

The Book of Jonah
Class Notes
Session 2

Jonah 1.1-3 God commanded Jonah...*the reluctant prophet*...to travel to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it.



(v.2): Nineveh was an old city, dating back to approximately 4500 B.C. A principal city (Capital.) of ancient Assyria.

God describes Nineveh as evil... While the exact nature of the evil is not given in the text, God's judgment was coming upon Nineveh due to its sin.

(v.3): Jonah's reluctance to travel to Nineveh may have been due to its horrendous violence or Jonah's incredulity that God would spare these veil people!

Jonah heads to Tarshish...literally the opposite direction from Nineveh! Notice the "movement" in the text...As Jonah runs from God...He *goes down*...and as we will see...further and further!

Joppa was a seaport on the Great Sea. Outgoing Ships would routinely carry passengers as well as cargo if one could pay the fare, which, Jonah did.

No matter the reasoning, Jonah wanted to be far away from God and from Nineveh.

"Most of us have our own Nineveh and Tarshish. One is the city of faithfulness and obedience; the other is a place of escape and equivocation. Our Ninevehs are those clear revelations of the will of God. Also, whatever or whomever our judgments have focused on as our enemy can be our Nineveh. Nineveh can be simply the Lord's urging that we change our behavior or do some obedient action that demands more than we are ready to give. Whatever else, Nineveh is the call of God sounding in our hearts to put Him first, be His person, and accept our vocation to be servants in mission....Tarshish can be inside our own souls!"¹

What we begin to see in just these three verses is what will be a recurring theme throughout Jonah...

...Yahweh is not only the God of Israel; He is the God of all Nations!

Still...Jonah could not believe that an evil, idolatrous Nation was worthy of Yahweh's attention.

¹ L.J. Ogilvie. *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1990).

Not to mention (and here is Jonah's true fear), what if Nineveh repents!?

"Jonah, like any other orthodox Israelite, would of course have known that...the covenant blessings and curses were held before Israel...God's command to Jonah to "speak against" Nineveh had to be understood in light of the possibility that God might thereby bring good, rather than evil, to the city...He does not want to preach against Nineveh, to give them any chance of repentance, and he thinks he has a chance to avoid a restatement of the divine call by fleeing. It will not work, of course. The divine call will come again exactly as it did at first (3:2)."²

The reality of divine freedom has always been a tension in Biblical faith. Both Israel and the Church can forget that *being chosen comes with a holy vocation...* to be *salt* and *light* to the world.

Jesus Himself repeatedly angered the Religious leaders for exactly this reason.

The criticism of the Scribes and Pharisees was always..."Doesn't He realize who He was eating with and talking to?"

The "Tax collectors and sinners" as described in the Gospel of Luke, were simply a smaller version of Nineveh. *Luke 15.1-2*. Jesus came to save the lost!

Jonah 1.4-6 "*Love Beneath the Waves.*" The story of Jonah now takes a dramatic and even violent turn. A storm comes up against the ship.

However, this is not just any storm, this is a storm *sent* by Yahweh.

The verb translated "sent"... טָלַח (*tál*)... is elsewhere used of hurling an object such as a spear.

This "great wind," or storm, was "hurled" by Yahweh like a spear to stop Jonah's running!

Yahweh throws down upon the sea a gale so furious that even these experienced sailors are frightened!

Even though Jonah tried to flee from God's presence, he could not because God would not leave Jonah!

God is the principal person in the narrative, not Jonah. A contrast appears...The sailors are panicking while Jonah is asleep!

How could Jonah sleep through such a storm? Some commentators have suggested that Jonah is significantly depressed. As there are no atheists in foxholes, there are no atheists on storm-tossed boats!

"The ancient Near East's religious environment included devotion to a multitude of "protecting spirits, patron deities...Perhaps the sailors felt that they had not reached their god or had gone through the wrong "channels" to contact their particular patron deity."³

Going Forward: "Jonah turns his back on God, but God stops Jonah from his folly. God could punish Jonah or send someone else to Nineveh. However, God loves Jonah so much that He sends a storm to interrupt his flight and to eventually bring him back into a healthy relationship with his Savior. Our own disobedience merits punishment, but God in His love and mercy works to bring us to repentance and a restored relationship rather than closing the door on us."⁴

² D. Stuart. *Word Biblical Commentary: Hosea-Jonah* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002).

³ L.C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1976).

⁴ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia, 2000).