

JONAH

INTRODUCTION: We have come to the fifth book of the minor prophets, and if I were to give you an assignment it would be this: Read this book and tell me why it is among the prophets. I mean, what is prophetic about this book?

Now, let me see how many we have in this congregation with the name Jonah. Well, let me give you some information and then I will check again. There is some evidence that the name Jonah, is an early Hebrew name that later became Joannas in Greek and which is the same as the name we are familiar with, John. And if that is true, how many do we with the name Jonah? But now let me ask the question a little differently. God told Jonah to go warn Nineveh, and Jonah would not obey when God called. Now, let me ask, how many of us has God called to do something, and we did not obey? How many Jonah's do we have now?

Well, once more we are in a book where we can establish the date with some degree of certainty. So we go to verse 1. Notice that this Jonah was the son of Ammittai. In 2 Kings 14:25, it says, "He...", that is Jeroboam the II whom we have mentioned numerous times already, "...restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath Hopher." So, he was known as a prophet, and he was from Gath Hopher, just west of the Sea of Galilee. So he was from the northern kingdom. From this we gather, according to Charles Ryrie, that the book is written somewhere about 760 BC.

Now the book centers around the city of Nineveh. Go with me to Genesis 10. In this chapter we have the three sons of Noah, and their children enumerated. First we have Japheth in 1-5, and his family. They settled Europe and Asia. Then we have Ham, the second son of Noah in 6-12. They went down and settled the area of Africa. And in verses 21-31 we have Shem, from whom came the Jewish people and Arabic people. So let us read verses 6-12 (read). So here we have the founding of this city of Nineveh. If you look up Iraq on a map and then at Baghdad, Nineveh is north of Baghdad, Iraq, just below the border of Turkey.

Now I have outlined the book under two sections. They are the first call of Jonah, and the second call. The first

call came before his big fish experience, and the second came after. So we begin by looking at his first call.

I. THE FIRST CALL TO JONAH (1-2)

So, let us read verses 1-2 in Jonah 1 (read). Here we have the content of Jonah's first call. He was to go and cry out against this very wicked city of Nineveh. Now I mentioned sometime way back that there are two kinds of prophesying and one of those is speaking exhortation. That is what Jonah was to do here because of their extreme wickedness. It says in these verses, their wickedness has come up before God. That, I think means almost the same as Amos' way of putting it, "...for three transgressions and for four...". The difference is that here repentance could still make the difference.

Well, this call resulted in a man by name of a dove, turning into a rebel. So look at verses 3-4. Now let me remind us here, that favorable circumstances do not always indicate the will of the Lord. Jonah wanted to run from God and there, sure enough, is a ship, ready to carry him far away. But these favorable circumstances were not God's provision for a rebel. And, alas, when they were out on the deep blue sea, God caught up with rebellious Jonah.

Now let me just say that Jonah had, humanly speaking, good reasons for not wanting to preach to these Ninevites. They were not only wicked. They were tremendously cruel, and it is very well possible, that just like Iran of today, they were calling for the destruction of Israel. The nation that surrounded this wicked city is the nation that in about 40 years from this time, would come upon Israel and Israel would experience their fierce cruelty to their prisoners of war. And Jonah, in no wise wanted their conversion. He wanted their destruction. So he refused to do what God had asked him to do. May I ask this morning, is there some person you would sooner see destroyed than converted? Do you have a heart capable of what my heart is capable of? You see, if we are like that, we too are a Jonah.

Well, in the storm, God caught up with Jonah. So let us read 1:5-16. Now let me shorten the story. God had

prepared a large fish, and it swallowed Jonah. And when Jonah was in the belly of the fish he cried out to God. So look at 2:6-9. I wonder, is there any Jonah here. Could you be running from God? The call is to repent. Well, the book says that God spoke to the whale or the large fish. He can speak to our circumstances as well. And when God spoke to the whale, it vomited Jonah out on dry land. And on the subject of vomiting, in the book of Revelation God says lukewarm Christians make him want to vomit too.

