

iDoubt: Questions about Faith

“Are Bible Stories like Noah and the Ark and Jonah and the Fish Really True?”

[Genesis 6-9, Jonah]

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**Show Announcement Slides** (I will give announcements)

**Show iDoubt title slide**

This is the first week of our series, iDoubt: Questions about Faith. Back in July, we asked you to write one question that you have about faith, “If you could ask God now question, what would it be?”. 115 of you responded by writing your questions on index cards and in our online poll. Reading your questions was one of the most fulfilling and touching experiences I’ve ever had in ministry. I was amazed at the depth and sincerity of your questions. I could feel how heart-felt these questions were, and often, I could feel the pain behind some of these questions. Some people’s questions had to do with devastating experiences they’ve had in life. Some people have been carrying these questions for years and have never found a satisfactory answer. The question I’m going to be addressing today is, “Are Bible Stories like Noah and the Ark and Jonah and the Fish Really True?”

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When it comes to these big questions of faith that we have, we sometimes feel like we believe two different things, and we’re not sure which one to pick or if we even *should* pick one answer.

My wife and I have an 8 month old son who doesn’t sleep through the night very well, so my wife and I wake up tired every morning. I have proof of how tired I usually am in the mornings. Two Sundays ago, I showed up for staff prayer at 7:30 in the sanctuary. We bowed our heads to pray before the 8:00a service, and when we said “amen”, I was looking down, and this is what I saw.

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I don’t shine one shoe more than other. Those are two different shoes that I put on my feet before I came to worship two Sundays ago. I texted Hannah, and she brought the other shoe for the 9:30 service. My clothes make the fashion statement that I dress in the dark.

When it comes to these big questions of faith, sometimes we feel like we have two shoes on. We’re not sure what to believe. We have competing ideas in our heads, and we want to be intelligent, thinking people who have answers.

I posted a question on my Facebook page asking for input on why more religious people don’t openly question their faith. Here are some of the responses that other people posted:

One person wrote, "Fear. Fear that having doubts means you don't really believe."

Another person wrote, "I think some people simply are too proud to think anything other than what they are taught."

Another person commented, "It's easier and less scary to just go with the flow and not get too deep and admit we are flawed. People are afraid of being judged."

Another person posted, "I think it's because there are some factions who believe (that) to question faith, is to question God (or commit) blasphemy. I believe that God wants us to question, to really roll around in our doubt, to explore it and then find the relationship that is true and deep."

Another person wrote, "I remember growing up in the church and looking up to role models in the congregation - I don't think it ever crossed my mind that they'd experienced doubts about their faith. It's frightening to face those doubts if you think that these strong Christians never went through that experience. Leaders can be so empowering when they admit their own struggles, because it "allows" others who admire them from afar the permission to go through those struggles, too, with the hope that the struggle might be healthy and positive. I always appreciate refreshing honesty from those I most respect."

Next week, on the tenth anniversary of 9/11, we'll be reminded of what can happen when religious people refuse to question their faith. Think of the difference that one question could have made in our world... "Does God really want me to fly this airplane into a building?" Think of the power of one question.

I agree with the person on facebook who said that fear is a major reason that more religious people do not express their questions. A term I hear often is the "slippery slope." They're afraid that if they ask questions, they'll slide down the slippery slope to unbelief. I wonder, is it possible that fear already puts person at the bottom of the slippery slope?

Most of all four Gospels consist of Jesus tearing down the religious walls that religious people had built. They had built walls to keep themselves from falling down the supposed "slippery slope", and Jesus said they were already at the bottom. In trying to keep from sliding down the slippery slope, their rigid dogma put them at the bottom of the slope. Jesus points to a loving relationship with God over a rigid type of religion.

People who believe it's wrong to acknowledge doubt and ask questions might point to a Scripture like James 1v6-8:

<sup>6</sup> But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> Those who doubt should not think they will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup> they are double-minded and unstable in all they do.

They may forget about verse 5 which explains the context of this doubt. Verse 5 reads,

<sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. <sup>6</sup> But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> Those who doubt should not think they will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup> they are double-minded and unstable in all they do.

The context of that Scripture about doubt is asking God for wisdom. It's praying, "God gives us wisdom to live well, give us wisdom to follow you and wisdom to partner with you in your work in the world." James is saying, "When you ask God for wisdom, don't doubt that God will give it to you."

