

The Minor Prophets - Jonah

- Introduction
 - The Hebrew word for Jonah is יוֹנָה (yo-naw) which means “dove” or “pigeon”.
 - Jonah is mentioned once in the O.T. outside this book [2 Kgs 14:25] and several times in the N.T. [Mt 12:39-41; 16:4; Lk 11:29-32].
 - The 2nd Kings passage gives us solid dating as Jeroboam II ruled Israel for 41 years between 793 and 753 B.C. [2 Kgs 14:23-27].
 - Jonah was a Hebrew [1:9], the son of Amittai [1:1] from Gath-hepher [2 Kgs 14:25].
 - Like Elijah and Elisha before him, Jonah was called to minister to the Gentiles – in Jonah’s case, the Ninevites.
 - Nineveh would later be the capital of Assyria who before long would conquer the Northern Kingdom, and carry them into captivity.
- Observations from the Text
 - The word of the Lord (דְּבַר־יְהוָה, debar-YHWH) came to Jonah [1:1].
 - This is a direct revelation from God given to Israel’s prophets, priests and kings.
 - This phrase appears almost 400 times in the O.T. as in Gen 15:1; 1 Sam 15:10; 2 Sam 7:4; 24:11; 1 Kgs 6:11; 16:1; 21:17; Isa 38:4; Jer 28:12; Ezek 1:3; Hosea 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1; 3:1; Micah 1:1; Zeph 1:1; Haggai 1:1; Zech 1:1.
 - Jonah is commanded to arise and go cry against Nineveh [1:2].
 - Nineveh was one of the cities built by Nimrod after the flood [Gen 10:8-11].
 - Nineveh is called “the great city” in Jonah’s day [1:2 cp. 3:2-3; 4:11].
 - The wickedness of the people of Nineveh had risen up before God [1:2 cp. Gen 18:20-21; 19:12-13; Hosea 7:2].
 - Instead of obeying God’s command to go to Nineveh, Jonah caught a ride on a ship heading toward Tarshish which is in the opposite direction [1:3].
 - Tarshish was a merchant city [2 Chr 9:21].
 - Tarshish was probably located in Spain.



- Jonah’s efforts to flee from the presence of the Lord are futile [Job 34:21-22; Ps 139:7-12; Pr 15:3; Isa 29:15; Jer 16:7; 23:23-24; Heb 4:13].
- Jonah had allowed his Jewish pride to distort his thinking and he shirked his responsibility as a prophet of the Lord.

- The Lord sent a powerful wind upon the sea to thwart Jonah's plans, so great a storm that the ship was in danger of breaking up [1:4].
- The sailors on the ship became afraid [1:5].
 - Each sailor cried to his own god.
 - As experienced sailors, they then began to jettison cargo in an attempt to save the ship from sinking.
 - Jonah was oblivious to the peril as he slept in the hold of the ship.
- The captain of the ship woke Jonah up and implored him to pray to his 'god' [1:6].
- The sailors reckoned that someone onboard had done something wrong resulting in the wrath of the 'gods' coming upon them, so they cast lots to see who it was [1:7].
 - The casting of lots (marked stones?) was common in the ancient Near East [Lev 16:8; Josh 18:6; 1 Sam 14:42; Neh 10:34; Es 3:7; Acts 1:26].
 - God demonstrated His sovereignty by causing the lot to fall on Jonah [Pr 16:33].
- The sailors questioned Jonah and found out that he was a God fearing Jew [1:8-9].
 - Jonah spoke of the one true God of heaven in contrast to their many 'gods'.
 - Jonah mentioned that God made the land and the sea, implying that He controls the sea.
 - Jonah's statement is an interesting example of how carnal believers know who God is, yet disobey Him in their rebellion.
- The sailors were frightened and shocked at Jonah's disobedience [1:10-11].
 - They correctly determined that the storm was the result of Jonah's fleeing.
 - They decided that they must do something "to" Jonah to resolve the situation.
- Jonah did not want his rebellion to harm others, so he offered his own life to save the sailors (and avoid going to Nineveh?) [1:12].
- The sailors did not want to take Jonah's life, so they vainly tried to return to land [1:13].
- The sailors now knew that they would have to resort to following Jonah's instructions, but they had seen what God could do, so they pleaded with the Lord not to hold them accountable for Jonah's life [1:14].
- After the sailors had thrown Jonah into the sea, the seas calmed [1:15].
- The sailors now understood the power of God and feared Him (and believed in Him?) [1:16].
- Instead of drowning in the sea, Jonah was swallowed up by a large fish [1:17].
 - In the Hebrew text, verse 17 of chapter one is actually the first verse of chapter two.
 - Jonah remained in the stomach of the fish for three days and nights.
- While in the stomach of the fish Jonah offered up a psalm of thanks to God [2:1-9].
 - He recalled the experience of being thrown into the sea and being engulfed in the deep.
 - As he was nearing death, he turned his thoughts to God and prayed.
 - The fish rescued Jonah from drowning.
 - Jonah vowed to offer sacrifices to the Lord who he knew had actually saved him.