Now it has often been questioned if a whale or large fish could swallow a man and the man could survive. There are numerous accounts with good verification of this happening and let me just take time for one. Harold Willmington, in his OT section of Basic Stages in the Book of Ages writes on pages 266-267, "One of the most striking instances comes from Francis Fox, 'Sixty Three Years Of Engineering' who reports an incident that was carefully investigated by two scientists." The story goes like this, "In February, 1891, the whaling ship, 'Star Of The East', was in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands, and the lookout sighted a large sperm whale three miles away. Two boats were lowered and in a short time one of the harpooners was enabled to spear the creature. The second boat also attacked the whale, but was then upset by a lash of its tail, so that its crew fell into the sea. One of them was drowned, but the other, James Bartley, simply disappeared without a trace. After the whale was killed, the crew set to work with axes and spades removing the blubber. They worked all day and part of the night. Then the next day they attached some tackle to the stomach, which was hoisted on deck. The sailors were startled by something in it which gave spasmodic signs of life, and inside was found the missing sailor, doubled up and unconscious. He was laid on the deck and treated to a bath of sea water, which soon revived him. At the end of the third week, he had entirely recovered from shock and resumed his duties... His face, and neck and hands were bleached to a deadly whiteness and took on the appearance of parchment. Bartley affirms that he would probably have lived inside his house of flesh until he starved, for he lost his senses through fright and not through lack of air." (A survey of OT Introduction, p. 302).

I do not know if I rightly recall the details of a little joke, but it went something like this: A school teacher chided a young student for believing the biblical account of Jonah and that he had survived three days in the stomach of a huge fish. And the young student said, "Well, when I get to heaven I am going to ask Jonah about this." And the teacher said, "And what if Jonah is not in heaven?" And the student said, "Well, then you can ask him."

But, let me add this to this whole account. When God is in the picture, you do not need to be able to prove something to be scientifically possible. God created the heavens and the earth in 6 days, and scientifically, that is just a tad hard to prove. As a matter of fact, to create anything out of nothing requires a Supernatural being, One outside the realm of the laws of nature. And such is the One who inspired this account of Jonah and the big fish.

But, back to the prophetic nature of the book of Jonah and the story of Jonah and the big fish, it is one of the greatest prophecies of the resurrection of Christ and His three days and three nights in the heart of the earth to be found anywhere. You will have forgotten, but in the introductory message I spoke to you of a kind of prophecy that is written in the past tense. I called it historical prophecy. Historical prophecy is when some historic event speaks of another event in the future that has similarities. Turn with me to Matthew 12 (read 38-41). Jesus laid out the similarities of the historical account to His own situation. As Jonah was in the belly of the great fish three days and three nights, so must the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.

II. THE SECOND CALL TO JONAH (3-4)

Well, we go now in chapters 3-4. From chapter three onward we have a new beginning. You see, when we have fallen into some sin and God has allowed some difficult circumstances to come in and we repent, we have a new beginning. And when Jonah got a new chance, God's call came to him again. Let's read it in 3:1-2 (read). Earlier I asked a few times if there were some Jonah's among us. Someone has said that God is the God of the second chance. Do you need a second chance this

morning? After repentance, we get another chance. I thank God for second chances.

Now, the verses we just read sound familiar. God has not changed His mind, but Jonah has and now he is ready to obey God. This fish experience did work some wonders. When God allows us to fall into hard things, it too can do some wonderful things.

Well, Jonah began to preach in this huge city. His message was very simple, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Over and over he repeated this message as he made his way through this huge city. Well, look at what happened (read 5-10). The very thing Jonah did not want to happen, happened. Nineveh repented! And when Nineveh repented towards God, God repented towards them, that is, He changed His mind about what He had planned to do. As a matter of fact, He had Jonah bring this message because He wanted them to repent! Those very people you and I might sometimes wish destroyed, God wants saved.

But look now at Jonah's response to his own preaching (read 4:1-3). Jonah did like the message, "Yet 40 days, and you are doomed." But he did not like the outcome. He wanted Nineveh to die. And here he confesses why he fled from God in the first place. He knew that if Nineveh repented, God would not destroy them, and now, that is exactly what happened.

And so in verse 4, God asked Jonah if it was right for him to be angry. But what we read happened was that Jonah went out of the city, made himself a little shelter from the sun and sat and watched to see what would become of the city. It seems he hoped against hope that the Ninevites would fall from their resolve and God would destroy them anyway.

