

Seeing Jesus in the Minor Prophets

Jonah

Historical background

1. Timeline

- Last week in the book of Obadiah, we were in the period of exile. The northern kingdom of Israel had long been fallen (722 B.C.) and the southern kingdom had just recently fallen (586 B.C.). This week in the book of Jonah, we jump backwards in time to before any of that had happened. Jonah's ministry occurs around the same time as Amos (775-750 B.C.).

2. Jonah: Historical figure or Didactic Parable?

- There are a few theologians who argue that Jonah was not a real person at all. They argue that this book is just a story to teach people a moral lesson (that's what didactic parable means). The reason that many believe this is because they find it difficult to believe. After all who could survive for three days in the stomach of a fish? However, their desire to avoid the miraculous runs into two massive problems.
 - The O.T. historical books believe Jonah was a real person.
 - ❖ 2 Kings 14:25--*He (King Jeroboam II of Israel) restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher.*
 - Jesus believed that Jonah was a real person.
 - ❖ Luke 11:29-30--*When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. 30 For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation*
- Because of this, we believe that Jonah was a real person, Jonah was a prophet (Oo Oo), and he prophesied in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II, as well as to the city of Nineveh.

Book Overview

- The most common and, in my opinion, the best way to grasp the overall structure of the book of Jonah is found in the ESV Study Bible...



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1. Jonah's commissioning and flight (1:1-3)

- ❖ Jonah 1:1-2--*Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."*
 - Take notice that Nineveh was called "that great city," because we will address this in Chapter 3.
- ❖ Jonah 1:3--*But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.*
 - Understanding the geographic locations mentioned can help us understand just how badly Jonah did not want to do what God told him to do. The city of Nineveh was "approximately five hundred miles northeast of Palestine,¹" yet Jonah chose to travel to Tarshish which was likely 2000 miles to the west in southern Spain.
 - This begs the question, why? Why did this task make Jonah want to flee the presence of the Lord? Did Jonah really think that he could escape the presence of the Lord? Surely this prophet of God would have been familiar with Psalm 139 which says...
 - ❖ Psalm 139:7-10-- *Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! 9 If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, 10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me*
 - The answer to these questions will come later.

2. Jonah and the pagan sailors (1:4-16)

- ❖ Jonah 1:4-6--*But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. 5 Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. 6 So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.*
 - Ask yourself, is this the only place in scripture where you read about a man asleep in a boat in the midst of a violent storm? More on this later.
- ❖ Jonah 1:7-10--*And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" 9 And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land. 10 Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them*
 - This function of this passage is to shame Jonah. Jonah makes this bold statement about how he is one of God's chosen people and how he "fears" the Lord yet these pagan sailors put him to shame. The very next verse (10) says that these sailors were "exceedingly afraid." The word "fear" in verse 9 and the word "afraid" in verse 10 are the same Hebrew word (*yare*). Thus this passage is basically saying...Jonah, one of God's chosen people said he feared the Lord, yet these pagan sailors were the ones who really feared him.

¹ Billy K. Smith & Frank S. Page, *The New American Commentary: Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*

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- ❖ Jonah 1:11-13--*Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. 12 He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you." 13 Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them*
 - Again, Jonah is put to shame by these pagan sailors. Jonah, one of God's chosen people, wasn't willing to go to Nineveh and preach repentance that Nineveh might live. Yet these pagan sailors risked their lives to try to avoid seeing Jonah die.
- ❖ Jonah 1:14-16--*Therefore they called out to the Lord, "O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you." 15 So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.*
 - When they discovered that there was no way they were going to be able to beat this storm and save Jonah, they cried out to God and basically said "Please don't blame us for his death! You're the one who caused all this!" Then they saw the power of God in action in a second way. First, they experienced his power in the raging storm. Now, they experienced that he calms the storm in an instant. This display of the glory and power of God caused them to convert. Verse 16 seems to indicate that they cast off their idols and began to worship the one true God.

