

Wheelerburg Baptist Church 9/25/08 Wednesday evening

Old Testament Survey—Jonah

Very few books in the Bible are more memorable than this one. Although brief (only four chapters), very few have caused as much debate at the grassroots level than this book. Even people who do not know much about the Bible have often heard the story contained in the book of Jonah.

Some view Jonah as a children's story, but there could hardly be a more relevant message for all ages than the one contained in the book of Jonah.

Discuss: What stands out to you when I mention the book of Jonah?

Who wrote the book?

--Anonymous

--Possibly, Jonah himself (Archer feels Jonah wrote the book)

Observations:

--Jonah was a prophet in the Northern Kingdom during the reign of Jeroboam II, according to 2 Kings 14:25.

--Unlike most other prophetic books, Jonah is a narrative account of a single episode in the life of the prophet.

When was the book written?

--8th century B.C. prophet (Jonah was a contemporary of Amos)

--A lot of revelation given in the 8th century (In the north--Amos, Hosea; In the south--Isaiah, Micah, Jonah)

Background: Jonah ministered during 800-750 B.C. During that time, Jeroboam II restored the borders of Israel, and ended conflict that had existed between Damascus (Syria) and Israel. Assyria defeated Syria in 797, and then Assyria had some internal problems. This allowed Jeroboam II to complete the restoration of Israel's northern borders (see note in NIV Study Bible, p. 1356).

So under Jeroboam II in the north and Uzziah in the south, Israel became very strong again in the first part of the 8th century (due to a political vacuum of other countries). Israel regained almost the same territory she held during the reigns of David and Solomon.

Summary: In the 9th century, Israel was a small, not very powerful nation. That changed in the 8th century. Then Israel enjoyed prosperity. The prosperity changed the values of the people.

Discuss: Money changes values. Do you agree? If so, how so? Money buys things. Money also buys people.

Overview of Jonah's Life:

When he was young >> prophesied that Jeroboam II would extend borders (2 Kgs 14:25)

During his mid-life years >> he went to Nineveh

When he was old >> he wrote the book

Why was the book written?

Review the Story Line:

Q: What did God tell Jonah to do in 1:2? Go, preach against Nineveh.

Note: Jonah is the only (??) prophet whose message got to another country.

Q: Why was judgment coming on Nineveh, acc. to 1:2? "wickedness..."

Q: What was Jonah's response to God's command? He went the *opposite* direction.

See: Map

Quote: I like Charles Wagner's outline of chapter one, "God said *go*. Jonah said *no*. God said, *Oh?*"

Jonah took a ship headed for Tarshish, but God sent a storm. Then a fish. Then came the trip to Nineveh, the message, the repentance, the sparing, and the gourd incident.

Key: How does the book end? With a question. Jonah is sulking because Nineveh was spared, and his gourd died, and God ask him (4:11), "Should I not be concerned about the great city?"

The purpose of the book is a satire against Israel. Nineveh had so little revelation and yet responded. Even the sailors had very little revelation from God, yet they responded. Yet Israel had so much revelation from God, but continued to play games with God. The book of Jonah is a back-door message to Israel. The focus isn't on Nineveh so much as on Jonah (who represents Israel)--"How are you going to respond, Israel?" (see notes by Leon Rowland)

What is the outline of the book?

I. Jonah flees (chs 1-2)

A. God gives him a mission (ch 1).

**Jonah disobeys.

B. God gives him a ride (ch 2).

**Jonah prays.

II. Jonah goes (chs 3-4)

A. God gives him a second chance (ch 3).

- **Nineveh repents.
- B. God gives Nineveh a second chance (ch 4).
 - **Jonah sulks.
 - **God reproves Jonah.

Questions of Interpretation:

--Many have questioned whether the book of Jonah is historical. Some have suggested it is a fictional short story, or an allegory, or a parable. But Jesus' reference to the episode supports its historicity (Mt 12:40).

What happened to Nineveh?

How do you explain the fact that the Ninevites responded in repentance? Jonah's message was only 8 words (NIV; 3:4). The people of Nineveh had a brutal reputation. Obviously, God prepared their hearts, but how?

1. Imagine the sight of Jonah, after 3 days in a fish!
2. God may have used some natural phenomena to get their attention. A plague went through Assyria in 765 B.C., and there was an eclipse of the sun in Assyria in 763 B.C. These events may have softened the people to look for a message from God. And then came Jonah.

Note: Did Nineveh's repentance last? See Nahum who prophesied Nineveh's fall.

What is the message of the book in one sentence?

In the book of Jonah, God uses a great fish to teach us some great lessons about Himself.

Q: Who's the main character in the book? God is! It's a book about God.

Discuss: What do we learn about God from this story? We see His holiness, his justice, his mercy, his power, and more...

What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?

1. God hates hypocrisy.

Someone has said there are three types of hypocrites. The first type is the hypocrite who knows he's a hypocrite, and others know it too. The second type is the person who doesn't know he's a hypocrite, but others do. The third type is the person who doesn't know he's a hypocrite, and those around him don't know either.

Q: Which kind was Jonah in 1:8-10? The second. Even pagan sailors can tell something's wrong with this man of the cloth! "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord..." "They knew he was running from the Lord..."

Q: Which is the worst kind of hypocrite? The third type (like the Pharisees)

2. *We see the sovereignty of God in the book of Jonah.*

See: The things God put in place in the story, some miraculous, some very ordinary acts of His providence:

--He sent a great wind (1:4)

--He sent a great fish (1:17)

--He released Jonah (2:10)

--He prepared a vine for shade (4:6), a worm (4:7), and wind (4:8).

Discuss: Is there any detail in our lives outside the control of God?

3. *God expects obedience from the heart.*

At first, Jonah flatly disobeyed. Then he obeyed, but did so with a wrong attitude.

Discuss: What was his attitude towards Nineveh (and God) in ch 3-4?

Key: In the book, everything responds to God *except Jonah*. The wind does, the fish does, the sailors do, the Ninevites do, the gourd does, the storm does. But Jonah doesn't, and he's a prophet of God! The question is for us, for we are the people of God, too. Will we respond to God?

4. *God taught Jonah that people are more important than things.*

How did He teach this lesson?

Did Jonah learn the lesson? Why are we not told? We are the answer. What are we going to do with God's questions to Jonah?

5. *Jonah is a type of Christ.*

How so? Jesus uses Jonah as a warning to unbelievers.