And then the Lord did something interesting. Look at verse 6 (read). This is the second time God prepared something especially for Jonah. Look at 1:17 (read). God planned the fish episode. He plans some events for us sometimes as well. The question is, do we rightly read what He is doing in our lives? Is there some obstinacy in us, and God has to prepare a little something special for us?

But now God prepared something nice for Jonah, not a big fish with a big mouth and a big stomach and a big appetite. Now it was a plant that grew big leaves and shaded him from the sun. And Jonah, for the first time, is grateful. Here is the first time we see something positive in Jonah. However, he is selfishly grateful. It is for his own pleasure that he is now positive. He could have recited this poem:

We had a little party
This afternoon at three.
'Twas very small, three friends in all,
Just **I, myself** and **me**.
Myself ate all the sandwiches,
While **I** drank the tea;
'Twas also **I** who ate the pie,
And passed the cake to **me**.

But now, quickly on the heels of the second thing God prepared for Jonah is a third and then a fourth. Look at verses 7-8 (read). Now will come God's application of what He has been trying to teach Jonah. He asked Jonah a question (read 9a). Well, look at Johan's answer (read 9b). Jonah felt he had the right to be angry. Do you have some circumstance and you feel you have a right to be angry? James 1:20 says that man's anger does not produce the righteousness of God.

Now look at how God reasons with Jonah (read 10-11). The Lord said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night." We might question, did Jonah actually pity the plant? And the answer is no. But by all appearance he did. And one morning he woke up to watch Nineveh. He is one day nearer the 40th day, and hopefully the destruction of Nineveh. But this morning, that wonderful plant that had so mysteriously sprung up and shaded him with its broad leaves, was now drooping and useless. And he was angry with the plant. He wanted it back up and running. He wanted it healthy and strong, and spreading even more leaves if possible. But there it droops listlessly and uselessly.

And God said, "You didn't plant it. You didn't nurture it. You didn't fertilize it. You had nothing to do with its existence, and now you get all emotional about its premature death." And then He said, "Look

down there Jonah. Look at that great city. You didn't have anything to do with bringing it into existence either, and you sit and long for its destruction. The plant you want saved. The Ninevites you want destroyed. Jonah, do you see what kind of a heart you have?" And then God might say, "Now look at it from My perspective. I created man. And down there, there may be a lot of wicked people, but there are 120,000 who cannot discern between their right hand and their left. And there is a lot of livestock as well."

So, let me stop there and ask a question. Who are these who cannot discern between their right hand and their left? It is my view that these, which cannot discern between their right hand and their left, are children who have not yet reached the age where they can make such discernments. A few Sundays ago we had a message on children and the value God places on them. And here is Jonah, he cares about an inanimate plant; but cares not a wit for animate creatures such as livestock and much worse yet, has no concern for 120,000 children who do not know the message of God.

I think I might conclude with regard to this book of Jonah, that it is among the prophets because, in a sense, it tells us why all the other prophets wrote their books of judgment. Israel's greatest failure was that same failure that has so beset the Church. It was her failure to be a light to the world. Israel, like the Church, caved in to the desire to be like the rest of the world rather than win the rest of the world to God. And in worshipping false gods, Israel miserably failed God's plan.

When God had first created man, He communed with man and walked with him. Then man fell into sin and God taught man how man was to come to Him and how to walk with Him anew. In the first two sons of Adam and Eve, one walked with God and the other did not. And then there began to be two camps. Those who knew and worshipped God and those who did not. They all had the revelation of God, but not all obeyed Him. As a matter of fact, just like today, most did not.

Then, as man multiplied, nations grew. And eventually God chose one man to become the head of a nation that would be God's nation, and through this nation, God

would share with the rest of the world how to walk with Him. Go with me to Genesis 12 (read 1-3). God's desire was to draw people who desired the truth into the one nation He had chosen to disseminate the truth. So God would later tell Israel, "You are my witnesses..."