3. Jonah's grateful prayer (1:17-2:10)

- ❖ Jonah 1:17--*And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*
 - Obviously, there is more to say about this. However, we will get to that later.
- ❖ Jonah 2:1-10--*Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, 2 saying, "I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. 3 For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. 4 Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple. 5 The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head 6 at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. 7 When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. 8 Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. 9 But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!" 10 And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.*
 - He should have drowned in the waves, but he didn't. The digestive juices of the whale's stomach should have killed Jonah, but apparently they didn't. These facts gave Jonah confidence that God was saving him. His prayers had reached God's heavenly temple, and he would live to see the earthly temple in Jerusalem again. Out of gratitude he makes vows to the Lord and cries out "Salvation belongs to the Lord." To some, this phrase sounds like religious mumbo jumbo but it isn't. This phrase has a specific meaning. Jonah is saying to God, "you alone can save and you save anyone you want!" We will soon see why it is ironic that Jonah says this.

4. Jonah's recommissioning and compliance (3:1-3)

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- ❖ *Jonah 3:1-3--1 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 “ Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days 'journey in breadth.*
 - *Two things to see here...*
 - (1) It appears that Jonah has had a change of heart. It looks like Jonah is now in tune with the will of God and eager to carry it out. We will soon see if that is truly the case.
 - (2) Nineveh, the great city. The problem with the way that Nineveh is described here is that there is no way Nineveh was actually a three day journey. Archeological evidence suggests that in the time of Jonah, “Nineveh was probably no more than a mile across it’s widest part.” So then what do we do? Ignore factual archeological evidence? Scratch Jonah from the canon of scripture? Fortunately, there is no need to do either.
- ❖ *Genesis 10:11-12--From that land he [Nimrod] went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth- Ir, Calah, and 12 Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.*
 - Thus a quick study of the origin of Nineveh shows us that Nineveh was likely the flagship city in a cluster of Assyrian cities that was referred to as “the great city.” Thus we can think of Jonah traveling to and prophesying to the greater Nineveh area. An area took three days to travel through and had a total population of about 120,000 people (Jonah 4:11).

5. Jonah and the pagan Ninevites (3:4-10)

- ❖ *Jonah 3:4-10--Jonah began to go into the city, going a day 's journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” 5 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them 6 The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles:Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, 8 but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” 10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it*
 - This is perhaps the greatest revival in the history of the world. Jonah performed no miracles, had no fancy entourage (it was just him and he probably didn’t look so good after his time in the whale), no smoke, thunder, flashes of lightning...nothing. All he did was announce that God was going to destroy them in 40 days and everyone repents “from the greatest to the least of them.” This is crazy! This is what every preacher dreams of! Preach one sermon and an entire civilization gets saved! So Jonah is thrilled right?

6. Jonah’s angry prayer (4:1-4)

- ❖ *Jonah 4:1-4--1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. 2 And he prayed to the Lord and said, “ O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” 4 And the Lord said, “Do you do well to be angry?*

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- This passage answers the question we just asked, No, Jonah was not thrilled that the entire city repented. But why? The answer to this question is also answer to an earlier question: why did Jonah run? The answer to both questions is...
- Because Jonah hated the Ninevites. Jonah knew his God. He rightly knew him to be “a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster” and he didn’t want God to be any of those things for the Ninevites. He hates them so much that the site of their repentance causes him to say “O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

7. Jonah’s lesson about compassion (4:5-11)

- ♣ *Jonah 4:5-11--Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. 6 Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. 7 But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live. 9 But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” 10 And the Lord said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?*

- *Two things to point out in this final portion of Jonah...*

- (1) God is utterly sovereign. We have already seen that God ruling sovereignly over everything in that he caused the storm that endangered Jonah and the pagan sailors (1:4), he caused a great fish to swallow Jonah (1:17), and he caused the fish to barf Jonah out (2:10). Now he sends a plant to provide Jonah with shade (4:6), he sends a worm to eat the plant (4:7), and he sends a scorching east wind to make Jonah really sweat (4:8). Why is he doing all this?
- (2) God is sovereignly ordering all things to reveal to Jonah that he is being a huge jerk. He has no compassion whatsoever. He groans and pleads for for death over the loss of a shady plant and yet the death of 120,000 people doesn’t sadden him at all.

