

The Minor Prophets

JONAH

- I. Central Message: Two-fold message – You can't escape God; God saves the penitent.
- II. Introduction
 - A. About Jonah
 1. name means, "Dove"
 2. prophesied in the kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jereboam II
 3. mentioned in II Kings 14:25
 4. referred to by Jesus (Matthew 12:39,40,41; Luke 11:29,30,32)
 - B. Date of writing – mid 9th or mid 8th century BC
 - C. About the book
 1. unique features
 - a. Jonah is the only minor prophet who preaches exclusively to a foreign people
 - b. Jonah is the only minor prophet mentioned by Jesus and the only Old Testament character likened by the Lord to Himself
 - c. only book of a minor prophet that is primarily taken up with a narrative (Jonah's prophetic message is given in only eight words in Jonah 3:4)
 2. through the years, some have suggested that the book is fiction and others have suggested that it is an allegory, that perhaps Jonah is writing about a dream he had
 3. the overwhelming evidence is in favor of Jonah being a real persona and the book being a record of actual historical events
 - a. that he was a real person is seen in that he is referred to in II Kings 14:25
 - b. that the book is a record of actual events is seen in that Jesus referred to them as actual events (Matthew 12:40-41)
 4. four sections
 - a. chapter 1: Jonah runs away from God
 - b. chapter 2: Jonah runs to God
 - c. chapter 3: Jonah runs with God
 - d. chapter 4: Jonah runs ahead of God
- III. First Section – Jonah Runs Away From God (Jonah 1)
 - A. Verses 1-2
 1. about Ninevah
 - a. mentioned in Genesis 10:11
 - b. capital of Assyria, the nation which captured Israel and took them from their homeland (II Kings 17)
 - c. large city (3:3) with perhaps between 600,000 and 2.5 million inhabitants
 2. God extended mercy even to those who were not Jews
 - a. He did not immediately punish their wickedness
 - b. He allowed them to hear a warning and gave them opportunity to repent (see Ezekiel 22:11 and II Peter 3:9 concerning God's desire that all turn to Him)

- B. Verse 3
1. Jonah was from Gath-hepher (II Kings 14:25) and was probably there when the Lord spoke to him
 - a. this city was located in Zebulon's territory, about half-way between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee
 - b. Ninevah was at least 400 miles to the east
 - c. the city of Tarshish mentioned is supposed to be a city of Spain, about 2,000 miles west of Palestine
 - d. Joppa, the city from which Jonah embarked on his voyage, was also west of Gath-hepher
 - e. it is obvious from the direction Jonah was taking that he was trying to get as far away as he could, thinking that God would not be able to find him
 2. Jonah would soon learn that one cannot escape from God (see Psalm 139 for discussion of the omnipresence of God)
- C. Verses 4-10
1. verse 4
 - a. the Lord caused the storm
 - b. it was so great a storm that it nearly caused the ship to wreck
 2. verse 7 – God obviously intervened and caused the lot to fall upon Jonah
 3. verses 9-10
 - a. notice the inconsistency between Jonah's words and his actions
 - i. "I fear the Lord" (verse 9)
 - ii. "For the men knew that he had fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them" (verse 10)
 - iii. he said that he served God and yet here he was trying to run away from Him
 - b. notice also that Jonah recognizes that God created the sea and land and yet he limits God in thinking that there is some part of the sea or some part of the land to which he can go and get out of God's sight
- D. Verses 11-16
1. the shipmen had gentle hearts
 - a. they did not automatically do something to Jonah but spoke to him first, considering him to be close to this powerful God and asking him what they should do
 - b. even after Jonah told them to throw him into the sea, they still tried to make it to land to keep from doing that
 2. Jonah was at least sensible enough to admit that the storm had come about because of him and caring enough to try to save the lives of the shipmen
 3. the Lord stopped the raging of the sea when Jonah was cast in
 - a. normally it would take much time for the sea to calm after a storm
 - b. as soon as Jonah was cast in, "the sea ceased from her raging"
 - c. evidence that just as God had started the storm, He also stopped it
- E. Verse 17
1. Matthew 12:40 in the King James Version calls this great fish a whale
 - a. other versions merely say, "a great fish"
 - b. regardless of the type of fish it was, it was obviously large enough to swallow a man

