



Week 29 Jonah

What does this book from the Bible mean for us today?

1) About the book of Jonah

a) Who was Jonah?

Jonah, son of Amittai, was from Gath Hepher near Nazareth on the southern border of the northern kingdom of Israel.

2 Kings 14:25 Jeroboam II King of Israel

²³ In the fifteenth year of Amaziah son of Joash king of Judah, **Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel became king in Samaria**, and he reigned forty-one years. ²⁴ He did evil in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit. ²⁵ He was the one **who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Dead Sea, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hepher.**

b) When was this?

8th Century BC - that's during the time of the Kings, with the divided nations of Judah and Israel.

Summary timeline:

Exodus and wilderness	[40 years]
Land of Israel with Judges	[3½ centuries]
Kingdoms of Israel and Judah	[5 centuries]
Exile	[70 years]
Post-exile	[5½ centuries]
Jesus Christ	

In the time of the reign of Jeroboam II (son of Jehoash) [786-746 BC]

c) What's the book about?

The book of Jonah is about a man called by God to prophesy for Him to a wicked people,
a man who disobeys,
who, through remarkable circumstances, is turned around and preaches as instructed,
who sees the people repent, and
who then feels angry at God's compassion on the repenting people.

What's distinctive about this book of the Minor Prophets is that it is more an account of the life and events of the prophet than recounting the prophetic words themselves.

Most prophets prophesied to Israel and Judah, but Jonah is called to go to the capital city of the neighbouring Assyrian empire.

d) Where did it take place?

Well, the early action takes place on (and in) the Mediterranean Sea, but the focus switches to Nineveh.

Gath Hepher, near Nazareth, is where Jonah lived.

Joppa was south east of Gath Hopher on the coast.

Tarshish was a port in Spain, on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea.

Nineveh, the ancient city (ref Gen 10:11,12), was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. It lay about 500 miles north east of Gath Hopher. When these events took place, Nineveh was a powerful, fortified city. It was a city steeped in idol worship, not unlike Israel itself.

- 120,000 population
- 3 days to cross it
- Jonah preaches to it
- Nahum prophesies against it around 150 years later
- Zephaniah foretells its destruction (Zeph 2:13-15) nearly another century later

(But more of those in Bible Explorer in the weeks up to Advent.)

For a map, see: <http://in-betweentime.blogspot.co.uk/2010/07/jonah-1-1-3.html>

2) The Themes in Summary

i) Jonah Disobeys

- God issued a command
- Jonah disobeyed - quiet refusal - no record of him speaking back to God, he just headed in the other direction
- Jonah fled from the Lord - flee: run away from danger or pursuers in haste (speed and urgency)
- God has authority over all nature - the wind and the sea (compare with Jesus in Matt 8:23-27)
- Jonah was hardened to God and appears insensitive to Him - in 1:9 Jonah says he fears God, but his actions speak differently
- The Gentile sailors showed respect / reverence for God and came to recognise the Lord is God
- The sailors showed compassion on Jonah (not wanting to throw him in and trying to row ashore) compared with Jonah's later lack of compassion for the Ninevites
- God shows his authority and calms the sea - awesome fear from the sailors (and disciples)
- God sends the 'fish' or 'whale' (sea creature)

ii) Jonah Prays

- Jonah's prayer - he cried out to God
- Did he have a change of heart? Or was this just a cry for help for himself?
- Did Jonah really submit to God? (Do we?)
- Jonah 2:9 - Salvation comes from the Lord
- God is gracious and answers Jonah's cry

iii) Jonah Obeys

- Gracious God - repeats command to Jonah - he's given a second chance
- We don't have much of the 'text' of Jonah's message:
 - "forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned"
 - We don't hear any call for repentance or pleading for change
- Has Jonah changed his attitude? (in the light of what comes next)
- The Ninevites repent - comprehensively - from the king to the most lowly - sackcloth and fasting
- God is gracious and relents on sending His destruction (for the time being)

iv) Jonah's Malaise *(well, it feels like it should rhyme with disobeys, prays and obeys)*

- Jonah is really angry when he sees the Ninevites' repentance
- Knowing God as he does, Jonah knows He won't destroy the repenting Ninevites
- Maybe this was why Jonah fled in the first place - he knew God would forgive
- Jonah probably had a deep-seated dislike of the Assyrians - they were a powerful empire, had defeated Israel in battle, and so were Israel's enemy
- Jonah went out of Nineveh and 'waited to see what would happen to the city', expecting (and hoping) for its destruction
- Jonah was 'very happy about the vine' and the shade it gave and was angry when the plant died
- God contrasts Jonah's concern for the vine with His own concern for the people of Nineveh and their possible destruction

3) Links between Jonah and Jesus

Jesus Calms the Storm

Matthew 8 vv 23-27

23 Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. 24 Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. 25 The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"

26 He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

27 The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

Jesus and the Sign of Jonah

Matthew 12 vv 38-41

38 Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you."

39 He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. 42 The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.

4) What does this say about God and our attitude to Him?

We see the character of God

- God speaks
- God is powerful - He has authority over nature - the wind and the sea, the fish and the plant
- God is loving and compassionate - giving second chances, to Jonah, the Ninevites, and us today
- God answers prayer - the sailors', Jonah's and the Ninevites'

***The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and abounding in love***

A recurring phrase throughout the Old Testament:

- The LORD gave this description of Himself to Moses (see **Exodus 34 vv4-8, especially v6**)
- King Hezekiah purified the Temple, re-established the service of the LORD in the Temple and called the people to observe the Passover again (see **2 Chronicles 30 vv 5-9, especially v9**)
- Later after exile to Babylon, Nehemiah returns to rebuild Jerusalem, Ezra reads the book of the law (Nehemiah 8), the people grieve and the Levites lead the people in confessing their sins, repenting, promising not to neglect the house of the LORD. The Levites pray. (**Nehemiah 9 vv 16-18 (v17b)**)
- Psalms
 - Psalm 86 vv14-16 (v15) - a prayer of David when under pressure
 - Psalm 103 v8 - a psalm of David
 - Psalm 111 v4
 - Psalm 112 v4
 - Psalm 145 v8
- Joel - talks of the army of locusts, then declares "rend your heart and not your garments, return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love" (**Joel 2 vv 12-14**)
- Jonah - expressed his anger at God not acting against Jonah's enemy

We see that Jonah knew about God, and God knew Jonah

- Jonah knew about God, but appeared to take that too lightly, too casually
- Jonah knew God is gracious - when he called from the fish
- Jonah knew God is compassionate - and would have mercy on the Assyrians if they repented
- Yet Jonah stubbornly resisted God's ultimate sovereignty and wisdom
- Jonah thought he knew better
- Jonah willingly received forgiveness himself whilst being unforgiving to his enemies
- The Assyrians deserved judgement and Jonah wanted them to get what they deserved
- LORD you have searched me and you know me, you know when I sit and when I arise ... you discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. (Psalm 139)

Do I excuse myself more readily than I forgive others?

Am I proud of being in "God's camp" and making judgements on those in another camp?

Do I think I deserve God's favour above others?

Do I get angry, jealous or feel piqued when I see God bless the initiatives and ministries of others?

The LORD, the God of Heaven, is a God of second chances

Finally, see

Psalm 139 and Psalm 103