

Minor Prophets: Jonah

Background

- Jonah is the son of Amittai (of whom we know nothing).
- “He (Jereboam II) did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin. He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.” 2 Kings 14:25
- Set in the reign of [Jeroboam II](#) (786–746 BC)
- The book of Jonah is a bit different from the other Minor Prophets. It is a book primarily about the prophet’s journey to deliver the Word of the LORD.
- It is written in the tradition of satire. [Satire](#) is used in many works of literature to show foolishness or vice in humans, organizations, or even governments - it uses [sarcasm](#), ridicule, or [irony](#). For example, satire is often used to effect political or social change, or to prevent it.
- In particular Jonah uses juxtaposition to highlight God’s mercy in the face of Jonah’s hatred.
- There is a fair amount of skepticism, even within orthodox Christianity, as to whether or not Jonah is historical. They tend to take it as a parable which mentions real people. There is a great skepticism about the ability for a man to survive 3 days in a great fish/whale. However, Jesus seemed to take Jonah quite seriously.

History of Nineveh and Israel

- Nimrod was the founder of Nineveh (Genesis 10:8-11). Thought to be a legend it was rediscovered in 1845 by A.H. Layard, a British Archaeologist. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire. They were famous for their brutality when conquering other nations. Famously, they would take captured soldiers, strip them down and impale them on poles that were then stuck into the ground erected around the city that was yet to surrender. They also had a nasty habit of taking the leaders of the city and skinning them alive in front of their people. Then they took the inhabitants and moved them into different locations throughout the empire.
- Jeroboam II was king and Assyria was not a threat at this time. Trade of olive oil and wine was bringing massive prosperity to the northern tribes in Israel. This led to success, opulence, idolatry and oppression of the lowly that the prophets railed against.
- In 2 Kings Jonah prophesy’s in favor of Jeroboam II, stating that the borders would be restored. This does take place. It is around this time period that Jonah goes to Nineveh.

What Does Jonah Say?

Jonah Disobedient and Delivered: Chs. 1-2

- 1:1 The Word of the LORD comes to Jonah “**Arise, go to Nineveh...**” but... he goes to Tarshish “**away from the presence of the LORD.**”
- God sends the storm so severe that the sailors are throwing cargo over and, being pagans, calling out to their gods. Amidst all this, Jonah is asleep. He is found by the captain and told to “**Arise.**”
- The contrast between the soft hearted sailors turning to Yahweh and Jonah’s stiff necked flight is ironic juxtaposition.
- Chapter 2 places us with Jonah in the belly of the “great fish” that Yahweh appointed to take him.
- In this beautiful poem Jonah repents. He ends the poem saying, “What I have vowed, I will pay.”

Jonah Obedient and Delivered: Chs. 3-4

- The Word of the LORD comes to Jonah “**Arise, go to Nineveh... call out against it the message I tell you.**”
- Jonah preaches the shortest sermon ever “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” Everyone repents.

- Again there is a dynamic contrast and irony between Jonah's hard heartedness and tenderheartedness of a group of Gentiles.
- God relents and has mercy on the Ninevites.
- Jonah is "displeased." Jonah asks God to kill him. God asks if Jonah is right to be angry.
- God appoints a plant, a worm and a wind. Jonah is angry unto death because of his compassion for the dead plant. Ironically God asks Jonah if He should not in the same way have compassion on the people of Nineveh.

What Does It Mean?

- The major point is that God is, as Jonah says, "gracious and compassionate...slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity."
- Jonah is hard hearted, prejudiced and racist. The reader from Israel would take this as a reminder and a warning. God's covenant people were to be a beacon to the nations.
- God cares about nations, people and animals (resources).
- God's timetable is not our own. Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C.
- Jesus references Jonah and the repentance of Nineveh in Matthew 12:38-41. There is very interesting typology in the life of Jonah and Christ. Jesus seems to take Jonah seriously and even uses Nineveh as a rebuke against this generation of Jews.

How Does it Apply?

- It is important to remember that God cares about nations and people in those nations.
- Are we hateful, prejudiced, or even racist?
- God may very well be calling us into hostile territory to share the grace of God. Will we do it, or will be like Jonah?
- We have something greater than Jonah, in the person of Jesus Christ. Are we living like Him? Are we learning more about Him? Are we talking to Him?