

XVIII. Revival in Biblical Perspective

Revive Us Again!

“The Nineveh Revival”

Book of Jonah

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

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Jonah 1:1–17 says [1] *Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, [2] “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” [3] But Jonah rose 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, away from the presence of the LORD.*

[4] But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. [5] Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. [6] So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.”

[7] And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. [8] Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” [9] And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” [10] Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

[11] Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. [12] He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.” [13] Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.

[14] Therefore they called out to the LORD, “O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.” [15] So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. [16] Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

[17] And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

In this study we will look at the whole book of Jonah but before I get into it, I can a confession to make. This is a very difficult confession for me to make. In terms of watching television there is a particular genre of programs I have become attracted to but I have not yet become addicted, so pray that I won’t become addicted to them. They do fall into the genre of reality shows. Do you know how hard that is for me to say that? I have become drawn to reality shows but only a certain genre of them and unfortunately not just one show but three

reality shows. I even record them sometimes if I know I will miss them. I like the renovation show Fixer Upper, Texas Flippers and then the Property Brothers.

I am drawn to these three programs because I love the stories – how the house will get renovated, how the story will be solved, how they make it worth something etc. Watching them go through this process is something I like but every story ends up at the same place. That doesn't bother me even though I know how all the stories will end. I have the essentials of renovation down pat and there are three of them – open concept, island (if not room for this then at least a peninsula) and shiplap. When you get those three done you'll make unbelievable money on the house. So other than cleansing my conscious why else am I telling you this?

I have been trying to do the same thing with this revival series but maybe not as well. I have been trying to give you the Biblically recorded narratives of revival and the essentials have stayed the same. We looked at five revivals in II Chronicles. We have looked at the revival in Jerusalem under Nehemiah. We have looked at the revival after Pentecost under Peter's ministry. We have looked at the revival in Sychar and Decapolis. God has recorded these revivals in the Word to instruct us, illuminate us and to inspire us as to where and how He brings revival. Every story comes back to the same thing.

Revival is God's work. It comes down, it's not worked up. Revival is an extraordinary work of God's grace through ordinary people in ordinary places by ordinary means with extraordinary consequences for God's glory. One purpose is God-centered worship and the other is a Gospel harvest where hundreds and thousands are brought into a saving relationship with the God of glory and grace through the power of God. The narratives are different, attractive, draw us into the story but the essentials of how God renovates remains the same. Only God can bring revival just like only God can give you when you get converted and only God can revive you when you have lost your way where deadness has come upon the soul of an individual or the church. He uses ordinary people with ordinary means like preaching, prayer and fellowship. So that is where we are and that brings us to this last one.

In my study of revivals I have at least uncovered 28 distinct revivals in the Bible. I am not going through all of them but I have chosen select ones from these 28. So in this study we will look at one more narrative that affirms the essentials of revival and when God brings a revival He raises up a revival leader but God is not dependent upon the revival leader. Sometimes the revival is actually upon the leader himself. If you want a deeper study of the book of Jonah, I did 6 or 7 sermons on it a few years ago and you can get information on those on our website at briarwood.org/sermons/, but in this study we'll focus on the revivals that take place. So as we look at these revivals in Nineveh I want you to see what God does with revival leaders that may not be as encouraging to you as it is to me but will hopefully take on some dimension for you as we look at Jonah himself.

The book of Jonah falls into a narrative with four scenes and we see each scene is represented in one of the four chapters of the book – scene 1 is in chapter 1 known as the rebellious prophet, scene 2 is chapter 2 as the repenting prophet, scene 3 is chapter 3 as the recalcitrant prophet and scene 4 is chapter 4 as the pouting prophet. So many try to say the book of Jonah is about the great whale but one it probably wasn't a whale and two that is only one miracle that happens in this book. The great fish although is mentioned three times is not by any means the focus of the text. I want you to see what God is saying to us as God deals with Jonah through this book and the people who need to be revived, the people through which He brings revival and the people through which He sends revival who once were revived.

So scene 1 and chapter 1 the Lord calls Jonah to go to Nineveh to preach. Nineveh is the capital of the Assyrian Empire. I cannot describe to you the kind of violence, torture, and horror of the way they dealt with people they captured and enslaved. These were very evil people and now God says to Jonah who is a prophet to the people of God to the Assyrian Empire's capital and preach out against the evil there. There evil has risen up to God. What does Jonah do when God calls Jonah to do that? He not only rejects the call but he rejects the presence of the Lord. Three times in the text it says he would flee the presence of the Lord and it's because he doesn't want the job to go preach to Nineveh, the call of the Lord on his life. He flees to Tarshish.

