

Jonah, The Relentless Love Of God

Learning Background Matters: Week 1

I am amazed at what I have been learning the several months about a book that I have studied and taught through more than once. New truths come alive in my mind because of the process of learning, growing, and changing. I am at a point that I can receive deeper things about myself that are revealed by the Spirit of the Living God. I can see deeper into God's amazing love for me, my family, and the people around me.....people I like and people that I don't like.

God's love is amazing and His love is relentless.

Elohim baffles me.

As a servant leader shepherd of the Most High God, one thing that I have learned through the years is that people do what they do for a reason.

Whether it is consciously or sub-consciously done, we do what we do for a reason. You can choose to disagree with me but I have learned this to be true.

The challenge is often assumption, pre-judging, prejudice, lack of desire, preconceived perspective, selfishness, and the list could go on. I just mention a few of them.

It does not mean that I know why someone does what they do but if I take the time to learn someone's background then I begin to see the person through a different lens.

Learning more about someone's background, history, and his/her setting helps to frame a person, a situation, and the responses in a better way.

Learning background matters on the most personal level as well as our study of the book of Jonah together.

Relentless love is when someone knows the worst about you and loves you in spite of it.

Romans 5:8 NKJV *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Jonah 1:1-3 NKJV *Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ² "Arise, go to **Nineveh**, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me." ³ But **Jonah** arose to flee to **Tarshish** from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.*

Let's get some background to set the stage for the next five lessons together.

Jonah, the prophet.....**Nineveh**, the largest city in the world at the time.....the **Assyrian Empire**, the most powerful nation.....**Tarshish**, an extreme destination point

The book of Jonah is viewed by some Christian scholars as fiction or a parable. Some would say parody or satire (**ahistorical**)

We will approach the book of Jonah as a written record of miraculous proportion (**history**)

Jesus refers to Jonah as an example not satire

Simply said, "If it is important to our Lord Jesus then it is important to me".

Matthew 12:38-42 NKJV (also see Luke 11:29-32)

³⁸ Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." ³⁹ But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. ⁴² The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.

Jonah lived in the northern kingdom in Israel, Zebulun of Galilee (show map)



Just a quick disclaimer: I am not going to sugar coat the reality of the historical record this morning so it may create conversations with your children after the service.

The Assyrians are an ethnic group with a long history that traces back to the ancient Near East. They are originally from the region known as Mesopotamia, which is located in present-day Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran. The Assyrians are particularly associated with the historical region of Assyria, which was a powerful empire in ancient times.

The capital of the empire was Nineveh, a city on the banks of the Tigris River. (show map)



Early eighth century history of the Assyrians and Nineveh can be learned through various archaeological discoveries including inscriptions, wall reliefs, and other artifacts.

Between 883-824 B.C.E. One famous Assyrian leader followed by the reign of his son was known for hanging his enemies on posts, flaying them, and lining city walls with their skins. He would burn his enemies or if they were fortunate enough, he would behead them. Those who lived would have noses, ears, eyes, arms, and other extremities removed. Dismemberment was common. Heads were hung from walls and impaled captives were lined up for display.

This was the kind of terror faced by enemies of the Assyrian Empire at the time of Jonah. While the later Persian Empire sought to keep conquered peoples in the fold through mercy and favor, the Assyrians sought to keep their empire together by way of the opposite extreme: terror. No wonder the prophet was fearful of carrying God's warning message—and conversely, no wonder God's threat of divine destruction.

Christopher Eames of the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology

The prophet Nahum describes Ninevah specifically as “the bloody city”. (Nahum 3:1)

During the 8th and 7th centuries the Assyrian Empire was known for its military prowess and administrative efficiency under 4 different kings, Tiglath-pileser III, Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, and Sennacherib. The empire was expanded by conquest and subjugation. (Read Kings, Chronicles, & the Prophets)

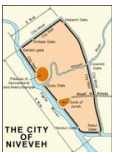
In ancient Middle Eastern history, few empires were as feared as the Assyrians. Among the nations that felt the weight of the Assyrian yoke were the Israelites (Hebrews), specifically those of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

The Assyrians had a well-established policy when dealing with conquered people; mass deportation. (See thetorah.com Assyrian Deportation and Resettlement: The Story of Samaria)

Isaiah 37:37-38 mentions Sennacherib being killed by his sons in Nineveh.

Zephaniah 2:13-15 predicts the destruction of the empire.

Ninevah was the largest city in the world for approximately 50 years until 612 B.C. The Neo-Assyrian Empire was taken down by a coalition of the Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians as foretold by the prophet Nahum. The book of Nahum has a lot of prophetic denunciations against Nineveh. (show first map then second)



Tarshish, the Strait of Gibraltar and into the Atlantic Ocean, many scholars believe it to be located in modern day Spain. (show first map then second map with distance)



I wanted you to see potential mileage but I don't want us to get hung up on exact distances. We want you to just consider "the reality of the run" from God?

Learning the background matters because we now have some context for what we read as we move forward.

Jonah had every human reason to hate the Assyrian Empire; it's leaders, military, and people. Nineveh was the capital of it all and the largest city in the world.

Tarshish was an opposite end of the world destination point.

We want to challenge you to begin to look for and see certain characteristics of relationship with God in both the Old Testament record as well as the New Testament.

Human Failure

Relentless Love

Incredible Mercy

Unbelievable Forgiveness

Simple Faith

Hebrews 11:1, 6 NIV *Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for:*

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Who do you hate, hold resentment/bitterness, or want to hurt in retaliation for wrongdoing?

May we look within ourselves as we study Jonah so that we can see God's desire to share His love with others through us.

We believe the results will be just as astonishing and miraculous.