Well, in this series, we're asking God for wisdom. We're asking God to help us wrestle with these big questions so that we don't have to be loaded down with doubt. We're asking God for wisdom, so that we can be confident in what we believe and why, and we can partner with God in God's work in the world. We're doing what James is telling us to do.

We're asking questions, not because we want to tear down faith but for the exact opposite reason. We're asking questions because our faith is important to us, and we want to find answers.

So, one of the four most popular questions you asked is about some of the more amazing, miraculous stories in the Bible. The stories of Noah and the Flood and Jonah and the Fish are two of the most well-known stories in the Bible.

By "stories", I don't mean they're not true. Some people hear, "story", and they think that means "false." By "story", I mean the type of literature they are. They're not bullet point lists. They're narratives with characters and plotlines in story form. That's what I mean by "stories." You asked, "Are Bible stories like Noah and the Ark and Jonah and the fish Really True?"

According to the Barna Group, a Christian polling organization, about 2/3 of Americans believe these stories are literally, historically true. In other words, if we had a video camera and we were filming it, we would see a fish swallow Jonah, we would see a world-wide flood and two of every kind of animal with Noah and his family in the ark.

The other 1/3 of Americans have trouble believing that these stories are literally true. They see that these stories present amazing, miraculous ideas and that what science teaches us about the world doesn't seem to fit with what these stories claim. Eventually, some people who have grown up in the

church have a crisis of faith, and they're not sure what to believe anymore. Some people turn away from faith altogether because they don't find satisfactory answers to their biggest questions and doubts.

My goal today is not to hammer home my own personal view. My goal is to present two opposing views on these stories fairly, in a balanced way, and let you decide where you stand. There are Christians who would probably be offended that I'm even fairly discussing another view other than the literal view.

I'm not afraid of acknowledging other viewpoints. The point of this iDoubt series is to fairly discuss complex, important questions. If there were easy answers, you wouldn't have asked these questions. So, we'll look at two different views.

However, those two opposing views are not what is most important to me. I'm going to spend most of my sermon talking about the meaning of the two stories, because that's why they were written down. But first, briefly, here are two views:

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1. The literal view- Most of the original readers believed these stories are historically true, meaning if we had videotaped these events, what you would see on video is exactly what is described in the Bible. According to Barna Group, 2/3 of Americans believe these stories are literally historically true.

Those who believe in that these stories happened literally just as they are relayed in the Bible would usually say that these are miracles, and if God can perform miracles in other places in the Bible, then why not here?

Followers of Jesus who believe these stories are literally true as they are presented would also probably have a very high view God's inspiration of the Bible. They would believe that while the Bible has human authors, God influenced the authors to the extent that whatever they write are the words of God, and some would say that since they are God's words, they must be historically true.

This doesn't mean, however, that there is no room to think within the literal view. People who hold the literal view may still wrestle with questions. For example, the theologian Wayne Grudem affirms world-wide flood while questioning six literal days of creation.

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"Personally, though I think the flood of Genesis 6-9 was worldwide, and that it did have a significant impact on the face of the earth, and that all living people and animals outside of the ark perished in the flood, I am not persuaded that all of the earth's geological formations were caused by Noah's flood rather than by millions of years of sedimentation, volcanic eruptions, movement of glaciers, continental drift, and so forth." -Systematic Theology p. 306

When writing about Jonah, a Bible scholar named Trent Butler writes:

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“Scientific details and explanations are not the author’s concern. The fact is that God used a fish to preserve Jonah’s life, and God made it possible for a man to live inside of a fish three days. The Bible boldly confesses God’s power to do what he wants to do.”-Trent Butler, *Holman Old Testament Commentary, vol. 19, P. 256*

2. The non-literal view

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People who hold to the non-literal view may point to a scientific worldview in which a fish would digest a person. They would say that for the flood to be as high as it is presented in the Bible, it would require three times as much water on the earth as is currently in the oceans. They would say that it is impossible for animals from all over the world to migrate to the ark.

They might say that the core of the Noah story is true and that over time, the stories grew before they were eventually written down in the form we now have in Genesis. People who view these stories as non-literal would probably affirm a localized flood. They would say that their world, as far as they knew, experienced a catastrophic flood. They might believe that someone named Noah existed and had a boat and possibly saved some people from the flood. And they would say that stories about this flood and this person named Noah would have been passed down orally from generation to generation as families sat by the campfire at night, and over time the story grew to its present state until it was written down in what we now have as Genesis.

