

CHASING JONAH

aka the prodigal prophet

Lesson One: Introductory Matters & Jonah's Rebellious Heart

First Baptist Church Chappell Hill, May 2, 2021

Learning the Bible Effectively

- Key Question: What was the author's intended message for his original audience? (secondary question, how do I apply it to my life?)
- Tips for effectively learning the Bible
 - 1. Apply a literal or plain sense hermeneutic
 - 2. Read the whole book, then read it again (and again...)
 - 3. Words matter (don't always assume what a word means)
 - 4. Genre matters (what kind of literature am I reading?)
 - 5. Structure matters (how is the book organized?)
 - 6. Context is critical (external context such as historical background; internal context such as preceding verses)
- God's Word has to be experientially learned (cannot do what you do not know) (see James 1:22-25)
- Our goal is to think Biblically and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit

Big Picture Context

- God made a covenant with the unified nation of Israel that we may refer to as the Mosaic Covenant or the Law (Exod. 24:1-3)
- Functions like a contract — both sides are obligated
 - Israel will be blessed if it is obedient to the Law
 - Israel will face increasingly severe consequences if it is disobedient to the Law (Lev. 26; Deut. 28)
- The nation splits after Kings Saul, David, and Solomon
- God’s prophets “foretell” and “forthtell”
 - Foretell the future
 - Forthtell / speak directly to current events, especially disobedience to the Law and consequences

Nineveh — That Great City

- “Nineveh” comes from the word “nina” or “ninuwa” and appears in cuneiform as a fish in an enclosure
- “Nineveh” means fish town
- Ninevites believed the town created by a fish god
- Worshiped Dagon, the fish-man god with human / fish features
- Founded by Nimrod in Genesis 10
- Long held by the Assyrians
- When Jonah preached, it had 2 walls, the inner wall was 50 ft thick, the outer wall 100 ft high, circumference less than 8 miles
- Plagues struck in 765 and 759 BC, total eclipse in 763 BC
- Ruins (two mounds) on the east side of the Tigris River near Mosul, Iraq
- Limited excavations at Tell Nebi Yuns (mound of the prophet Jonah) because there is an Islamic mosque there dedicated to Jonah

Nineveh – The People

- “Nineveh was the capital of one of the cruelest, vilest, most powerful, and most idolatrous empires in the world...Gross immorality was practiced in Ninevah and throughout the Assyrian Empire. The religion of Assyria was Babylonian in origin but in Assyria the national god was Assur, whose high priest and representative was the king.” — Elliott Johnson
- “I cut their throats like lambs. I cut off their precious lives as one cuts a string. Like the many waters of a storm I made...their gullets and entrails run down upon the wide earth...Their hands I cut off.” — Sennacherib (705-681 BC)
- Ashurbanipal (669-626 BC) of a captured leader in battle: “I pierced his chin with my keen hand dagger. Through his jaw...I passed a rope, put a dog chain upon him and made him occupy a kennel.” And of Egyptian officials he put their bodies “on stakes [and] stripped off their skins and covered the city walls with them.”
- “the city of blood” (Nahum 3:1)

The Book of Jonah

- Part of the “Minor Prophets” or “The Twelve”
- Probably the best known of the The Twelve — who has not heard of the prophet swallowed by a “whale”
- “Disbelief has attacked this book probably more than any other in the Bible.” — Charles Feinberg (but why?)
- “The character, Jonah, has intrigued believers for many centuries. Unfortunately, he has become caricatured by many who miss the positive results of an objective examination of his life. The Book of Jonah is a case study of ‘missed blessings’ because so many readers focus upon its supposed difficulties rather than upon its rich teachings.” — Billy Smith and Franklin Page
- “The Book of Jonah is perhaps the most misinterpreted book in the Bible.” — Israel Loken

The Book of Jonah

- Audience: Israel (meaning the northern kingdom) — so we need to determine the intended message of the book of Jonah to the people of Israel at the time Jonah was a prophet?
- Genre: Prophetic (historical) narrative with a didactic purpose
- The book is unlike all the other writing prophets because Jonah presents no message directly to Israel (compare Amos, Hosea)
- Sometimes prophets were told to perform symbolic acts, but in this case a portion of Jonah's life is the symbolic act
- Purpose: God uses what transpired in the life of the prophet Jonah to help Israel see its own wicked heart and need to turn to God as it sees the positive responses to God's limited revelation from the sailors and the Ninevites in contrast to the rebellious response of Jonah to God's substantial revelation. The looming judgment announced to Nineveh will also befall Israel if they do not repent. (40 days / 40 years?)
- See Matthew 12:38-42; Ezekiel 3:4-7

The Man, Jonah

- The name Jonah means “dove”
- 3-fold “attack” on Israel: Jonah, Amos, Hosea
- He was a prophet in Israel (the northern kingdom) during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC) (see 2 Kings 14:25)
- Jeroboam II not a godly king but probably Israel’s most powerful king politically and the nation enjoyed prosperity
- Boundaries of the Northern Kingdom were extended to approximately where they were during Solomon’s reign
- Probably preached to Nineveh around 759 BC during the reign of the Assyrian king Asher-Dan III (772-754 BC)
- Israel defeated by Assyrians about 40 yrs later in 722 BC
- Jesus referred to Jonah as an historical figure in Matthew 12:38-42 and confirmed the historicity of the book

Jonah's Rebellious Heart (ch 1)

- God commands Jonah to preach (1:1-2) (what message?)
- Jonah disobeys God and runs (1:3) (why run?)
- God pursues (chases) Jonah (1:4)
- Pagan sailors fear God (1:5-8)
- Jonah talks a good talk (1:9)
- Jonah would rather die than repent (1:10-12)
- Pagan sailors show compassion on Jonah (1:13)
- Pagan sailors pray to God (1:14-15)
- Pagan sailors sacrifice to God (1:16)
- God intervenes for Jonah (1:17)

Jonah's Rebellious Heart (ch 1)

- Main Principle: Genuine spirituality is not established by our confessional theology (e.g., I fear the Lord) but our experiential, “proof in the pudding” theology (e.g., thoughts, words, and actions), and especially our obedience to God’s will as it is explicitly revealed in the Bible.
- Believers who have sinned against God either run to Him for forgiveness or run from Him.
- God chases sinners, calling upon them to repent.
- Just because an opportunity is available does not, in and of itself, mean it is God’s will for you.
- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**