- The Lord then commanded the fish to expel Jonah [2:10].
 - God freed Jonah from the fish after he had shown contriteness of heart by offering thanks for being swallowed up by the fish.
 - Animals are not moral creatures and will always obey the commands of God.
 - God had the fish expel Jonah on dry land, safe from the dangers of the sea.
- This entire experience is a type of Christ and His death, burial and resurrection.
 - Jonah being willing to give himself up to save the sailors is a type of Christ being willing to give Himself up to save all of us.
 - Jonah being in the fish three days is a type of Christ being in the tomb [Matt 12:40].
 - Jonah being freed from the fish is a type of Christ being freed from the tomb.
- God once again commanded Jonah to arise and go to Nineveh [3:1-2].
- This time Jonah obeyed God's command [3:3].
 - God controlled Jonah's circumstances, but God allowed Jonah to choose to go.
 - The city is so large it takes a three day walk to make your way through the city.
- One day's walk into Nineveh, Jonah delivers God's oracle of an imminent overthrow [3:4].
- The people of Nineveh and the king heeded the warning and believed in God [3:5-9].
 - Their faith was the response God desired.
 - The universal call for sackcloth and a fast were the outward expression of that faith.
 - They won God's favor by believing in Him and called upon God to help them turn from their wickedness and violence.
 - They had hope that God would relent.
- Because they believed in God and turned from their wicked ways, God did not bring the calamity upon the people of Nineveh [3:10].
 - Their turn from wickedness was a result of their faith and their supplication before God.
 - God would have overthrown Nineveh had the people not repented.
 - God knows everything including all of the what-ifs of history.
- Jonah became very angry that God had relented of Nineveh's demise [4:1-3].
 - Jonah's Jewish pride had resulted in an irrational hatred for the Assyrian people.
 - Even after being the object of God's gracious compassion, Jonah did not have any such compassion toward the people of Nineveh.
 - After praying to God to save his live while in the deep, Jonah now asked God to take his life.
- God asks a rhetorical question to show Jonah he has no good reason to be angry [4:4].
- Continuing to pout, Jonah goes outside of the city, builds a shelter and watches the city to see if God will destroy it anyway [4:5].
- God continues to show compassion to Jonah by providing him shade [4:6].
 - The growth of the plant was miraculous.
 - Jonah's happiness was selfish in nature.

- The next day God directed a worm to attack the shade giving plant [4:7].
- God then brought forth a scorching wind that caused Jonah to become faint [4:8].
 - Jonah's temporary happiness had been based upon his circumstances.
 - Jonah one again asked God to take his life.
- God once again asks Jonah if he has a good reason to be angry [4:9].
- This time Jonah answers God, not recognizing the contrast between his concern for his own physical welfare, but not for the spiritual welfare of the Ninevites [4:9].
- The Lord pointed out how ridiculously selfish Jonah's viewpoint is [4:10-11].
 - Jonah grieved for the plant only because it had provided him with shade.
 - God had compassion on thousands of souls.
- The book ends with the question and we do not know how Jonah responded, but God had made His points.
 - God is sovereign.
 - God cares about the Gentile nations, not only the Jewish people.
 - God punishes rebellion, but is compassionate and longsuffering in doing so, desiring that we will choose to turn back to Him.
- Applications for Today
 - Jonah teaches us about the Will of God – His directive will, permissive will, consequential will, overruling will, decretive will and geographic will.
 - God communicates His directive will and allows His creatures to volitionally obey or disobey.
 - God demonstrates His permissive will in patiently tolerating our disobedience to His directive will [Matt 23:37].
 - God administers His consequential will through discipline upon His children who are operating in His permissive will [Gal 6:7-8].
 - God imposes His overruling will by controlling circumstances (not volition) so that His directive will is accomplished in spite of disobedience [Job 42:2; Isa 46:10].
 - God's accomplishes His decretive will without regard to the volitional choices of His creatures.
 - God reveals His geographic will as he directs our steps [Ps 37:23; Pr 3:6; 16:9; Mt 2:16-23].
 - The good works that God has prepared for us [Eph 2:10] are not based upon our personal preferences [Heb 12:1].
 - Resisting God's plan and purpose for our lives is essentially the same thing Satan did in his rebellion against God [Isa 14:12-14; Job 33:13; 40:2; Isa 45:9; Rom 9:20-21].
 - Happiness which comes from circumstances in life pales in comparison with the joy we have in the Lord [Ecc 2:1-11; John 15:11; 17:13].
 - God gives us warnings in our lives to bring about a change in our thinking and a subsequent change in our conduct.
 - When these changes take place, God may alter the consequences [2 Sam 12:22; Joel 2:14].
 - If not, God still deserves our worship [Dan 3:18].