

The Book of Jonah Discussion Qs

1. How does Jonah point ahead to Christ?

Jonah is an Israelite, the only Israelite of the book. He is a prophet. His experience in the fish is a pit, grave, and death-experience from which deliverance comes after three days in order that He may bring good news to the Gentiles.

In all this, the Jonah event prefigured the coming of Christ, the Israelite, prophet of prophets, king of kings (greater than Jonah, greater than Solomon; cf. Mat 12.38-42) in whom God's promises converge and through whom they will be realized.

The seed of Eve, the seed of Abraham, the greater Isaac, will not be spared the knife but will be delivered from death in three days in order to bring good news of God's compassion to the nations. Abraham believed in resurrection of his seed. The book of Jonah indicates that this refers to a three-day experience of the One who is prophet to the nations.

2. What sense can we make of animals repenting?

Repenting animals contribute to the promise of restoration of the whole creation as well as placing extreme accent on the repentance of all the people in all the depths of their lives (Jonah 3.6-9).

3. How does Jesus *contrast* with Jonah?

Jesus did not have the exclusivist spirit that Jonah had in his repining (Jonah 4). When lifted up on the cross, Jesus will draw men of all nations to himself (Jn. 12:32). Jonah disobeyed, reluctantly preached, and repined at God's mercy. Jesus obeyed and willingly gave His life for His sheep, which includes many others besides a remnant from the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Jn. 10.16).

We have here an OT version of the golden rule in the shade giving vine event. "What the vine did for you giving shade, comfort, and protection for your well-being, you ought to do for others to protect them from the scorching heat of God's wrath." The greater than Jonah, Jesus, did exactly that when he secured the deliverance of Jew and Gentile alike through his death and resurrection.

4. Is Jonah's prayer (2.2-9) a model prayer or does it reflect some of the need for sanctification that his repining at God's mercy to Gentiles indicates?

It seems that Jonah is truly repentant about his disobedience in the precise matter of running away from, rather than going to, Nineveh. He called on the Lord, he remembered the Lord, and he commits to the Lord to keep his vows (which presumably includes his duties as a prophet). The first person language in practical every verse shows a deeply personal relationship with God and not necessarily a man-centeredness. Comparison with Psalm 119.25-32 shows many similarities: I told of your ways and you answered me (v. 26), I have chosen the way of faithfulness...I cling...I will run (vs. 30-32). However, Jonah is a sinner-saint, a saint in tension as is evident from his anger with the Lord because of God's mercy to the Gentiles. At least, we can say that Jonah repents of running away in disobedience, but the book does not record any change in his attitude toward the Ninevites. A bad attitude is the last quality of Jonah that we have on record! Surely, the Lord made this the end of the record to drive home how shameful and selfish God's people can be regarding outsiders.

5. Does God change His mind (Jonah 3.10, God relented or repented)?

We know that God is not a man that He should repent. We also know that He planned all things and He works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph 1.11). Thus, we can say that God's relationship to people (blessing or cursing) changes because He is unchanging.