

Sunday, January 21, 2024

## Scripture Reading: Jonah 3:1-5, 10

*Grace will follow us even when we are going the wrong way. —Ricky Maye*

According to a Barna survey of self-identifying Christians, only 61 percent realized that Jonah is an actual book of the Bible. Even more shocking is that 27 percent said positively that it is not! And 12 percent had no idea.

But if you look hard, it's right there, only three to four pages long, tucked in between Obadiah and Micah.

The plot of this fish story is simple. God asks a prophet (Jonah) to preach to Israel's enemy, Assyria. The prophet refuses, running away to a port city and catching a berth in the belly of a ship. When there's a violent storm, the prophet accepts responsibility for the wrath of God, and is unceremoniously thrown overboard. In the great sea, a great fish happens along and gulps him down whole. But the fish finds him unpalatable and vomits him up on a shore. The prophet now goes to Assyria and preaches judgment in the capital city, Nineveh. Surprisingly, the people of the city repent, and God repents of his judgment against the city, and spares it. The prophet is upset and angry with God, and the book ends.

Many lessons can be drawn from this simple story. One is that it is *pointless to disobey God or attempt to flee from God's presence*. It didn't work for Jonah, and it won't work for us.

A second lesson is *that God is merciful and forgiving*. Jonah's defiance is breathtaking, but the providence of God provides a huge storm and an even bigger shark or some other sea creature to get the prophet out of the storm and back on to land. There, in the belly of the beast, he had a "come-to-God" moment. When Jonah comes to his senses, he finds himself on a beach. It is a moment of amazing gastrointestinal grace. Jonah, like us, gets another chance from the God of second chances.

Third, it's really bad form to *accept the grace of God and then get peeved and perturbed* when God extends that same grace and mercy to others. If we are recipients of mercy, let's rejoice when others accept God's freely-offered love and mercy, too — especially if we have been blessed to be a transformational agent or conduit of that blessing!

—Timothy Merrill

*Prayer: Grant me the patience to let you be God, and me to be me. Amen.*

Week of January 21, 2024

## Daily Bible Readings

**Sunday:** Matthew 8-11

**Monday:** Matthew 12-15

**Tuesday:** Matthew 16-19

**Wednesday:** Matthew 20-22

**Thursday:** Matthew 23-25

**Friday:** Matthew 26-28

**Saturday:** Psalms 4-6

## Verse to Remember

*The LORD has heard my supplication;  
the LORD accepts my prayer. —Psalm 6:9*

### SECRET IDENTITY!

**Directions:** The purpose of this exercise is to discover the identity of a well-known biblical person. To do so, you must assign a number value to each letter of the alphabet, assuming that M equals 1, N equals 2, O equals 3, etc. A letter and number chart for you to fill in has been provided for your convenience. Use the numbers in the clues to spell out each word in the sentence.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
												1	2	3											

**First Clue:** 15-7 15 13-3-9-2-21 1-15-2 22-19 25-23-26-26-19-18 7-3-1-19-3-2-19.

**Second Clue:** 22-19 11-15-7 8-19-2-18-23-2-21 7-22-19-19-4 23-2 8-22-19  
18-19-7-19-6-8 11-22-19-2 21-3-18 17-15-26-26-19-18 22-23-1.

**Third Clue:** 15-7 15 16-15-16-13 22-19 11-15-7 20-3-9-2-18 20-26-3-15-8-23-2-21  
23-2 15 16-15-7-25-19-8 23-2 8-22-19 2-23-26-19 6-23-10-19-6.

**WHO IS THIS PERSON?**



**Answer**  
(spelled  
backwards):  
SESOM.