



WEEK ONE HANDOUT – **Once Upon A Time**

BAND of BROTHERS 2021

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai... – Jonah 1:1 ESV

- **Fact or Fiction**

- Most of us are familiar with the story of Jonah and the Whale
- But is it supposed to be a historical account or allegorical?
- Is it fact or fiction?

If the bible myth of Jonah in the whale and the Mother Goose myth of Jack and the Beanstalk were switched at birth so that Jack in the Beanstalk were in the bible, do you think any child would notice? – Bill Maher, Comedian and Television Host

- It's a **real** story about a **real** person involving **real-life** events
- It may read like a **fairy tale**, but that does not make it **fiction**
 - The Bible is full of difficult-to-believe stories
 - After all, it is **the revelation of God**

Consider...

- ...the creation account in Genesis
- ...the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus
- ...the burning bush
- ...the miracles of Jesus
- ...the raising of Lazarus
- ...the resurrection

- Jonah was a **real person**

Jeroboam II, the son of Jehoash, began to rule over Israel in the fifteenth year of King Amaziah's reign in Judah. He reigned in Samaria forty-one years. He did what was evil in the Lord's sight. He refused to turn from the sins that Jeroboam son of Nebat

*had led Israel to commit. Jeroboam II recovered the territories of Israel between Lebo-hamath and the Dead Sea just as the Lord, the God of Israel, had promised through **Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath-hepher**. – 2 Kings 14:23-25 NLT*

- **It's a real story**

*"An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. **For just 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." – Matthew 12:39-40 ESV*

- **It's involves real-life events**

*"The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for **they repented at the preaching of Jonah**, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here." – Matthew 12:41 ESV*

- Yet, the church has turned the book of Jonah into a children's Sunday School story

- A fairy-tale-like story with a moral lesson
- A cute parable with a clever meaning
- Jonah becomes the reluctant hero
- The whale gets all the attention
- And God ends up with a bit part

- Consider the descriptions of popular children's books on Jonah:

*"In this story with a moral, God forgives Jonah and gives him another chance." – *Jonah and the Whale*, D.K. and Giuseppe Di Lernia*

*"The story of Jonah is full of ingredients that children love: a dangerous mission; a man on the run; danger at sea; an incredible whale rescue; and a grand finale about forgiveness." – *The Hard to Swallow Tale of Jonah and the Whale*, Joyce Denham and Amanda Hall*

*"What happens when you disobey God?" – *Jonah and the Big Fish*, Susan Collins Thoms and Naoko Stoop*

- This is **not** a story about **obedience**
- It is **not** a lesson on **faithfulness**
- It's **not** a parable about **forgiveness**
- It's God's Word concerning His **grand redemptive plan**
 - That is the key theme of the entire book

“The overriding theme of the book is the sovereign God’s grace toward sinners, illustrated in His decision to withhold His judgment from the guilty but repentant Ninevites.” – Robert B. Chisholm Jr., “A Theology of the Minor Prophets,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*

- **Historical setting**

- The context
 - The author: Either Jonah or someone else
 - Original audience: The people of Israel
 - The Date:
 1. During Jeroboam II’s reign (793-753 B.C.)
 2. Or after the exile (460-420 B.C.)
- Part of a larger whole
 - This book is not an isolated story
 - It is part of a much larger narrative
 - It doesn’t begin in chapter 1 and it doesn’t end with the last verse of chapter 4
- NOW...
 - This is the very first word of the very first chapter
 - In Hebrew, it can best be translated as... “and it happened that...”
 - The author is continuing an existing story

The author was letting his readers know that what they were about to read was a story, but it was not an isolated or independent one. The book of Jonah was not intended to be taken as a free-standing narrative but as an integral part of a much larger story. The author is linking his chronicle of Jonah’s Ninevite mission to the writings of Amos and Hosea. – Devotionalary™ on the book of Jonah

- Amos and Hosea
 - These two were contemporaries of Jonah

The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel...in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. – Amos 1:1 ESV

The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri...in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. – Hosea 1:1 ESV

Amos

...they [Israel] sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals... (2:6)

“They do not know how to do right,” declares the Lord.” (3:10)

...many are your transgressions and how great are your sins. (5:12)

"I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." (7:12)

Hosea

There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land... (4:1)

...there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery. (4:2)

...they know not the Lord. (5:4)

*The people of Israel have become like silly, witless **doves** (yona). (7:11)*

- **A story state of affairs**

*In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, **Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria**, and he reigned forty-one years. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. – 2 Kings 14:23-24 ESV*

- God's sovereign, impeccable timing
...and it happened...
...at about that time...
...right when things were at their worst...
...the word of the Lord came to Jonah...

*"Arise, **go to Nineveh**, that great city, and call out against it, for **their evil** has come up before me." – Jonah 1:2 ESV*



- **An unappealing assignment**

- Jonah is being sent into the belly of the beast

The Assyrians had a well-deserved reputation for immorality, idolatry, and wanton cruelty. – Devotionary™ on the book of Jonah

- To Jonah, they were evil incarnate
- But to God, they were His *imago dei*
- The Ninevites had been made in God’s image, just like the Israelites
- God had created them both
- But He had **called** and **set apart** the Israelites
- Why?

Isaiah 42:5-7 ESV

*Thus says God, the Lord,
 who created the heavens and stretched them out,
 who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
 who gives breath to the people on it
 and spirit to those who walk in it:
 “I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;
 I will take you by the hand and keep you;
 I will give you as **a covenant for the people,**
a light for the nations,
 to open the eyes that are blind,
 to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
 from the prison those who sit in darkness.”*

Isaiah 49:6 ESV

*“I will make you as **a light for the nations,**
 that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”*

- **For further thought**

Read John 1:9-13. In what ways does this passage tie in with the story of Jonah?

Are we guilty of failing to recognize the “Assyrians” of our day as made in the image of God? In what ways? And how do we change?

Why is it important to read the Bible as one book and not as isolated, independent stories?