



BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020



Summary

This is the story of a prophet who tried to run away from God. He famously ended up in the belly of a big fish for three days before emerging with life and purpose, in a sign Jesus would later call people to remember before his death and resurrection.

Jonah's conversation with God reflects the challenge we might feel when faced with God's grace conflicting with our sense of fairness. God wants us to see the world from his point of view instead. The story also shows how even someone close to God can need forgiveness, and how God can use one repentant person to save thousands.

Bern Leckie

Thursday February 27: Jonah 1-4

A salty story about obedience and grace

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

I love how neatly this story looks at one crucial idea in lots of ways: are we going to do what God wants, or not?

The consequences of not are messy. I've been trying to imagine how Jonah felt when he started to realise that what was happening to the sea, the boat and all its seasick sailors was maybe, probably, no, definitely his fault. Surely death was about to swallow them all.

Then something amazing happened – Jonah's self-sacrifice. Remind you of anyone? Swallowed into the deep for three days with God's power recognised, leading people to him – a sign later quoted by Jesus, whose life too was restored for our benefit.

I love how this incredible process brought Jonah to turn to God, obey him and call others effectively to follow him in repentance. As they did, their lives were restored too.

God's grace is amazing, but can we cope with it? This might be the most remarkable aspect of the story for me, as we get to see inside the head of a man who heard God, knew his grace and love, but turned away. What made Jonah angry? Was it envy at seeing people treated unfairly in a gracious way? If so, what about the plant that came and went?

The way I hear it, Jonah wants God to work in a way which makes sense to him, feels fair and just to him, and makes him feel better when he needs comfort. Is that so different from how we approach God too?

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God, however, challenges us to see the world from his point of view, accept his love and grace and realise our need for forgiveness, changing our minds and our lives.

God's provision can come and go, and we shouldn't try to work out God's guidance from whether or not there is a comfortable plant or a convenient boat, especially if we know that boat is heading the wrong way. But if we do run away, God still loves and cares for us, and can discipline, save and restore us to good life with him. He can even use one repentant person to save a hundred thousand more.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

In prayer and chatting with others, I need to spot how God's direction might be different from my own sense of what seems right. I want to grow my sense of what God is saying and doing in grace and love, and get better at obeying rather than resisting God.

Who am I going to share this with?

People I pray with over the next few weeks, on "The SHAPE of you" course, for example.