Jonah starts in Joppa which is just below Jerusalem on the coast which is the only natural harbor on the Mediterranean Sea for Israel. East and slightly north of Joppa is Nineveh but west of Joppa is Tarshish, not far from what we call Gibraltar. In other words Jonah is going in the opposite direction to flee his calling. He pays his fare to board a ship and the Lord tracks him down because the Lord appoints a great wind which probably means a small hurricane has hit him as an extraordinary storm comes upon the ship. In the minds of those from the Middle East back then, the sea was representative of all that was evil so when this sea is foaming and rising up all they can see is evil and destruction is upon them. They all have their own pagan deities and they are all calling out to them but that's not working so they start hurling the cargo from the ship into the sea. That's a big deal because the cargo is the way they make money so if they don't deliver that cargo they don't get paid but they are so fearful they are willing to throw the cargo into the sea.

Then a pagan captain tracks down Jonah who is below deck asleep. Jonah has already resigned himself and this is probably going to cost him and the crew their lives. He knows why that storm has come. There is something that he so badly does not want to do that he is willing to walk in disobedience to the Lord and flee from His presence to where he can even lay down and sleep in the hull of a ship. The captain comes to wake him up and you can almost hear the voice of the Lord through the captain as he says to Jonah, "*What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.*" Jonah doesn't have compassion for anyone and there is a reason why he has no compassion. This captain doesn't say this because he is now converted, no he wants to know why all this has suddenly come upon them. Before long a sovereign God uses the casting of lots to put His finger on Jonah so the crew knows it's because of Jonah this has all come upon them.

So Jonah finally tells them if they want relief from all this not to hurl the cargo over but hurl him over and for some reason in their kindness they decide not to do that. They just try to row harder out of it to be delivered but God brings the wind and storm harder. Finally they ask Jonah if there is a way they can be delivered and Jonah says it's a substitutionary sacrifice, 'I'm the guilty one so hurl me over.' The text says they hurled him into the sea and they were delivered. It was so astounding to them that they repented of their sins, covered themselves with sackcloth and they worship God which is an evidence of God's reviving work. Here is a Gospel harvest on a ship as pagan sailors are brought by repentance to the God of glory. They worship and make commitments to this God of glory.

So what has happened to Jonah? Now we go to Jonah 2 and the second scene. Jonah 2:1 says [1] *Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish.* God had designed, developed and appointed that great fish to swallow up Jonah where he is in the belly of that fish for three days and three nights, kept alive and in that process is brought to repentance. A glorious declaration of Godly repentance is given by Jonah as he quotes many of the Psalms in Jonah 2:2-9. Then after he repents we see what it says in Jonah 2:10, [10] *And the LORD spoke*

to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. Now we have a rebellious prophet that becomes a repenting prophet and is restored back to the dry land.

Now we go to the third scene in Jonah 3 where we go to a recalcitrant but resolute prophet. Jonah is to go preach the message God tells him, not what he wants but God's Word. Jonah 3:1–10 says [1] *Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying,* [2] *“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”* [3] *So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth.* [4] *Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”* [5] *And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. (A city wide renewal begins to take place and a Gospel harvest through the entire city through the revived Jonah.)*

[6] *The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.* [7] *And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water,* [8] *but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.* [9] *Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”*

[10] *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.*

God who has ordained that the soul that sins shall die is the same God who prepared and sent Jonah with a message because God has a work of grace and mercy He was going to do in Nineveh. So when this work of God came to Nineveh they by the power of God through the grace of God turned to God and repented. Therefore God's stated course of action which is to bring judgment upon sin because of His wrath against sin and those who bring it, is now removed because of His grace and mercy. That is now removed through their repentance that He Himself gave them by sending the message through Jonah to them. Therefore God's plan has come to fruition. So what does Jonah do?

This prophet becomes a pouting prophet. So now we are about to find out why Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord in Jonah 1 as we look at Jonah 4. Jonah 4:1–11 says [1] *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.* [2] *And he prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.* [3] *Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”* [4] *And the LORD said, “Do you do well to be angry?”*

[5] *Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city.* [6] *Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.* [7] *But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered.* [8] *When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”* [9] *But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?”* And he said, *“Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.”* [10] *And the LORD said,*

“You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. [11] And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

In other words, Jonah didn't make the plant yet he pitied the plant. God made these people and God says 'I can't show grace and mercy to these who I have pitied and fulfill my justice through a substitutionary sacrifice that they might be delivered from My anger because I have done a work of grace to them, on them and for them?' In other words, Jonah do you know what I did for you? I saved you and you're not where you are because of your self-righteousness. You are where you are because I made you glad. If I want to do it for you then I have every right to do it for them to show My grace and mercy. Why would you not be glad in what makes Me glad when I deliver people from My wrath through My grace and mercy? Now the pouting prophet is being pursued by the Lord to bring him to a heartfelt obedience of God's grace and God's call upon his life.