In the book of Jonah, Jesus is...

1. Asleep in the boat

- In the book of Jonah, we see Jonah sleeping in a boat in the midst of a terrible storm while everyone around him is terrified. They beg him to cry out to God so that this storm might stop.
- In the book of Matthew, we see a nearly identical scene...
 - ♣ *Matthew 8:23-25--And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. 25 And they went and woke him, saying, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing.*
- Jonah was foreshadowing the one who had nothing to fear in the midst of such a storm.

2. The one who calms the storm.

- In the book of Jonah, God is the one who causes the storm and God is the only one who can stop the storm that threatens the lives of the pagan sailors.

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- In the New Testament, we see that Jesus is almighty God when he calms the storm with a spoken word...
 - ❖ Matthew 8:26-27--*he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. 27 And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him"*

3. Thrown into the sea

- In the book of Jonah we see pagan sailors working as hard as they can to survive the furious storm. They row and row for all they might but to no avail. The only way that they are going to survive is if God's chosen is sacrificed.
- In the New Testament we see a world working as hard as they to avoid the furious storm of God's wrath. The rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-30) claims to have kept the commandments of God from his youth and yet he knows that something more is required if he wants to escape God's wrath. The only way we will escape the wrath of God is if the Messiah, the chosen one, is sacrificed. This was prophesied by Isaiah...
 - ❖ Isaiah 53:10-11--*Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. 11 Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities*
 - Here Isaiah prophesies that God will pour out his wrath on "the righteous one" one so that many who are wicked will be counted as righteous
- The New Testament reveals that the one spoken of in Isaiah is none other than Jesus.
 - ❖ 1 Peter 2:22-25--*He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls*
- Thus, just as Jonah had to be thrown into the sea to save the life of the pagan sailors. Jesus had to die on the cross to save countless wicked people. He bore our sins in his body and his righteousness is imputed to all who place their faith in him alone.

4. In the belly of a whale

- ❖ Matthew 12:39-40--*"An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*
 - Here, the people are demanding that Jesus perform signs to prove that he is who he says he is and he refuses to give them what they want. The sign they wanted was miracles, healings, miraculous provision, etc. Yet, he will give a sign. The sign that he will give will be far greater than the petty things they long for. Jesus will prove that he is who he says he is by defeating death itself. He will experience death for three days and nights, and then he will rise.

5. Calling us to go into all the world

- In the book of Jonah, God calls Jonah to get over his racism and proclaim the Word of God to people who desperately need to hear it.

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- In the New Testament, Jesus calls us to do the very same thing...
 - ❖ Matthew 28:18-19--*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"*
 - ❖ Acts 1:8--*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*
 - Just as he did with Jonah, Jesus is calling us to preach the Gospel to people we are potentially uncomfortable with. Also, just as Jonah was confronted over the fact that he cared about a plant more than he did 120,000 people. We must recognize that we to have "plants" that we care about more than the 150,000 people here in Hampton, or the 180,000 people in Newport News. We conservative Christians tend to feel outraged when the government condones same sex marriage. We feel outraged when we are bullied into saying "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas." We feel outraged when the ten commandments are removed from U.S. courtrooms. We feel outraged when the President of the United States says "we do not consider ourselves a Christian nation²." I believe that that is possible that all of these things are simply God removing our shady plant from us. If that is the case, the question becomes, are we going to, like Jonah, throw a fit about our shady plant being removed. Are we going to have to endure God telling us, "do you do well to be angry?" Or are we going to share God's heart of compassion and proclaim the truth of the Gospel to the countless number of people around us who are enslaved by their sin and "do not know their right hand from their left?"

² http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/06/obama-us-not-a-christian_n_183772.html