

The Book of the Prophet Jonah

12 6 16

Jonah 800-753 BC Pre Exilic

- Jonah typifies a category of prophets of *Yahweh*
 - He prophesied to *Israel*
 - The exact date of his works is not known but is similar to the universal message of *Isaiah* (550-525) and post exilic work of *Zechariah*
 - He is mentioned by name in 2 Kg 14:25 during the reign of *Jeroboam II* (**793-753 B.C.**)
 - Is he a real person?

Jonah (Cont)

- *Jonah* is also referenced in:
 - Tobit 14:1-10
 - Matthew 12:38-42
 - Luke 11:29-32

Jonah (Cont)

- Jonah was born at *Gath-hepher* in the territory of *Zebulun* about 5 miles north of *Nazareth*
- His early prophecies were popular because he prophesied the victory of Israel and the expansion of its territory to the original boundaries
- The Lord granted a temporary stay in his judgment on Israel by permitting his people an unparalleled era of prosperity under Jeroboam II
- Israel and Judah took God's grace for granted

Jonah (Cont)

- By the time of Jonah's ministry, Assyria was preoccupied with local insurgents and did not continue her westward campaigns until *Tiglath-pileser III (745 B.C.)* came to power
- During this preoccupation, Israel aggressively pursued a policy of defense by fortifying cities, raising an army and employing international diplomacy
- Israel did not realize how God was free to deal favorably with Assyria and pour out his judgment on Israel

Jonah (Cont)

- Jonah is a narrative about a disobedient prophet who evades his divine mission, is redirected, and then complains of its success
- It is meant to amuse and instruct
- Its message is:
 - Serves Israel and extends Joel's message of God's mercy as it applies to Israel and other nations
 - Stresses the importance of humility and sincere repentance

Jonah (Cont)

- Jonah is presented with two commissions from God to prophesy to Nineveh:
 - First he flees, goes to sea, is cast overboard and swallowed by the great fish
 - Then he obeys and preaches to Nineveh
- In both, God uses nature to bring him to deliver a message of new life
- Presents the divine mercy that no human can merit but which God bestows on all people

Jonah (Cont)

- Jonah's main focus is on the idea that God desires that all men be saved
 - This represents the Old Testament understanding of the value of repentance
- This concept reflects the type of death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as we saw in Mt 12:39-41
 - Jesus says that "one greater than Jonah is here"
 - Jonah will spend three days and three nights in the belly of the whale as will Jesus in the tomb

Jonah (Cont)

- What swallowed Jonah?
 - In Hebrew it was a “big swimming thing”
 - In Greek it was a “big whale”
 - In the Latin vulgate Jerome translated from the Hebrew as a “big fish”
- The point of the story is that “a big sea creature swimming thing” swallowed this guy!

Jonah 1

- Jonah 1:1-3
 - *Jonah*, while living in Northern Galilee, was called by God to go and prophesy to the people of *Nineveh*, the capital of the Assyrian Empire
 - He should have gone northeast over the Fertile Crescent
 - Instead he goes to *Joppa* and gets on a ship bound for *Tarshish* (in modern Spain) which was considered to be the farthest western place one could go
 - According to Father Sebastian this is the story of “our lives!”

Jonah 1 (Cont)

- The question is “why would he disobey God” since he is a prophet of God who was sent to speak to *Jeroboam II* and his people?
- His reluctance is a common theme throughout the prophets
 - God tells a prophet to do something and he says, “no”!
 - They often tell God that He has chosen the wrong man
 - Look at the story of Moses in **Exodus 3 and 4***
- Here, God tells *Jonah* to go to *Nineveh* and tell the people that they are all living in sin and are about to die

Jonah 1 (Cont)

- *Jonah* tells God “no way, this is a bad idea”, and then gets on a boat heading in the opposite direction
- Even though he fled from God there was no way that he or we can get away from His presence *

Jonah 1 (Cont)

- Jonah 1: 4-5
 - Again, we see LORD in all capitals meaning it was the divine name, “*Yahweh*”
 - The pagans were very pious and worshiped almost any god
 - Since they are afraid that they were about to die, they believed that their only salvation was through a God
 - They begin to pray to their gods as they lightened the ship *

Jonah 1 (Cont)

- Jonah 1:6-9
 - These are polytheists who have their favorite gods
 - They told *Jonah* that they will call on their gods and asked him to call on his God in hopes that one of them would help them
 - They are becoming desperate as they seek someone to blame
 - They cast lots hoping the God of history will save them
 - *Jonah* tells them that his God is the God of the heavens and the earth *

Jonah 1 (Cont)

- Jonah 1:10-17
 - The men learn that the God of *Jonah* is causing the problem
 - Since they are polytheists they have no problem believing that the God of *Jonah* exists
 - Suddenly they are praying to the God of Israel
 - They convert and make a vow to the God of Israel
 - *Jonah* is cast into the sea and swallowed up by a great fish, whale or large swimming thing *

Jonah 2

- Jonah 2
 - *Jonah* (inside the whale) was like most of us who begin to pray when we get into trouble
 - *Jonah* prays to *Yahweh* who has placed him in the belly of the big fish preventing him from going anywhere
 - He knows that he can no longer flee
 - He is pinned down

Jonah 2 (Cont)

