

## MINOR PROPHETS

### Session\_6\_ JONAH - Intro & Chapter 1

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#### Background To Jonah

Jonah is written in the third person and while some make claims to the effect that Jonah is not the author, there are examples of other OT authors writing of themselves this way (Ex 11:3; 1Sa 12:11). While there are no known writings from Jonah to the Northern tribes, he was from Gath-hepher near Nazareth making him a Galilean (The Pharisees said “no prophet has come from Galilee”) = wrong! Jonah was a prophet from Galilee in the past just as Jesus, the greatest prophet, was from Galilee at their time. Jonah’s lived during the reign of Jeroboam II (793 - 753B.C.). It was a prosperous time materially but not spiritually for Israel who had slipped into decadence and idolatry.

Amos’s ministry was close to the time of Jonah so both shared the same background experience within the northern kingdom. Despite the desperate condition of God’s people, Jonah was sent to call to repentance the people of the largest known Gentile city at the time - Nineveh. Eventually the Assyrians were used by God to bring judgment upon His own people in 722 B.C. The Assyrians later faced the revenge of God when they fell to the Babylonian Empire in 612 B.C.

Nineveh was founded by Nimrod, the great-grandson of Noah (Gen 10:6-12). The city and her people were ancient enemies of Israel. Unlike the many other prophecy’s against Israel’s enemies, Jonah’s message is the only one that God wanted delivered to the people in person. God used this real life example to demonstrate the reality of His own people and highlight their own spiritual hardness of heart.

#### Typology of Jonah

There are several typological examples to be drawn from Jonah. Jonah, much like the Pharisee’s of Christ’s day, hated Gentiles because of his own self-righteousness. Jonah was a reflection of the hard-heartedness of God’s people. By contrast, the Gentile city would respond with a broken heart and repent at the preaching of God’s Word. This was a picture of the church age - while Israel remains hostile toward the Messiah, the Word has been received largely by the Gentile church; “a people who were not my people”. Additionally, Jonah became very jealous at the repentance of the enemy. Paul says in Romans chapter 11 that the Gentile church will be used by God to provoke Israel to jealousy (Romans 11:13-15).

The greatest type in Jonah is in the example of Jonah being in the belly of the fish for 3 days and 3 nights; a sign used by Christ to point to His death, burial and resurrection while rebuking His people who were constantly seeking a sign (Mt 12:39; 16:4; Lk 11:29,30). Finally, Israel was commissioned by God to be a witness to the world (Is 43:10-12, 44:8), a calling against which they have rebelled (Ex 32:1-4; Jdg 2:11-19; Eze 6:1-5; Mk 7:6-9). But God will bring His people through tribulation to be what they have been called to be (Jer 30:11; 31:35-37; Hos 3:3-5; Zec 8:23; Rev 7:1-8; 14:1-3).

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#### Miracles in Jonah

1:4 "the Lord hurled a great wind on the sea."  
1:7 "the lot fell on Jonah"  
1:15 "the sea stopped its raging"  
1:17 "the Lord appointed a great fish"  
1:17 "to swallow Jonah (alive)"  
2:10 "the Lord commanded the fish...it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land"

3:10 "God saw their deeds...they turned from their wicked way"  
4:6 "the Lord appointed a plant"  
4:7 "the Lord appointed a worm"  
4:8 "God appointed a scorching east wind"

#### Outline of Jonah

- I. Running from God's will (1:1-17)
  - A. Jonah's commission (1:1,2)
  - B. The Flight of Jonah (1:3)
  - C. The Pursuit of Jonah (1:4-16)
  - D. The Preservation of Jonah (1:17)
- II. Submitting to God's Will (2:1-10)
  - A. The Helplessness of Jonah (2:1-3)
  - B. The Prayer of Jonah (2:4-7)
  - C. The Repentance of Jonah (2:8-9)
  - D. The Deliverance of Jonah (2:10)

- III. Fulfilling God's Will (3:1-10)
  - A. The Commission Renewed (3:1-2)
  - B. The Prophet Obeys (3:3-4)
  - C. The City Repents (3:5-9)
  - D. The Lord Relents (3:10)
- IV. Fulfilling God's Will (4:1-11)
  - A. The Prophet displeased (4:1-5)
  - B. The Prophet Rebuked (4:6-11)

***1-3) "Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD." [Jon 1:1-3 ESV]***

The Assyrian Empire lasted 930 to 612 B.C. and was responsible for the defeat of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. Nineveh was its thriving capitol city. Nineveh was some 60 mi. in circumference and was protected by both an outer and inner wall. The inner wall was 50 feet wide by 100 feet high. It had 1,200 towers 200 feet high. There is much the Bible has to say about this city; its people and their wickedness. Isaiah's book prophesies much about her certain doom (Isa 10:5-19; 17:12-14; 18:4-6; 30:27-33; 37:21-35;). Nahum also spoke of their crimes (Nah 3:1,4,16).

Assyria was well known for evil and violence, in particular against those whom they captured in war. Even the Assyrian king acknowledged these facts (3:8). They thought of themselves as invincible (Zeph 2:15). Like all of the Pagan nations in history, they served many idols and had many temples dedicated to their worship (Nabu, Asshur, Adad and Dagon).

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**The City of Nineveh**



**The Inner City**

Jonah is also the only prophet commissioned by the Lord who actually initially refused to do what God had asked. While Jonah probably was under no illusion that he could go anywhere to escape God's actual presence, he more than likely was attempting to get as far away from Israel as possible since it had the temple presence of the Lord. The actual location of Tarshish is not known for sure but the Greek philosopher Herodotus identified it with Tartessus, a merchant city in southern Spain.

