomplished, even by one who is obstinately disobedient if He so wills it.

Oddly enough, in spite of his determination to disobey God and the breakdown of fellowship between himself and God resulting from it, Jonah still gives a very good testimony. Maybe he'd been preaching too long and couldn't shake the habit of it. Maybe he knew he was a terrible liar. He could've just given them an abridged version and let it go at that but No, he spilled all the beans! He gave them his background, saying he was a servant of the Creator and covenant-keeping God, Jehovah. Jonah was trying real hard to resign his commission but he couldn't change his heart – it remained that of a true prophet and he pointed these sailors to the only true God – the Lord God Almighty!

Instead of being comforted by the knowledge of Jonah's God, the sailors were now exceedingly afraid (terrified)! They were now apparently more afraid of this revelation than they were of the storm itself? The reason they were so terrified was because they knew about Jonah's God! They had heard the stories about the Hebrew God who brought the plagues on Egypt; parted the Red Sea, provided for His people for 40 years in the wilderness, leveled the walls of Jericho, etc. The Hebrews' God was a great God and it was this God who was pursuing them because of Jonah!

Upon hearing this terrifying information, the sailors only had 2 questions for Jonah. 1) Why? This is a great question but it was actually a rebuke! "Did your God force you to run? Was He so harsh and unkind that you had no other alternative but to run? Were you tired of your God? Is He no longer worthy of your trust and obedience? Had you completed all the duty you owed Him? Had His protection and provision been exhausted? Have you found a better friend; a better portion, a better job? What good reason can you produce for running from such a great God?"

If Jonah had been able to think clearly along these lines, he would've quickly recognized that nothing God had done or could ever do deserved his disobedience. If he had thought this way he might have repented. But Jonah was like many of God's people when they sin. Instead of thinking clearly, he hardened his heart, kept his back turned to God, and plunged on into even greater alienation. The state of Jonah's heart is revealed in his answer to the 2nd question: "What shall we do...?" Note: it wasn't the sailor's idea to throw Jonah overboard. It was Jonah's. They said, "Tell us what to do to get out of this; we'll do anything you say."

12-16 –What did Jonah say? Did he tell them to repent and turned to God? Did he offer to help row to shore? Did he suggest they turn around and go back to Joppa? That would've stopped the storm and given them a great tail wind! Jonah didn't say any of these things. His answer is a sad one. He was so determined to resist the Lord's will that he actually said, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea, then the sea will become calm for you. What Jonah really meant was, "I would rather die than do God's will." Whoa! Can a Christian become so hardened that they prefer death to what God wants them to do? Yes unfortunately, a Christian can become so hardened. This is the course of sin. What begins easily with just a step to the west instead of to the east soon accelerates into a maelstrom of self-destruction. King David knew this was possible and he wrote down a workable solution just for it in **Ps 139:23-24**.

Jonah, in his disobedience, is willing to let all of Nineveh perish; his message concerns impending judgment, and he fears God will suspended His judgment if Nineveh should repent. But the sailors, pagans like Nineveh, aren't willing that Jonah (just one man) should perish even though he's brought this great danger upon them. Jonah said he's to be thrown overboard. The sailors have every right to do it. But they don't want to see him die if it can be prevented. They do their best to save him, literally digging to return to the land." But, even pagans have their limits. Finally, when they realized they couldn't win against the waves, they asked Jehovah to hold them guiltless for Jonah's death and then threw the rebellious prophet overboard. Immediately, the storm ceased its raging.

What happens next is the true climax of **ch1 (v16)**. This means the sailors were converted through their experience with Jonah. Ironically, God was already accomplishing His purposes in spite of His prophet's stubborn rebellion. The fact that the sailors were saved is evident in nearly every word used. This is the 3rd time the sailors are said to have feared something or somebody. The 1st was the storm (**5**); 2nd was that Jonah's a Hebrew who worshiped Jehovah (**10**). Now, they feared (respected) the Lord exceedingly. That's a progression. They were worshiping Jehovah too. Before, when they were praying, they prayed to idols, false gods! Now, after Jonah's been given the heave-ho and the wind has stopped, we're told that they prayed to Jehovah, Jonah's God. How did they worship? They performed a sacrifice—the Jewish means of approaching Jehovah—and they made vows.

If they had made these vows before their deliverance, it could be disregarded as only a foxhole conversion. There aren't any atheists in foxholes. When you see the enemy advancing on your position, everybody starts praying and making promises. Most of the time, those promises are forgotten as soon as the danger has passed. That's not what happened here. They made their vows after they were delivered. Thus, it appears that they were truly converted and that they must have vowed to serve Jehovah all their days. How much did they really know about this Jehovah? They knew enough to put their faith and trust in Him and as they did, they would continue to learn more.

Interestingly, it's at this point that Jonah, the backslidden prophet running away from God, now becomes a true type of Jesus Christ. Jonah must die so that these sailors could live. Even though Jonah had offered to die, they were reluctant to throw him overboard, but they had to. Jonah couldn't kill himself; but he had to be killed. So, regardless of the circumstances, the sailors would effectively be guilty of murder when they tossed him into the sea. In the same way, Pilate would declare of Jesus, I am innocent of the blood of this just person ([Mt 27:24](#)) but he was still guilty because he had the power and responsibility to release Jesus but had Him crucified instead.

But with Jonah, the sailors were placing their faith in the true God and were consciously (or not) appropriating the substitutionary death of Jonah as payment for their own deliverance. Similarly, we're all personally guilty of putting Jesus to death since He was delivered up because of our offences ([Rom 4:25](#)) and died for our sins ([I Cor 15:3](#)). Yet, in an amazing transaction, when we truly believe and accept Christ's payment for our sin on the cross, as God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us we are then made the righteousness of God in Him ([II Cor 5:21](#)). These pagan sailors, though guilty of murder when they sent Jonah to certain death, they were still saved by God's grace as they trusted and obeyed His word.

Oh, the irony! Jonah was running from God because he didn't want God to save the heathen in Nineveh. But the first great event in this story is the conversion of the heathen sailors, who were just like the pagans of Nineveh. And Jonah wasn't even there to see it! This carries us farther into the lessons of God's sovereignty. What God's going to do, He will do. If He's determined to save a person, God will save them. If He's determined to

save another person, He will save them. But note: God can do this through the obedience of His children, where they share in the blessing. Or He can do it through His children's disobedience, and they'll miss out on the blessing. Either way, God blesses those whom He will bless. But one involves happiness for His people while the other involves misery. Which will it be for you? Will you resist Him? Will you refuse His Great Commission? Or will you obey Him?

Maybe you're not a Christian. If not, then learn from God's gracious dealings with the sailors. You haven't perished in your godless state yet because God, who made the sea around you and the dry land on which you walk, preserves you by His power and according to His good pleasure. Don't refuse Him. Turn to Him. Come to Him on the basis of the perfect sacrifice for sin made once by His own Son, Jesus Christ, and follow Him all of your days. 😊