Old Testament scholar, Terence Fretheim, writes:

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“Genesis is a composite work with respect to the origins of the literature... but in time it has been shaped into a unified composition.” -Terence E. Fretheim, *The Pentateuch, P. 69*

people who hold the non-literal view would say that the Book of Jonah is something like a parable, as story that illustrates a spiritual point.

A famous Christian leader who held this view is C.S. Lewis, the author of *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*:

“The point is that the whole Book of Jonah has to me the air of being a moral romance, a quite different kind of thing from, say, the account of King David or the New Testament narratives, not pegged, like them, into any historical situation... This is not a ‘rationalistic approach’ to miracles. Where I doubt the historicity of an Old Testament narrative I never do so on the ground that the miraculous as such is incredible. Nor does it deny a unique sort of inspiration: allegory, parable, romance, and lyric might be inspired as well as chronicle.”-C.S. Lewis, Letter from C. S. Lewis to Corbin Carnell dated April 4, 1953

It’s important to note two things:

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- > People holding either view may affirm the divine inspiration of Scripture.
- > United Methodists believe that the Bible is reliable to teach all things necessary to salvation and that it is the primary authority for our faith.

Now, as humbly as I can, I’ll share my view.

The vast majority of the Bible scholars of whom I am aware do not spend much time thinking about or discussing this question. The debate between science and the Bible is something that began in the 1800’s and decreased by the 1950’s. There is a sense that we have been there and done that with this question, and there is a new question that is really an old question but its come to the front again. That question is what I’m going to spend the rest of my sermon on.

The book of Jonah calls the fish that swallowed Jonah a “great fish” (uncover fish). Isn’t this a great fish? And by “great”, I mean “obnoxious.” I wanted to make a fish that is impossible to ignore. Do you think I succeeded?

It’s gets better... or worse (plug electrical cord in). Do you know anyone like this, “Look at me, look at me!”

Far too often, when people read the accounts of Noah and Jonah, the fish or the amount of water in the flood, or the two kinds of animals are like big blinking signs to them, and the can’t resist focusing only on the fish or the ark. They fixate on the fish, or they fixate on the ark, and they get sidetracked into an argument about whether or not its scientifically possible for a man to live in the fish’s belly for three days or about how much water was in the flood. There get distracted by these details of the stories, and they miss the actual point of the story. They miss what the biblical author is trying to say through the story, and they miss what God is trying to communicate to them. They fixate on the fish, and the miss the actual point.

In America especially, we have this polarization between conservatives and liberals. It’s true in politics, and it’s true in theology. The liberals fixate on the fish and they judge the Bible in the light of science,

and they say, “These stories are not scientifically possible”, and many people stop taking the Bible seriously after that.

I went to see a couple of friends play in a local band one night in Columbus, and a bunch of people who knew different members of the band were there and meeting each other for the first time. The drummer introduced me to a friend of his who was there to play guitar, and he asked me what I do for a living. Do you know how awkward it is when someone is freaked out and tries to keep from expressing it on their face? That’s how he looked when I told him that I’m a pastor. I could tell that he was thinking, “Why would anyone ever want to do that?!”

He said that he had gone to church as a child. Then, he said something very interesting out of the blue. He said, “I like Jesus, but you can keep that Noah stuff.” That is how some people react to these miraculous stories in the Bible.

On the other hand, conservatives judge the Bible in the light of science, and they conclude that it is scientifically possible for these things to have happened, and they write books about how the Bible stands up to science.

The problem with these two views is that science is the judge of the Bible. Theological liberalism and theological conservatism are two sides of the same coin. Both judge the Bible in the light of science. Some of you might be thinking, “Well what other way is there?” We live in a scientific age, but every book in the Bible was written hundreds of years before the scientific revolution, and the Bible is not asking or answering questions about science.

When we read the Bible and ask, “Is that scientifically possible?” we are imposing a scientific worldview upon the Bible, and it violates the Bible. The writer of Jonah is not concerned about whether it’s scientifically possible for a man to live in a fish’s belly. The writer of Genesis is not concerned about how much water is on the earth and whether its scientifically possible for a worldwide flood to occur. The point of these two stories is the meaning they are trying to convey. The details of a fish and the amount of water in the flood are details that are part of the story, but the reason these stories exist is to communicate meaning.

