

The Book of Jonah

The Reluctant Prophet

Study 1 – God’s World; God’s messenger

Introduction

For many of us the story of Jonah is familiar, at least in broad terms. Jonah the prophet is told by God to preach to the great city of Nineveh, the imperial capital of his day. To our surprise however Jonah promptly heads in the opposite direction, only to be pursued by the LORD, cast overboard in a great storm, swallowed by a great fish, vomited onto dry land, and having it seems learned his lesson, finally agrees to fulfil his prophetic calling. And yet even then something seems wrong, for Jonah’s mission to Nineveh results not in the judgement that the LORD threatened (and which it seems that Jonah welcomed!) but in repentance on the part of the Ninevites and a seeming change of mind on the LORD’s part – much to Jonah’s great displeasure. Suddenly a book which seems so simple raises all sorts of questions, questions which as we shall see search our hearts and challenge our attitudes toward those who do not know God.

Chapter 1 of the book introduces us to the main characters – the LORD, Jonah and the city of Nineveh – and lays out the key elements of the plot – a command of God, a refusal by the prophet and the Lord’s intervention to ensure that His command is fulfilled. The first chapter however also highlights the first of two key statements about God, namely that the LORD, the God of the Hebrews is also “the God of heaven who made the sea and the land” (1:9). As we shall see from our study of the passage, it is this key truth that lies the LORD’s commission to Jonah to go and preach his coming wrath to the Ninevites.

Read Jonah 1:1-17



Investigate

1. What commission did the LORD give to Jonah? (1:1-2)

2. What reason did the LORD give to Jonah for his mission? (1:2)

3. How did Jonah respond to the LORD's instruction? What clue does the narrative give us as to why Jonah responded in this way?

4. What is surprising about Jonah's response to the LORD's command?

5. How does the LORD respond to Jonah's disobedience?

6. Jonah the reluctant prophet is compelled by the situation to declare the truth about the LORD to the pagan sailors. What does He say?

7. How do the sailor's respond to Jonah's declaration about the LORD? How might this anticipate the future response of the Ninevites?

8. How do they respond to the LORD after the storm is stilled?

9. What is surprising about Jonah's instruction to the sailors that he should be thrown overboard?

10. In what way does the LORD rescue Jonah from death by drowning?



Think

1. How does Jonah's declaration of who the LORD is connect with the mission that the LORD gave Jonah?

2. How does this truth apply in our world today? What impact should it have upon our view of the church's mission and message?

3. How do you interpret Jonah's sacrificial act?

Apply



In what way has this passage challenged your thinking about our world and the godly response to our world?



In what way has this passage spoken to your heart and challenged your own attitudes to a pagan world?



What needs to change in your daily life as a result of this passage?