

The Minor Prophets

Lesson 3

Jonah – The Reluctant Evangelist

Jonah was a prophet in Israel during a time when Assyria was Israel's bitter enemy and had taken much of Israel's territory. This of course was a judgment from God against Israel for its apostasy. Nevertheless, Israel hated Assyrians. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. Jonah feared he would be used to help the enemy that would later destroy his own nation.

Read Ch 1 of Jonah

1. What was God's command to Jonah (1:2, 3:2, 4)? What was Jonah's initial response (1:3)? How did God counter Jonah's move (1:4)? Where can you go to escape the presence of God (Ps 139:7-12)?
2. The principal person in the narrative was God, not Jonah. God sovereignly controlled the events recorded in the book. God commanded Jonah, gave him the prophecy, brought on the storm, altered Jonah's voyage, controlled the lots (1:7), calmed the sea, and provided the great fish. What do the following passages say about the sovereignty of God (Isa 14:24, 26-27, 43:13, 46:8-11, Eph 1:11, Prov 16:33)?
3. Jonah was one of God's chosen people, and he was a prophet of God. He was certainly saved and looked forward to spending eternity with the one true God. Nevertheless, contrast his strange behavior with that of the pagan sailors (1:14, 16). Why do you think that believers in Christ fall into sin, and sometimes act more unrighteous than non-Christians (I Cor 3:1-3, Eph 4:14, 17-19, Hebrews 5:12-14, 2 Peter 1:8-9, I John 1:8-10)?
4. In Chapter 2 Jonah has been cast into the sea, and this is his poetically recounted story of his deliverance. Jonah plunged into what appeared to be a watery grave (Sheol), but God saved his life. What object of His creation did God use to restore Jonah to dry land? From Jonah's prayer, describe his new attitude.

5. Most people doubt the authenticity of this story. What credence as an historical event does Matt 12:39-41 give it? The great fish was possibly a sperm whale or a whale shark. Both have been proven to swallow larger objects than a man, and men have been found alive in their stomachs (Round the World after Sperm Whales by Frank Bullen, and Rhineodon Typicus). Could the Creator use His creation according to his sovereign purpose? What is the principle which is clearly revealed in Matt 19:26?

Read Chapter 3

6. What was Jonah's message to Nineveh? What was their response? What was the king's proclamation? What was God's reaction? Was Jonah successful in his own view (4:1)? In what way was the grace of God necessary in both of these men's lives?
7. Chapter 4 is illustrative of man's struggle against God-our will vs. His will. The book of Jonah was written to a rebellious nation of Israel, and symbolized her lack of concern for the ways and mercies of God. In 4:2 what confession did Jonah make concerning his fleeing to Tarshish (ch 1)? Contrast the attributes of God with those of man (Ps 86:14-15, 103:8, 111:2-4, 145:8-9).
8. It is common to mankind to be angry with God. Some people remain angry their whole lives, while all of us question or doubt God from time to time. What rhetorical question did God ask in Jonah 4:4 that applies to all of us? What answer does this question demand (Eph 4:26-27; Lamentations 3:39)?
9. Do you think Jonah had forgotten that he, who also deserved death for disobedience, was delivered by God (Ch 2)? In the same way, do we often freely accept or even expect God's grace and mercies, but find it hard to forgive others? What is our responsibility in the area of forgiveness (Matt 6:9-15)? What lesson using a plant did God teach Jonah in 4:10-11?
10. How did Jesus use the story of Jonah and the whale in Matthew 12:39-41? The religious leaders demanded a sign from Jesus, even though He had done many miracles. What sign would be the ultimate disclosure of who Jesus was (Matt 28:1-9, John 20:25-28, I Cor 15:3-6, Rom 1:4)?