The new question is, “What do these Bible stories mean to us? We’ve debated how the Bible stacks up to scientific scrutiny, but that misses the entire point of the Bible anyway. So, I’m going to spend the rest of my sermon on what these two accounts mean.

3. Let’s read some passages from these two stories. Noah and the Ark appears in Genesis chapters 6-9, and the book of Jonah is one of the 12 minor prophets in the Hebrew Bible and is only four chapter long, total.

**Show “Scripture” slides**

Genesis 6v5-14, 17-19,22 (Common English Bible)

*5 The LORD saw that humanity had become thoroughly evil on the earth and that every idea their minds thought up was always completely evil. 6 The LORD regretted making human beings on the earth, and he was heartbroken. 7 So the LORD said, "I will wipe off of the land the human race that I've created: from human beings to livestock to the crawling things to the birds in the skies, because I regret I ever made them." 8 But as for Noah, the LORD approved of him.*

*9 These are Noah's descendants. In his generation, Noah was a moral and exemplary man; he[c] walked with God. 10 Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. 11 In God's sight, the earth had become corrupt and was filled with violence. 12 God saw that the earth was corrupt, because all creatures behaved corruptly on the earth. 13 God said to Noah, "The end has come for all creatures, since they have filled the earth with violence. I am now about to destroy them along with the earth, 14 so make a wooden ark.... 17 "I am now bringing the floodwaters over the earth to destroy everything under the sky that breathes. Everything on earth is about to take its last breath. 18 But I will set up my covenant with you. You will go into the ark together with your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives. 19 From all living things—from all creatures—you are to bring a pair, male and female, into the ark with you to keep them alive... 22 Noah did everything exactly as God commanded him.*

Jonah 1v1-5, 12, 17, 4v10-11

*1 The LORD's word came to Jonah, Amittai's (Ameet- TYE) son: 2 "Get up and go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it, for their evil has come to my attention." 3 So Jonah got up—to flee to Tarshish from the LORD! He went down to Jaffa and found a ship headed for Tarshish. He paid the fare and went aboard to go with them to Tarshish, away from the LORD. 4 But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, so that there was a great storm on the sea; the ship looked like it might be broken to pieces. 5 The sailors were terrified, and each one cried out to his god. They hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to make it lighter... 12 He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea! Then the sea will become calm around you. I know it's my fault that this great storm has come upon you... 17 Meanwhile, the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. <sup>4:10</sup> But the LORD said, "You 'pitied' the shrub, for which you didn't work and which you didn't raise; it grew in a night and perished in a night. <sup>11</sup> Yet for my part, can't I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than one hundred twenty thousand people who can't tell their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"*

What is the message that I believe God wants to communicate through these stories?

**Show "What is the meaning...?" slide**

God speaks to Noah and says, “I’m grieved by the evil that I see in the world”, and the text elaborates on that evil. It says the evil is violence and corruption. When God looks at the world, God sees that the world is so full of violence and corruption that God is sorry that He created the world. Every once in a while, do you watch the news or hear about something and just think, “How did it get this way? How can people do something like that, how do things like this happen?” Well, the text says that God feels this way too.

The Scripture says that it rained for 40 days and 40 nights, and 7v19-20 state that the entire earth was flooded and that all mountains on earth were covered with water. The text in verse 22 is hard to translate, but it seems to say that the water rose to be 15 cubits, or about 22 feet, higher than the highest mountain. When the waters finally receded, only Noah’s family and the animals on the ark had survived.

Corruption means that conditions have gotten worse. It means “decay” or “spoiled”, that things used to be good, and now conditions are worse than they used to be. It’s a downward spiral. The flood account starts in Genesis 6. You remember that in Genesis 1, God creates and saw that “It was good”. Well, in Genesis 2 and 3, you have Adam and Eve in the Garden, and they eat the fruit. They turn away from God, disobey God, and experience a separation from God. Then, in Genesis chapter 4, Adam and Eve have two sons, Cain and Abel, and how does that turn out?

Cain murders his brother, Abel. A man *murders* his own *brother*. You see the downward spiral. Then, Genesis chapter 5 is one of the infamous genealogy lists, “a bunch of unpronounceable names begat a bunch of other unpronounceable names”. It’s like quicksand for people trying to read through the Bible. They’re reading along just fine, and then all of the sudden, they sink.

