

The Prophets

Lesson #7

Jonah

Outline

I. **Jonah Fleeing (1:1-17)**

- A. The reason for his flight (1:1-2).
- B. The route of his flight (1:3).
- C. The results of his flight (1:4-17).
 1. To the sailors (1:4-11).
 2. To Jonah (1:12-17).

II. **Jonah Praying (2:1-10)**

- A. The characteristics of his prayer (2:1-9).
- B. The answer to his prayer (2:10).

III. **Jonah Preaching (3:1-10)**

- A. God's command to preach (3:1-3).
- B. The content of Jonah's preaching (3:4).
- C. The consequences of Jonah's preaching (3:5-10).

IV. **Jonah Learning (4:1-11)**

- A. Jonah's complaint to God (4:1-3).
- B. God's lessons for Jonah (4:4-11).

Notes

Jonah 1:1-17

- The reason for his flight (1:1-2).
 - "Jonah son of Amittai" is the only prophetic name recorded for the North in the nearly forty years between the death of Elisha and the ministry of Amos (2 Kings 14:25). Later rabbinic tradition claimed that Jonah was the widow's son brought back to life by Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24).
 - Nineveh was long noted for the wickedness and cruelty of its people. The political and military temper of the city was at a low ebb at this time; therefore, it was a suitable time for the Lord to make an appeal for repentance.
- The route of his flight (1:3).
 - Apparently "Tarshish" comes from a Semitic root meaning "to smelt"; since there were a number of places with this name on the Mediterranean coast, probably Tartessus in Spain is intended.
 - Israel was involved in the battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C. and under Jehu paid tribute to Assyria in 841 B.C. If Assyria were to be spared

now, it could only be that the doom pronounced at Horeb to Elijah (1 Kings 19:15-18) should go into full effect.

- The results of his flight (1:4-17).
 - To the sailors (1:4-11).
 - Wind and storm are ministers of God, sent by Him to accomplish His purpose (cf. Psalm 104:4).
 - The ship was about to be broken up and smashed to pieces in the storm. This need not be considered a miracle, but rather an act of God; for severe storms are not uncommon on the Mediterranean Sea.
 - After the struggle within him and the decision to flee, the prophet was no doubt mentally and physically exhausted. Relaxation following the strain may account for the prophet's ability to sleep in the middle of the storm.
 - Though one could criticize Jonah for fleeing from the divinely given task, one cannot help admiring him for the honesty, boldness and the courage of his confession. However, his confession was in stark contrast to his actions.
 - To Jonah (1:12-17).
 - Like Jonah, Jesus was willing to be sacrificed for the sake of others; but unlike Jonah, who had brought the present storm on them by running from God, Jesus came to calm the storm brought on by those whom He came to save.
 - Even the disobedience and flight of His prophet became a means in the hands of God to glorify Himself. God makes even the wrath of men praise Him!
 - The miracle is not that a fish was present, but that Jonah survived the ordeal of the "three days and three nights" in the stomach of the creature, living to carry out the purpose of God. Clearly, the term "three days and three nights" is intended as an approximation, not a precise period of seventy-two hours. The use by Jesus (Matthew 12:40) should almost certainly be understood in the same way.

Jonah 2:1-10

- The characteristics of his prayer (2:1-9).
 - "From the belly of hell" is literally "from the belly of Sheol." Sheol is often no more than a synonym for the grave; Jonah was not saying, however, that he thought he was buried but that he had gone to join the dead.
 - Both repentance and hope are expressed in vs. 4. He was cast out from before God's eyes. The prophet could not endure this, so it brought him to repentance. The fact that he was alive in the belly of

the fish assured him that he would look again toward the holy temple of God's presence.

- One can only image the incredible discomfort and terrifying experience of those three days! Because he was entrapped, there was no hope of return apart from a divine intervention. Jonah had followed his own way instead of God's and had come to a sad end.
- The answer to his prayer (2:10).
 - The only source of salvation is God, and the prophet had learned this the hard way. We are left to wonder about many particulars of Jonah's rescue from the great fish.
 - The literal Hebrew reads, "And the Lord spoke to the fish." Unlike the prophet, the fish responded promptly, as soon as it knew God's will.

Jonah 3:1-10

- God's command to preach (3:1-3).
 - There was no protest and no mention of Jonah's former call by God and flight. The Lord passes over this in gracious silence; the prophet had learned his lesson, and with this God is satisfied.
 - Although there are numerous explanations of the phrase "three days' journey," it seems to best to think that the reference is to Nineveh itself, to the seven or eight miles of its circumference. This would mean that it would take the prophet three days to complete his mission, going from section to section where the crowds would be found, and preaching to them as they would gather about him.
- The content of Jonah's preaching (3:4).
 - On the first day, Jonah proclaimed his message. There may well have been something about Jonah, his bearing or his dress as he strode toward the center of the city, looking neither to the right nor to the left, that drew many after him.
 - When he stood and shouted, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," the news spread like wildfire. The credibility of the message was underscored by the fact that at the time Assyria stood in considerable danger from its northern neighbors. However, the word of the Lord worked the miracle, not Jonah or his commentary.
 - If the nation would listen to God and repent, God would repent of the evil He had determined against it (cf. Jeremiah 18:7-10).
- The consequences of Jonah's preaching (3:5-10).
 - The man who had been in "Sheol" and had been raised as it were from the dead would be a tremendous "sign." The people not only believed God, but the greatest to the least of them demonstrated that belief by clothing themselves in sackcloth as a symbol of grief and penitence.

- The covering of the animals was a custom practiced in mourning for the death of a great person. He further decreed that all turn away from their evil deeds. This indicates that the national conscience recognized that the overthrow of the city would be a just retribution on them for their wickedness.
- We can know the character of God only from what He does and the words He uses to explain His actions. When He does not do what He said He would, we as finite beings can say only that He has changed His mind or repented, even though we should recognize, as Jonah did (4:2), that He had intended or desired this all along.

Jonah 4:1-11

- Jonah's complaint to God (4:1-3).
 - We would expect Jonah now to rejoice that Nineveh had been spared and that God had so wonderfully blessed his preaching, but not so. Instead, we find Jonah very displeased, even angry with God for the mercy He had shown to this heathen people.
 - Jonah's motive could only stem from what Nineveh had meant in Israel's past and what he expected it to be in the future (cf. Nahum 2:1-3:19). Interestingly, the prophet now prays that God will take his life from him, for he considered it better to die than to live to see the city spared.
- God's lessons for Jonah (4:4-11).
 - The prophet departed as a pouting child to prepare a booth where he would be protected from the sun, and where he could wait to see whether God would change His mind.
 - The spirit of Jonah is the same as that of Job's three friends, who were willing to torture Job in order to save their own tradition. It is the same as the elder brother who was angry that his younger brother had returned home alive to enjoy his father's favor and forgiveness.
 - With a miracle, God raised up a gourd overnight to shield Jonah from the sun. When it was taken away, Jonah again wished that he would die, even expressing a great excess of anger.
 - Jonah had apparently grown completely indifferent to the fate of God's creation outside Israel. If man is so affected by small concerns, should not God be concerned over Nineveh with its teeming thousands? God was concerned not only for the huge population, but also for the animal world as well.