

The Book of Jonah
Class Notes
Session 3

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”... טוּל (tūl)... 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.”¹

In Jonah, the storm was sent by God as a way for God to “redirect” the reluctant Prophet!

In God’s sovereignty, storms, while frightening and disorienting, become the means through which God saves us and changes us.

Jonah 1.7-10 The sailors prayed to “the gods” during the storm at sea.

The idea that the gods caused storms and really, all circumstances that human beings encountered, was a common understanding in the Ancient Near East.

Relatedly, certain individuals and their behaviors could cause the gods to look favorably or unfavorably upon the world.

The method of casting of lots was used in antiquity to discern what “the gods” desired.

גוּרַל (gō·rāl)... Lit., “Lot” (Pebbles, sticks, Pottery shards).

¹ L.C. Allen. *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1976).

“The most common word used for ‘lot’ indicates that they were either stones or pebbles that were painted or colored; When the stones were thrown, if two dark sides landed up the usual interpretation was no. If two light sides landed up, that meant yes.”²

Again...The Sovereignty principle...God even used “pagan” means to guide human history!

“The crew wanted to know whom to blame for such a tempestuous storm...the lot fell on Jonah. God, who controlled the storm, also controlled the outcome of casting lots. Jonah thought he could run away from the Lord’s presence, but God demonstrated His reign over every detail of the situation.”³

Even though he was running from God, Jonah admitted to the sailors that he was a Hebrew and that God should be feared as the only true God!

Jonah’s confession is that his God is the God of heaven...the one true Sovereign...In contrast with the sailors’ many false gods!

Yahweh is the Creator...The One who made the sea and the land...*Exodus 20.11...Psalm 95.5.*

Consequently...as Creator of the world He can control nature...including storms on the sea!
Psalm 89.9.

(v.10): The circumstances intensify... The description of the sailor’s fear is literally...“they feared with a great fear.”

The sailor’s question of what Jonah has done includes... “What have you done *to us?*”

Both Jonah and the sailors would know that running from a god was foolish...To run away from the God who made heaven and earth is dangerous...and foolish!

Jonah maybe responsible for the sailors’ deaths... Another irony...He ran from his call to the Ninevites that could have saved them!

Yet Jonah now has to deal with other pagans and determine to save them.

Disobedience to God only creates more frustrations, pain, and misery!

Going Forward: “We rightly take comfort in learning that [God’s] power is unchanged, and that the focus of his care in working all things together for the good of those who love him is still the same. But we should also understand that the God who stills the storm, also sends it (v. 4)...The hurling...[of the storm in Jonah]...is not the action of a frustrated deity petulantly throwing a tantrum and taking revenge on the man who refused to do his bidding. Rather, it indicates precision and purpose in God’s actions. He is not out to punish Jonah, but to turn him round and restore him.”⁴

² B.K. Smith and F.S. Page. *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995).

³ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).

⁴ P. Mackrell. *Opening up Jonah* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2007).