Then, in chapter 6, the flood account begins, and the text says that the world was filled with corruption and violence. Do you see the downward spiral of evil, corruption and violence? It spreads like a disease, and everyone shares some sort of responsibility in it.

Then the flood happens. In the ancient Middle East, the ocean was a symbol of chaos. We think of the ocean as a vacation, like a summer vacation in Myrtle Beach. These were desert people. In Genesis 1, you have God bringing order out of the chaotic water. The sea was a symbol for chaos.

So, when the flood waters crash down upon the land, the people who heard this story would have immediately realized that its like the world is coming unglued. This evil, violence and corruption has led to chaos in the world, and its destructive chaos.

Violence doesn’t just mean physical violence. It can mean emotional harm. It can mean injustice when innocent people are harmed. It means that, “I’m looking out for me, what I want is important, and I’m not really concerned about how it affects other people.” It’s self-serving, and even though we don’t

realize it, it leads to chaos. It's the mentality of, "I'm just a single drop of water, what harm am I doing?" Well, millions of those single drops of water create a flood that brings destruction.

The flood account doesn't mean that God causes all natural disasters. In Luke 13, Jesus is asked a question like that, and Jesus' reply indicates that natural disasters happen just because they happen. They happen because of weather patterns and tectonic plates, not because God is directly causing it. The first hearers of the flood story would have seen the flood as a chaotic consequence of evil in the world.

But God rescues Noah and his family by commanding Noah to build a boat that will see Noah and his family safely through the chaos. God protects them and gives the world a new start, so to speak. The human race begins again with Noah and his family, and it sets up the story of Abraham in Genesis chapter 12, in which God promises Abraham that he will bless the entire world through Abraham.

## **Jonah**

The Bible doesn't give a date for the flood, and it doesn't give a date for the Book of Jonah, but we do have at least an idea of when the Book of Jonah was written, several hundred years before Christ. The Book of Jonah is a literary masterpiece. It's only four chapters long, and it's one of those short stories that is packed with meaning in just a few pages.

God calls an Israelite prophet named Jonah to travel to a city called Nineveh and tell them that their city is going to be overthrown because of the evil they've committed. Nineveh is built on the banks of the Tigris River, in the same general area in which Noah lived in ancient Mesopotamia.

So, Jonah travels in the exact opposite direction of Nineveh to Tarshish, which is probably in Spain. It was thought to be the edge of the world. So, the author is saying that Jonah ran from God, and would go to the ends of the earth to avoid preaching to the people of Nineveh. It was because Jonah was afraid. Chapter four tells us that it was because Jonah knew that God is gracious, and Jonah didn't want to see the people of Nineveh spared. He wanted to see them destroyed like the people in the flood.

So, Jonah takes a ship to Tarshish across the Mediterranean Sea with a group of sailors. A horrible storm blows up, and the sailors are afraid they're going to die. They decide that someone has ticked off the gods, so they pace a dice game to find out who it is. The dice indicate that it's Jonah, so they like, "What did you do?" Jonah says, "Just throw me overboard." They're concerned about doing the right thing, so they decided to row back to shore, but the storm got worse. So, finally, they throw him overboard, and the storm subsided.

Jonah is drowning in the chaos of the sea. He has run from God, and his life has descended into chaos. The Book of Jonah repeats the word "down" five times. Then the text says, "The Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah." We've seen this before. Instead of being destroyed by the chaos, the fish is a type of ark that God provides to rescue someone from the chaos.

The fish spews Jonah onto dry land in the right direction, and Jonah travels 550 miles to Nineveh. Nineveh was built on the banks of Tigris River in Mesopotamia. He preaches to them, and Jonah goes outside of the city and sits down because he wants to watch the people of Nineveh suffer.