So what can we learn from this? I want to give you three takeaways. The first one is we have a reaffirmation one more time that revival is God's work and it's an extraordinary work of God's grace. That is all over the pages of this book. There is God's reviving work on Jonah. It's persistent and out of that comes a Gospel harvest on a ship in the middle of the Mediterranean. Out of that comes a Gospel harvest in a pagan empire, pagan capital, pagan king and pagan people. How did all of this revival in leading to worship and a harvest of God's grace and mercy happen in such unlikely places? It happens because it is an extraordinary work of God's grace.

Did you notice the five appointments? First God appointed a storm, a wind to track down and chase a fleeing, rebellious prophet and that's a miracle. It is just like when He appointed a star to point to where Jesus was born. God speaks to the heavens and they obey Him. Secondly, He appoints a great fish. I don't need to come up with the kind of fish that Jonah was swallowed by because I think God made the fish for the very purpose of what He was using it for. It is a miracle. I think when the fish vomited Jonah up God was done with what He created it for. Thirdly, when God is dealing with Jonah He then appoints a plant that grows up miraculously overnight to shade him. Fourthly, He appoints a worm to destroy that plant the next night. Fifthly, He appoints an east wind that comes off the Sahara desert just at the right time to bring utter fatigue, heat and exhaustion upon Jonah as He is teaching him the lessons of grace through His redeeming, disciplining hand upon Jonah. It is extraordinary work that can only be done by God.

That's not all, for look how God is speaking here. God speaks through a pagan captain by using him to speak to a prophet. It's amazing who God will raise up to speak to me and you. He will not only use Godly preachers but He'll use ungodly people sometimes. The convicting word from a pagan captain comes to Jonah from the Lord. Then there are the pagan sailors whom God speaks through to get to Jonah. Then God Himself speaks to a dumb fish to accomplish His purposes and then the fish vomits up Jonah onto dry land. I would love to know what God said to the fish. Then God speaks a word of repentance to an entire city through a pagan king – the king of Nineveh. Here you have a king that gets in on the game. This king calls a city to repentance, a fast and sack cloth and ashes and he himself gets in on this. He did this when he heard what was happening to the people. Then God speaks to an entire city and this pervasive movement of the reviving hand of God overflowing into a Gospel harvest takes place from the greatest to the least of them.

In a society like ours where we have an election process, people who are ruling over us are there as a reflection of our values. Every election is a world and life view statement of the people. We get who we want as a nation but to encourage you, when God does a work in everyday people like you and me those people that are “up there” hear what is happening “down there” and it’s amazing how it effects them. The king of Nineveh heard what was going on and got in on it. It changes his trajectory and it is a bottom up movement of revival and great awakening. How God speaks here is absolutely amazing.

There is not only a Gospel revival on a ship, but in a pagan empire and it’s all because God is doing a revival in the heart of one prophet named Jonah. God is doing an extraordinary work in fish, clouds, seas, storms, lightning, sinners, kings, lowly for all are under His sovereign hand. They all obey His voice to accomplish His purposes. It is an extraordinary work of God’s grace that He does.

The second takeaway is that God does this extraordinary work through ordinary people. These revivals come to ordinary people in ordinary places by ordinary means. It comes through the preaching and prayers of Jonah. God brings this revival that goes into this enormous awakening that goes from a ship, then into a city and then it touches an entire empire. This all comes through ordinary people. Can you tell me the captain’s name? It doesn’t give his name. The text doesn’t give the names of the sailors or even the name of the King of Nineveh. We know where it took place but have no idea who was participating other than by their titles and Jonah. God doesn’t want us to get fascinated with the people but He is telling us to see the God of grace and glory, the power of His Word, His Spirit, the preaching of the Word and intercessory prayer.

Thirdly, I have a couple of final thoughts about Jonah. During the life of Jesus He was asked of the people to show them a sign and He said ‘None will be given except the sign of Jonah. Here is Jonah with all of his inadequacies, his sins, his persistent sins and God’s persistent work of grace upon him and Jonah now occupies a glorious privilege of being a Christ identified type of Christ. See Jonah hurled in the foaming of the sea to deliver the sailors. See the Father hurl His Son into this world to deliver us from our sins. See the Son willingly say to the Father ‘here I am send Me.’ See the Son deliver the guilty, not the guilty being delivered up but the Innocent One being delivered up to save the guilty. See the belly of the earth, hades, and the grave swallow Him for three days and three nights. See the Father who spoke to the fish speak to hades, the grave and the ground shakes and the Son of God is vomited from hades, death and the grave. He is Christus Victor for our souls. See the Gospel go from ship to ship and city to city until He comes again and sinners are brought to saving grace throughout the world. This Jonah with all of his recalcitrant and rebellion, whether he wants to or not becomes an instrument of God to give us a picture of the love of God and the gift of His Son to save us from our sins and its consequence and deliver us from our evil.