2. some have questioned whether or not there are fish that large in the Mediterranean Sea
 - a. but this is beside the point since it is said that the Lord prepared the fish
 - b. the Lord has the ability to put any size fish He wants into any body of water He wants
3. when the Hebrews said, “a day and a night,” they did not necessarily mean a 24 hour period
 - a. example
 - i. Esther 4:16 – Esther told Mordecai that she would not eat or drink for “three days, night or day”
 - ii. Esther 5:1 – on the third day she went before the king
 - b. Jonah was in the fish’s belly one full day and at least a part of the other two days
 - c. it is important to understand this in light of Matthew 12:40
 - i. Jesus said He would be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights even as Jonah was in the fish’s belly for that period of time
 - ii. Jesus was not in the tomb for three full 24 hour periods
 - iii. Jesus was in the tomb part of Friday (first day), all of Saturday (second day) and part of Sunday (third day); hence, Jesus WAS in the heart of the earth three days

IV. Second Section – Jonah Runs to God (Jonah 2)

A. Verses 1-9

1. the penitent prayer of Jonah
2. God hears the prayers of the righteous no matter where they may be (in a building where all are assembled for public worship or even in the belly of a great fish)
 - a. we do ourselves great harm and do not fully utilize the power of prayer when we pray only during public worship or at mealtimes
 - b. I Thessalonians 5:17 – “Pray without ceasing”
3. a description of Jonah’s experience in the fish
 - a. “all thy billows and thy waves passed over me” (verse 3) – the ocean’s activity while he was beneath it in the fish
 - b. “the weeds were trapped about my head” (verse 5) – some of the things inside the fish
 - c. “the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever” (verse 6) – either being at the bottom of the sea or the bottom of the fish’s belly
4. verse 7
 - a. the formula for overcoming trials
 - i. remember the Lord
 - ii. pray
 - b. sometimes it takes a severe crisis before we will humble ourselves before God and lean on Him (cf. the prodigal son in Luke 15)
5. verses 8-9
 - a. the Lord is the God of all mercy
 - b. to turn unto Him is to find the salvation desired and needed
 - c. to follow after lying vanities (e.g., idols, self-will, worldly pleasure) is to turn aside from the only true source of mercy and salvation

- d. the despairing person who seeks these lying vanities can only expect to find more despair
 - e. the despairing person who turns to God will find salvation
 - f. "I will pay that I have vowed"
 - i. Jonah made a promise to God and intended now to keep it
 - ii. do we not make a promise to God when we become Christians?
 - B. Verse 10 – God miraculously prepared the fish and caused it to give up Jonah as well
- V. Third Section – Jonah Runs With God (Jonah 3)
 - A. Verses 1-2
 - 1. the instruction was the same as it was the first time; the difference in results was the heart of Jonah
 - 2. God's Word is consistent, never changing; the difference in results is the heart of the hearers (cf. Luke 8:4-15)
 - a. some close their ears to God's Word; they shall suffer punishment
 - b. some are anxious to do the Lord's bidding; they shall be rewarded
 - c. the difference is not in God, the fault is not with God
 - d. it is up to each person to respond to God's Word; this responsibility is placed upon each of us
 - 3. the message would be God's, not Jonah's (God's Word is the only message that has the power to change lives and save souls)
 - B. Verses 3-4
 - 1. description of the enormity of the city of Ninevah ("an exceeding great city of three days journey"; "began to enter into the city a day's journey")
 - a. there is some confusion as to the exact meaning of these phrases
 - b. some say that it would have taken Jonah three days to go around the entire city with his warning, hence the description of it as a city of three days journey
 - c. estimates place its size at between 50 and 60 miles in circumference
 - 2. Jonah's simple message
 - a. "Yet forty days and Ninevah shall be overthrown"
 - b. while the books of the other minor prophets mostly contain the messages to the people, this phrase is all that is told us of Jonah's message
 - c. God's mercy is seen in that He gave them 40 days to turn back
 - C. Verses 5-10 – the Ninevites repent
 - 1. some facts which these Ninevites, though not Jews, knew about God
 - a. that He would keep His word
 - b. that He had the ability to destroy them
 - c. that they were accountable to Him
 - d. that He was merciful
 - 2. the demonstration of their repentance
 - a. fasted
 - b. dressed in sackcloth and sat in ashes (a sign of extreme sorrow)
 - c. ALL of them, even the king, showed repentance (no one above it)
 - d. would not even let their animals eat and drink
 - e. "cry mightily unto God" (verse 8)