Why did Jonah hate the people of Nineveh so much? Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, and the Assyrians had been enemies of Jonah's people. The Assyrians had attacked them in the past, killed many people, and the Assyrians were known for being brutal, cruel, violent people with a vast army. One of the kings of Assyria, Sennacherib, ordered a stone carving commemorating his conquering of Babylon. It said, "Its inhabitants, young and old, I did not spare, and with their corpses I filled the streets of the city." The Assyrians practiced psychological warfare meant to strike terror into the hearts of the enemy. One of the ways they did this was by impaling enemy soldiers on the battlefield. If an enemy army showed up after a battle won by the Assyrians, they would see the defeated soldiers impaled on rows stakes across the battlefield. They would also put the heads of the enemy on stakes in the battlefield. One of Nineveh's nicknames was "the city of bloodshed (Nahum 3:1)." Theologian Phyllis Tribble says Nineveh was thought of as "evil incarnate."

The Assyrians didn't just impale their enemies. They invented another form of torturing someone to death- crucifixion. The Romans got it from Alexander the Great, who got it from the Assyrians. Jonah wanted to see the people of Nineveh pay for their brutality. So, he reclined near the city to watch it burn. What happens shocks Jonah. The people repent of their sins. They turn to God, and God spares their city. Jonah is suicidal. He doesn't understand how God could spare a people that Jonah hates so much.

Much of the known world had written the people of Nineveh off as "evil", horribly violent, and viewed them as irredeemable, "there is no good in 'those people'. They have no potential." God did not give up hope on the people of Nineveh. The people of Nineveh and the whole Assyrian empire were thought of as bloodthirsty, violent killers, cruel people who didn't value human life.

While Jonah is sitting in the hot desert sun, God protects him again by causing a shrub to grow miraculously over Jonah's head to give him shade, but then God causes the shrub to die. Jonah is sitting in the desert wishing he could die, because the shrub that gave him comfort is dead.

And the Book of Jonah ends with God saying, you had "pity" on the shrub because it made you comfortable. I have pity on the city of Nineveh because I care about my creation. God cares for the people Jonah hates.

The word "pity" is the Hebrew word "Hus". It means "pity, compassion, concern, care, empathy." "Hus" is connected with the eyes because it could involve shedding tears for someone because you care about him or her so much. God says that he has that kind of compassion and concern and tears for the people whom Jonah hates.

Both of these stories are about the chaos that takes place when we act violently towards other people. It's not just physical violence. It's thinking of ourselves and our own comfort and not being concerned about what is good for others.

The world was violent in Noah's time, and Jonah was just as violent toward the Ninevites and they had been toward Israel. He was violent toward them in his attitude. He had written them off as irredeemable, and as we saw violence leads to a downward spiral into chaos. Violence leads to more violence.

Just to see if these stories have anything to do with today... both the flood and the Jonah accounts take place in the same place. Do you where that is today? It's between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in ancient Mesopotamia. We have a Google Earth video. We'll start at Stonybrook and take a little flight to this place.

**Show video "Flying from Stonybrook to Iraq"**

**Then, when the video ends, Show "What is the meaning...?" slide**

It's Iraq. The city of Nineveh is now Mosul, Iraq, the site of some of the bloodiest battles of the war in Iraq in 2004 and 2005.

A week before the tenth anniversary of 9/11, do you think these stories have any relevance to our lives? These stories, however, are not just about war and terrorism.

They're about the way we view other people. They're about office politics, family fights, the way we view people we don't like, the way we view people who have hurt us. They're about the way we view people who have a different view of the Bible than we do, people who have different answers to their iDoubt questions, people who have different political views, and on and on.

If we have violent attitudes toward them, wishing them harm in any way, that leads to the downward spiral into chaos. If we are simply self-serving, and we care about our comfort, it leads to chaos.

God sheds tears for the people you don't like... just as God sheds tears for us. That's *difficult* for me, and that's an understatement, but if we don't realize that, we act in a way that leads to more chaos. Do you think these stories have any relevance for today?

That's the bad news... but there is even more powerful good news in these biblical accounts. God always provides a way out of the chaos. God provides a redemptive solution. That's what God is all about. He provides an ark or a fish or a.... cross.

Jesus alludes to the Jonah story in Matthew 12. Jesus said, "As Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days, so will I be in the grave. Jesus issued the same call to turn from evil and turn to God. In the death and resurrection of Jesus we see the ultimate example of God's "hus" for the world. Jesus overcame evil and offers to save us, rescue us from the chaos of evil. The first followers of Jesus saw Jesus as a type of ark, as a type of fish that God works through to rescue us from the chaos. When we follow Jesus, he is vehicle of redemption for us. Jesus' work the cross and our lifestyle of following rescues us from the chaos.