

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

Learning from Those Who Walked Before Us

THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED BY JONAH

Jonah 1:7

INTRODUCTION: The Book of Jonah is one of those books in the Bible that is easy to read in one sitting. It is short, and the story is both intriguing and very immediately understandable, and in that story is the explanation of a great mystery that both theologians and church attenders often argue about. But the mystery, explained in this book impacts the life of every person in this room and every person born upon this earth. Let's read the beginning.

Jonah 1:1–17 NKJV 1 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.

4 But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.

5 Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.

6 So the captain came to him, and said to him, “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.”

7 And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble *has come* upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.

I want you to think with me about that last sentence: “**The lot fell on Jonah.**” Picture the scene.

- The captain and the sailors are crazy with fear. They have seen a lot of storms, but they have never seen a storm like this.
- They have already thrown everything on the ship that is not attached overboard to lighten the load, but they are still sinking.
- They have prayed to their pagan gods, but they are still sinking.
- They do not know what it is, but they know there is a reason for this storm.

- They must find out the who and the why or they will all perish in the depths of the sea.

So, they cast lots.

- We cannot know for sure what the lots looked like, but common lots in that day consisted of two stones in a leather bag. One meant yes and one meant no.
- They would shake the stones in the bag and dump the stones. The first one out gave the answer.

Maybe they started with the Captain. Shake the bag, drop the stones, NO.

The first mate is next. Shake the bag, drop the stones, NO.

Jonah is sweating bullets. The others can't see it because the rain is drenching them all, but Jonah can feel it.

Another crew member. Shake the bag, drop the stones, NO.

Jonah thinks, "We may as well skip the drama. It's going to be NO on everybody until they get to me. When they get to me, they are going to shake the bag, drop the stones, the lot is going to be a YES!"

You see Jonah knows something a lot of people, even today, don't know.

What Jonah knows though, we need to know, because it is as true today as it was then.

Jonah knows the truth Solomon wrote down in a proverb about two centuries earlier. We find that proverb in **Proverbs 16:33 NKJV** **The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.**

The casting of the lots continued. Every time it was a NO. How many times? A dozen? Two dozen? What are the odds?

With God in control – 100%

Finally they came to Jonah. Shake the bag, drop the stones. YES!

The Bible says simply, "the lot fell on Jonah."

Do you see what we need to see here? Has this awesome and dramatic truth reached out and grabbed you yet? Folks, the Word of God is here replaying a melody we find throughout the symphony of Scripture.

GOD IS SOVEREIGN. Sovereign means "supreme in power and control."

If Jonah did not know this fully before he hopped the cargo ship headed to Tarshish, he surely knows it now. God said, "Go to Nineveh and preach." Jonah disobeyed and fled from the presence of the Lord.

- God hurls a storm into the Mediterranean and targets Jonah's ship.
- The Almighty will not let the ship escape, no matter how hard the crew labors with every skill and trick known to seasoned mariners.
- The God who made the sea and the dry land will not on this occasion allow the demons posing as the gods behind the pagan idols of the sailors to offer any hint of an answer to their frenzied prayers.
- The Lord who is keeping the gunnels of the ship barely above the water line causes harried neurons to fire in some desperate seaman's brain, and he says, "The lots. Get out the lots. We will find out who has angered the god of the sea and the god who sends storms."
- And then time after time, as the lots were cast, the hand of the Sovereign God of the Universe controlled their fall. "And the lot fell on Jonah."

You see, my friend, Scripture tells us...

- **God is present everywhere – omnipresent.** Psalm 139:8 NKJV *If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.*
- **God is all knowing – omniscient.** Proverbs 15:3 NKJV *The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good.*
- **God all powerful – omnipotent.** Matthew 19:26 NKJV *But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

My friend, **When you have a God**

who is everywhere,

who knows everything,

who can do anything,

You have a God who is sovereign.

You have a God who is in complete control. Isaiah quotes the Lord Himself,

Isaiah 46:9–10 NKJV *... I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, ...My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,'*

IN HIS SOVEREIGNTY, GOD HAS GIVEN MAN LIMITED FREE WILL.

- **Some people think that saying man has free will violates the sovereignty of God.**
 - **This is not true.**
- **It is God who has chosen to give man limited free will.** God does all His pleasure. It has pleased God to give man a certain measure of free will.
 - This is part of what it means to be created in the image of God.
 - From the beginning to the end of the Bible, God continually gives men and women choices to obey or disobey and holds them responsible for their choice.
 - It is God who gave Adam and Eve the choice of obedience or disobedience concerning the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
 - **We can choose to obey or disobey God, but we cannot disobey God with impunity.** Both obedience and disobedience bring consequences.
 - **We can choose whether or not to receive the gift of eternal life purchased for us by Jesus' death upon the cross.**
 - **But we cannot choose to go to heaven another way** because God has chosen that salvation only comes one way – through Jesus.

Romans 10:9 NKJV that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

OUR EXPERIENCES IN LIFE ARE A RESULT OF THE BLENDING OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND OUR CHOICES.

- **What about predestination? Predestination is God's guarantee of** Romans 8:28 NKJV And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

Romans 8:28 is the promise.

Romans 8:29-30 is God's way of keeping the promise.

For whom He foreknew	Knew in advance – including their choice about Christ
He also predestined	God determined in advance

To be conformed to the image of His Son ...	God arranged things ahead of time so that those who choose to trust Christ will , with all certainty, ultimately be made to be like Jesus.
Moreover whom He predestined	These, God made sure
These He also called...	They were called
He also justified, ...	They were justified
He also glorified.	They were glorified

- The biblical doctrine of predestination does not teach that God arbitrarily picks out who will be saved and who will be lost.
- Instead it is God's guarantee that when in His omniscience, God saw beforehand that a person would trust in Christ as their Lord and Savior, that that person would for sure be saved and live with Him forever.
- Nothing would be able to stop it.
 - He or she could live in the most remote region of the world.
 - He or she could be born to the worst pagan parents in the world.
 - He or she could be exposed to the greatest wickedness the world has ever seen.
- But if that man or woman, was a person who when they learned of Christ and His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, would believe, would trust in Jesus, God determined that He would work things out for them to be saved.

Because Romans 8:28 NKJV And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

- **This also guarantees that God keeps us saved once we have trusted Christ.**
 - Once we trust Christ and are saved, then we are certainly among those God knew in advance would trust Jesus.
 - Therefore He promises that ultimately we will be glorified with Christ.

- **This also means that EVERYTHING that happens that has human consequence, is controlled by God.**
 - **Either God causes it, or gives it permission to happen.**
 - Nothing that brings consequences to a person's life, good or bad, happens apart from the controlling hand of God.

James 1:17 NKJV Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

OUR EXPERIENCES IN LIFE ARE A RESULT OF THE BLENDING OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND OUR CHOICES.

- That is exactly what we see in the life of Jonah.
 - God tells him to go to Nineveh and preach.
 - Jonah disobeys and heads for Tarshish.
 - God sends a storm.
 - The sailors cast lots to see whose sin is causing the storm.
 - God causes the lot to fall on Jonah.
 - Jonah gets pitched into the sea.
 - At the bottom of the ocean, Jonah repents.
 - God rescues Jonah by causing a whale to swallow him and gives him another chance to obey.
 - Jonah heads for Nineveh.

Everything that happened in Jonah's life was the consequence of God's sovereignty and Jonah's choices.

- And so it is in my life, and in yours.