- This prayer of *Jonah* is a lesson on the value of repentance
- In this story we have pagan polytheists who cry to God and He has mercy on them
- We also have *Jonah* trying to flee from God in disobedience and, after repenting, is spit out of the fish on the beach of *Israel*

Jonah 3

- Jonah 3:1-5
 - By this point *Jonah* has learned his lesson and decides to go to *Nineveh*
 - The actions of the people of *Nineveh* can be seen as a sign of “repentance”
 - Underline the word “overthrown” as in *Hebrew* it can mean “changed”, “converted” or “transformed”
 - Forty days is a period of repentance and it is the period of conversion or transformation
 - This repentance becomes a major theme in the Bible *

Jonah 3 (Cont)

- Jonah 3:6-9
 - The people of *Nineveh* don't even know the name of *Yahweh* as they simply pray to God
 - The king of *Nineveh* hopes that God may change His mind if they repent
 - But we know that God is **immutable** (does not change) so the great mystery is that the people of *Nineveh* change by repenting of their sins
 - The Bible often speaks about God in anthropomorphic terms (having human characteristics), making it sound like He changes but due to their repentance He gives them His divine mercy *

Jonah 3 (Cont)

- Jonah 3: 10
 - The word “evil” in Hebrew does not have the same sense that it has for us in English
 - Hebrew only has one word for “evil” or “bad” and that word is used for anything that is unfortunate including something that hurts or is bad or is really evil
 - We would not call a bad snow storm “evil”
 - When God saw that they had repented from their evil ways, He changed the punishment that He was planning to give them

Jonah 3 (Cont)

- Jonah 3
 - All this effort got *Jonah* nowhere
 - According to rabbinic commentaries when *Jonah* was spit out of the fish, his hair and skin were bleached white from the acid in the beast
 - He ends up on the beach of *Israel* and once again is told to go to *Nineveh*
 - We see the same theme in *Gn 12-13* when *Abraham* flees to *Egypt*, finds nothing but trouble, and is returned to *Israel*
 - A theme of *Genesis* is that going to Egypt will not help your situation
 - *Genesis* can be seen as a catechesis for the Israelites *

Jonah 4

- Jonah 4:1-3
 - Who is this guy?
 - *Jonah* finally goes to *Nineveh* and presents God's message and everyone from the king to the lowliest person repents in sack cloth and ashes
 - *Jonah* has the best record of any prophet!
 - He knew that if he came to Nineveh the people would convert
 - So why is he so angry? *

Johan 4 (Cont)

- Jonah 4:4-5
 - Father Sebastian said that if he was God, he would have squashed Jonah by this point!
 - Instead, God gives the people of *Nineveh* a second chance and then has mercy on them
 - God's grace and mercy to the people of *Nineveh* were delivered by *Jonah*
 - So *Jonah* leaves the city, seeks some shade as he awaits God's action while still hoping that God will kill them because they are a major enemy of *Israel* *

Johan 4 (Cont)

- Jonah 4:6-7
 - God sends *Jonah* a plant to give him shade from the terrible heat
 - He did this to save *Jonah* from his discomfort
 - *Jonah* acts like an unrepentant kid who, after refusing to do what his father asks, seeks refuge in his tree house
 - The merciful father then send him his supper via one of his siblings
 - Our merciful God provides *Jonah* with shade from a fast growing plant
 - God then sends some form of caterpillar or bug who eats the roots of the plant killing it *

Jonah 4 (Cont)

- Jonah 4:8-9
 - The east wind sent by God would be coming off of the desert
 - *Jonah* becomes faint and asks to die
 - Here we see God giving *Jonah* every opportunity to repent which he refuses to do
 - Again, we wonder what was *Jonah* so angry about?
 - He was angry that God was being merciful to the people of *Nineveh* and that they were not going to die
 - He was also angry that God had allowed the plant to die, causing him such misery *

Jonah 4 (Cont)

- Jonah 4:10
 - God tells *Jonah* that he had nothing to do with the plant as it was a gift to him
 - “Cattle” in Hebrew, refers to all means of herding animals to include sheep, goats and cattle
 - The reader is being asked to compare the mercy of God to that of *Jonah*
 - To fully understand *Jonah’s* anger we must know the historical setting

Jonah 4 (Cont)

- *Nineveh* will soon be the capital of what becomes the Assyrian Empire which will consume all of Israel
- So the last thing *Jonah* wants is for these people to convert to the God of Israel because if they do, God might bring down his wrath on the evil and wicked people of Israel
- What happens here is that for one brief moment the *Ninevites* turn to the true God of Israel and repent
- Later we will see this happen to the people of *Babylon* who, under King *Nebuchadnezzar*, becomes monotheist for a brief time

Jonah 4 (Cont)

- Again, this is a lesson in the value of repentance
- Look at **2nd Kings 17:13-14*** where God sends the people of Israel prophet after prophet yet they do not repent
- This become the major problem throughout the prophetic literature
- In some cases they not only don't want to hear what God has to say but they try and send the prophet away
- That will be in stark contrast to what happened when *Jonah* prophesies to the people of *Nineveh*
- This theme will also be seen in the New Testament were we see Jesus referring to the prophesy of *Jonah*

Transition

- We will now return to **2nd Kings 15**