Now before we close I want to very briefly show you God's missionary plan for Israel. When I went to Bible school, in missions class we were taught, and I think rightly so, that in the OT God used the centripetal method of evangelizing the world, in the NT He uses the centrifugal method. Let me briefly explain. Centripetal force is that which draws something into the centre. For example, when you drain a bathtub, anything floating on the water is drawn into the center of the force. It draws in. Centrifugal force is force that pushes outward. For example, if you make a sharp turn while driving quite fast, the centrifugal force wants to push you outward. So it is the exact opposite of centripetal force.

Now I want to show you this in the Bible. When the first temple had been built, when Solomon dedicated the temple to Jehovah God, He mentioned God's centripetal method of evangelizing the world in his dedicatory prayer. Go with me to 2 Chronicles 6 (read 32-33). When the prophets later began to prophecy, they too mentioned God's method of evangelization. Now go to Isaiah 56 (read 6-7). And so, in the OT, God chose one nation and tried to use that nation as a centripetal force to draw in those who desired truth. God said, "You are My witnesses and My servant whom I have chosen..." (Is. 43:10)

But Israel miserably failed. Rather than follow God and be different than the nations around them, their witness was this, they followed the practices and the gods of the lost pagan world. I feel that largely as Christians, we fail because we follow a lost world in its practices rather than being a light to it. Our mission board is right now challenging the brotherhood to consider how much money this church should send to missions. Let me further add that one of the great mission needs today is right on our own doorstep. Another great need on our own doorstep is to start new

churches that hold to a conservative biblical view. We, right here in this church, have the potential of doing something about that.

Now, back to Jonah, the land in which the city of Nineveh was, was the land that would soon come and take the northern kingdom captive. This book is written somewhere in 760 BC and in 722 BC, the people from this area around Nineveh came storming down and conquered vast tracks of land and added it to their domain, including Israel. The reason why Jonah wanted this city destroyed is the very thing that this nation would now do to them.

Today, there is a vast number of people who hate the God of the Bible with a vengeance. They would like to get rid of every Jew and every Christian. They are the Muslims, at least a very large percentage of them. And because they hate the God of the Bible, they hate the Jews. And because they hate the God of the Bible they hate Christians. The gravest dangers for Jew and the true Christian today is the teaching of the Koran and the Muslim faith.

And I want to propose that the answer to this great hate, is not to hate them, but to love them and bring them the Gospel. And if we do not evangelize the Muslim world, we too may pay for our failure to evangelize. In Britain, that great nation that had such a powerful impact on the world both spiritually and politically, is today in parts under Sharia law. Not too many years ago that would have seemed unthinkable.

CONCL: And so, in conclusion I ask, may it be that the book of Jonah is in the prophets because it does contain some important prophecies, but more so because it shows us why the rest of the prophets had to prophecy judgment over and over again. If Israel had not failed in being God's light to the world, the other prophetic books may not have been necessary.

That is a reminder to us to evangelize while yet it is day. LE Maxwell, in his book 'Crowded To Christ' gives a little poem on this book. He says this, "At the conclusion of a message on Jonah wherein we likened him to a present day

believer, one of our students (now a foreign missionary) wrote the following appropriate lines:

Jonah built a little booth,
A shelter from the heat.
A gourd-vine grew, protection from
The wind that on him beat.

Jonah rejoiced, exceeding glad
For this convenient gourd -
Espec'lly since this comfort was
Provided by the Lord!

"I thank Thee, Lord, Thou hast been good
To my dear wife and me;
We're glad we're in a peaceful land
Of great prosperity.

It makes us feel so good
This little bungalow-
The kitchenette, the living room,
The rug, so soft you know.

We love our children ev'ry one;
We keep them home for God:
The homeland needs them just as much
As missions fields abroad.

And fundamentalists are we,
My children, wife and I -
So thankful that we're saved by grace,
Secure until we die!

What didst Thou say? Oh - Ninevah?-
Well, that's another thing.
Right now we want to praise our God
"We're sheltered 'neath His wing!"

Thus fundamental Jonahs to
The Lord their praises tell.
They'll sing "We're saved and satisfied,"
Till Nineveh goes to hell! - Ted Laskowski

Oh, by the way, this is the first book in the minor prophets that does not close like this: And they lived happily ever after.