Tarshish is mentioned elsewhere biblically as a wealthy city (1Ki 10:22; Ps 72:10; Jer 10:9; 20:7-9; Eze 27:12,25). They had ships capable of making long voyages (Isa 60:9). Joppa (Jaffa today) is on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea between the borders of Judah and Samaria - the same place of Peter's vision concerning Cornelius.



**Jonah's refused God's plan by 180°!**

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**4-5)“But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.”**

There are storms and then there are the few examples in the Bible where men who are seasoned sailors and fisherman become terrified over situations that are beyond a normal storm that cause men to recognize God (Acts 27). The judgments that God will bring on the earth recorded in Revelation will cause men to recognize that God is the direct source yet they will curse God. The text reminds us that nothing is coincidence - God is in control of the smallest details in life:

*"he makes his messengers winds, his ministers a flaming fire." [Psa 104:4 ESV]*

As Nebuchadnezzar wrote *"all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" "* [Dan 4:35 ESV] and he added that God is able to humble the most proud!

Jonah was sleeping in the midst of the storm; certainly a sign of his absolute calloused heart toward God's command. His false sense of security is much like the nation of Israel toward God in their rebellion to witness to Gentiles and in their rejection of Jesus. They proclaimed "We are of Abraham" and implied that Jesus was illegitimate, but their hearts were not of God.

**6-7)“So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish." And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah."**

Not only is Jonah running from what the Lord had told him to do but in this immediate moment he is failing to be a witness to the pagan people who seek comfort in false gods. Compare this with Paul's witness to the Roman shipmen and guards (Acts 27) as he sought to share the peace of Christ with them. Jonah should have been praying himself for his own sin and for the lives of those that his sin was immediately impacting - he had to be told by a pagan to pray. Casting lots was not only practiced by pagan people but there are several examples of the practice by the people of God knowing that "the lot is in the lap of the Lord"(Proverbs 16:33).

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#### Casting Lots

The casting of lots occurs many times in scripture as it was used for determining God's will, yet there is no description given as to how this was done. Several examples are:

- Sin of Achan – Josh 7:16 · Division of Land – Josh 15:1 · Assigning inheritances – Num 26:55; 34:13
- Selecting men for expedition – Judg 1:1; 20:10 · Electing a king – 1Sam 10:20 · Jonathan's sin – 1Sam 14:41,42 · The choosing of Matthias – Acts 1:26 · The selection of the scape goat – Lev 16:8

**8-9)***"Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." "*

Here, at least under interrogation, Jonah speaks boldly concerning who God is as the only creator and God. The pagan men questioning him had gods (in their minds) for the many different aspects of creation and forces within creation (ie. god of the wind, god of the sea; etc.). These sailors were most likely from Phoenicia, the center of Baal worship. Baal was considered to be a sky god.

Ancient culture was unlike our secular humanistic culture of today who view science as god and say "there is no god" while the Word of God says "the fool hath said in his heart there is no god"(Psa 14:1; 53:1). Still, believing in false gods isn't much better. The ancients all believed there were "creators" behind creation (Rom 1:18-23). Paul discussed "the unknown god" to the pagans at Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-32) and when he and Barnabas were perceived as gods by the people at Lystra they began to preach same way – with the God who created the heavens and the earth (Acts 14:14-17). Paul used different approaches to evangelizing depending on the circumstances.

**10-12)***"Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you." "*

Ironically Jonah claimed to fear God and yet it seems to be these men who fear God more after he had told them his defiance against God. Additionally they understood that there was to be an immediate response to God's chastening. Additionally they understood that there was to be an immediate response to God's chastening. Notice Jonah's thinking still – he would rather be thrown into the sea than go to Nineveh! At the same time Jonah's willingness to die in the sea so that these many sailors could live fits the typology of Christ Who laid down His life in order that the storm of God's wrath may pass over us.

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Recall what Caiaphas had said concerning Jesus:

*"But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish. " " [Jhn 11:49-50 ESV]*

**13-16)***"Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Therefore they called out to the LORD, "O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you." So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows."*

In contrast to Jonah these men feared God more over the death of one man than Jonah cared about the death of hundreds of thousands. They knew that Jonah was acting in defiance, yet they still recognized that he was God's man. Just as God had brought about the storm suddenly, He brought it to an end just as suddenly. This command of God struck the hearts of Jesus' disciples in the same way:

*"And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?" " [Mat 8:23-27 ESV]*

Apparently these men became converted as they recognized the sovereign God. They said "you have done as you pleased" and made vows as they sacrificed to Him. When they eventually made it back to Joppa in their sea going they may have sought out the Jews instruction concerning Jehovah as part of their vows.

**17)***" And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."*

"The Lord appointed" - all of creation serves the Lord. Here a fish is appointed to bring Jonah into the circumstances of utter despair. In the typology, several aspects of this real event point to Christ, the first of which is the fact that His suffering and death on behalf of "the many" (Rom 5:19) was "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God"(Acts 2:23). Jonah also sank into the depths of the sea just as Christ descended into the abyss where He made proclamation to the spirits who sinned (1Pe 3:19).

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The duration of 3 days and 3 nights was also a direct type for Christ's own prophetic duration of being in the tomb prior to His resurrection:

*"So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken." [Jhn 2:18-22 ESV]*

In fact it was the only sign remaining that Jesus said He would give to His stubborn people:

*"Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here." [Mat 12:38-42 ESV]*

### **Our Challenge:**

How do we feel when it comes to being the witnesses of Christ; especially toward those we view as enemies?

More important than anything we can "help" mankind with is telling them about the good news of Jesus - more important than any material thing we can offer.

Viewing witnessing to others through the lens of the mystery of God's sovereign work is a very powerful motivator in overcoming fear or timidity. Ask the Lord whom He has appointed for you to witness to.