Jonah is not only a type of Jesus but he is also a type of you and me. I so easily think I am what I am because of who I am than to think I am by the grace of God so instead of having compassion upon people who were like I was, not realizing that was exactly what I was, then I begin to ask God to bring some judgment on them. It’s a tough thing to rage against sin but to love sinners but that is what God has called us to do. Be the hands of compassion for the lost. We want to take to them the message that somebody brought to us. God came to us through a message through ordinary people in ordinary places so unlike Jonah we want to say to God ‘we are what we are by the grace of God, we take no delight in sin but we do take delight in reaching sinners’ and that’s what we desire to do. So dear God use us and then watch how God uses us.

Watch how God revives us. Don't you just love Jonah 3:1 that says [1] *Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time.*

I remember the time my dad was going to go play golf and up until then my dad would take me out when he would play golf and I would get to shag them. Then he gave me a club to practice with and I read books about golf and then he told me he was going to take me to go play nine holes. This was a big moment for me and I remember to this day standing at that first hole and first tee. I took this big swing, made contact with that golf ball but I have no idea where that golf ball every ended up. I'll never forget what my dad said next, 'Tee it up again son, I'm going to give you a mulligan.' For those who don't know what a mulligan is, it's a second chance without a penalty.

That is what the Father did with Jonah. Tee it up again son. The Word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. God is doing that in my life all the time. He not only comes a second time but He has a lot of second time, second times. Look at Peter. He messes up several times that we know of and look what the Lord does with him. The Apostle Paul messes up with the churches in Galatia and God says 'ok Peter let's tee it up again.' I thank God for second opportunities. I thank God for His patience and persistence but God's relentless persistence in working in our lives is not there for us to think lightly of our disobedience. God's persistence is there to bring us to full obedience and that's why He is relentless.

I am so refreshed when in the text I see them go to sackcloth and ashes and say 'let us repent, perhaps God will be gracious.' They had heard that God is holy and He has wrath. They had heard that they were sinners and had done evil. They were not only undeserving but ill-deserving. Do we have any hope? Today we're trying to teach people a Gospel without telling them there is a God who has a wrath to be delivered from. We're trying to tell people of a Gospel without trying to tell people we're sinners. We're trying to teach a Gospel without telling them there is a hell to lose and a heaven to gain. If you don't have a God with holy wrath, men without sin and an eternity with hell then you have no Gospel to preach of a God of grace who will deliver you from His wrath because He put His Son in that place for you, a God who will deliver you from hell because His Son went there for you, a God who will take you by the power of His grace which is greater than your sin. So you will end up with a prosperity gospel, a therapy gospel, a self-esteem gospel or a coach-me-up gospel, instead of a sin delivering Gospel.

Yet look where we stand, we stand not on the sign of Jonah but on the fulfillment of Jesus and we can tell people not perhaps but God will save all who come to Him. And He gave His Son to save you. We have a message that not simply God is gracious but that God has been gracious because His Son has taken your place. He has been hurled into the sea. He has been vomited from the grave. He has ascended to heaven and He will save any and all who come to Him. God please get me back into the business of telling others about you. Renovate me Lord, I know what You do. Do an extraordinary work through ordinary means in ordinary people in ordinary places and I'm an ordinary man and be relentless with me, not simply that You keep working on me but that You bring me to full obedience. Then would You be pleased to use me? Would you join me in this? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. If you are reading this today and you find yourself on that ship with those mariners or that captain and you know that God has working and moving not only to work in His people but to make you one of His people, there is a Savior who went into the sea of sin, died an atoning death, was swallowed up to the

grave and then burst forth in victory. He is ascended and ready to receive you, just come to Him. If you would like to pray with someone please call us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200. We would love to pray with you about this liberty and life giving redemption in Jesus Christ. My dear Savior, would You work upon me, us? We thank You for the second times and the second times of the second times. Thank You for Your patience and persistence, not so that we think lightly of our first sins but so that we are brought to full obedience of love. If ever I loved You, Jesus let it be now for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

REVIVAL

Revival is an extraordinary work of God's grace through ordinary people in ordinary places by ordinary means with extraordinary consequences for God's glory.

- + God-centered Worship
- + Gospel Harvest

THE NINEVEH REVIVAL

Four Scenes

LIFE TAKEAWAYS

- I. Revival is an "extraordinary" work of God's grace
- II. Revival comes through ordinary people, to ordinary places and by ordinary means
- III. Jonah and some final thoughts