

The Minor Prophets - (Part 1) Jonah

9-19-18

1. Every other prophetic book presents the message of God through the prophet to Israel, Judah, or both.
2. The book of Jonah is about what happened to a prophet and not a collection of messages.
3. The book of Jonah is read in the synagogue on the afternoon of Yom Kippur each year - the holiest day in the Jewish calendar - also known as the day of Atonement.
4. The message of the prophet - sin and divine judgment - repentance and divine forgiveness is the reason for the reading.
5. As one writer wrote, "The Book of Jonah is one of the most relevant books for the present time. Its message is abidingly relevant for the modern-day reader."
6. The "fish/whale" is a relatively minor part of the story, mentioned in only three verses.
7. Nineveh was one of the capitals of the Assyrian empire and at the height of that empire one of the great cities of the world.
8. Nineveh was situated in what is now northern Iraq and is represented today by two mounds located to the east of the Tigris River and opposite the main part of the city of Mosul.
9. Nineveh's surrounding brick wall, 7 ½ miles long with 15 gates (of which 5 have been excavated) was guarded by very large stone bulls.
10. Nimrod, who was "a mighty hunter" - began his kingdom at Babel (Babylonia) and then went into Assyria where he built four cities, two of which were Nineveh and Calah. (Genesis 10:11-12)
11. Nineveh was regarded as the seat of the greatest enemy of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and most biblical references are to its fall.
12. On one of the two mounds, Nebi Yunus, there is a mosque dedicated to the prophet Jonah and inside this structure there hangs the bone of a whale. The tradition has continued at the site of Nineveh to the present time.
13. The fall of Nineveh, is recorded in the book of Nahum ("an oracle concerning Nineveh"). A brief description of Nineveh's fall is also found in Zephaniah 2:13.
14. The story of Jonah and Nineveh is referred to in the NT in Matthew 12:40-41 and Luke 11:30-32.
15. But there is debate concerning the historical evidence for the events portrayed in the book.
16. We do know that Jonah prophesied the expansion of the northern kingdom in the reign of Jeroboam II - about 780 B.C. (2 Kings 14:25)
17. Jonah's prophetic mission to Nineveh resulted not only in their repentance and deliverance but ultimately also in Israel's destruction.

18. We begin with God's first call and Jonah's response. (1:1-6)
19. Little is known about Jonah outside of this book. The one designation in 2 Kings 14:25 gives us a general time frame for his ministry. Nothing is known about his father, Amittai.
20. Many people in the world today ignore God and assume that He also ignores them. Many believe that God set the world into motion and allows it to continue along unnoticed.
21. However - this passage portrays God as one who notices, as a God who is active, and as a God who takes sin seriously.
22. So Jonah - instead of traveling approximately five hundred miles northeast of Palestine to Nineveh, went to Joppa, the nearest seaport.
23. Joppa was the seaport of Jerusalem and corresponds to the modern Jaffa, which is now a part of Tel Aviv.
24. Jonah tragically played the fool when he chose to pit their seafaring skills against the Creator and Lord of the sea.
25. From there he took a ship bound for Tarshish, probably a Phoenician port in Spain, some two thousand miles due west.
26. The reason for Jonah disobeying God - while not given in this verse - is stated by the author in chapter 4 and verse 2.
27. The issue *was* fear—fear that the Ninevites might repent and be spared the disaster that Jonah thought they deserved.
28. The response of the ship's crew was to cry out to their own gods. Apparently - this was an international, polytheistic crew.
29. Next - we see the moment of revelation. (1:7-10)
30. The casting of lots was a widely used method in the ancient Near East to determine the guilty person. It is interesting to imagine the drama of this moment.
31. For the first time in the story Jonah speaks. But he responds to all their questions with only two answers, which are simple and relatively short.
32. He knew that his response probably would satisfy the curiosity of the crew.
33. To know that Jonah was a Hebrew was one thing; to know that he worshiped the supreme God was another. To run away from a god was foolish; but to run from "the God of heaven, was suicidal.
34. "What have you done?" was not a question about the nature of Jonah's sin but an exclamation of horror. They were frightened to the depths of their beings.