3. their actions define the term “repent”
 - a. Matthew 12:41 – Jesus said that the Ninevites “repented at the preaching of Jonas”
 - b. Jonah 3:10 – “God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way”
 - c. from this we learn that repentance is the actual turning from evil
4. God would (will) not destroy the righteous (see Genesis 18:25)

VI. Fourth Section – Jonah Runs Ahead of God (Jonah 4)

A. Verses 1-3 – caused for Jonah’s anger

1. he was upset that God forgave these Ninevites
 - a. he is saying, “I knew that you’d forgive them if they repented. That’s why I didn’t want to go.”
 - b. Jonah knew the goodness of God and thought that the Ninevites were unworthy of it
 - i. we need to be careful lest we also judge someone unworthy of God’s blessings
 - ii. dangerous to look at someone and judge that that person is not interested in salvation and therefore not take them the Gospel
 - iii. also dangerous to wish evil upon those who are our enemies (see Matthew 5:43-48)
 - c. Ezekiel 18:24-32
2. he was embarrassed that his words would not come to pass
 - a. perhaps felt that he would become the subject of ridicule in Ninevah for telling them something that did not happen
 - i. the reason it did not happen was because it was conditional, conditioned on the people’s response
 - ii. when they repented, they met God’s condition of repentance and were forgiven
 - b. Jonah was more concerned about his pride than the souls of the Ninevites
 - c. in essence he said, “Lord, if you are going to be this way, just go ahead and kill me because I can’t stand the way you do things.”

B. Verses 4-11

1. Jonah had no right to be angry
 - a. anger, in and of itself, is not sinful and can sometimes be productive
 - b. but anger at God’s mercy is never right
 - c. Jonah wanted to see these people killed and, in having this attitude, he showed that his mind was very different than God’s (see Ezekiel 33:110)
2. Jonah built a booth (tent) and sat therein to see what would happen to the Ninevites
 - a. some suggest that this has reference to what Jonah did during the period between his preaching and God’s forgiveness of Ninevah)
 - b. others say that he built this after God forgave them and went to sit there with hopes that God would change His mind
 - c. the former seems more likely

3. the gourd
 - a. prepared by God
 - b. it was large enough to provide shade for Jonah from the hot sun
 - c. its presence caused Jonah to be glad
 - d. notice the many times we see God “preparing” things in this book
 - i. He sent out the great wind (1:4)
 - ii. He prepared the great fish (1:17)
 - iii. He prepared the gourd
 - iv. He prepared the worm
 - v. He prepared the vehement wind
 - e. again we find Jonah wanting to die and God asking, “Doest thou well to be angry?”
 - i. Jonah responds by saying that he has every right to be angry
 - ii. in short he is saying, “The way you treat me, of course I am angry. You’re not fair.”
4. the lesson from the gourd
 - a. Jonah was more concerned about his own comfort and welfare than he was the souls of others
 - b. his only thoughts were of self and he was interested in following God only when God’s way was what HE thought it should be