

*(99) Adult Sunday School Class
Jonah, chpts. 1-4
Prophets, pp. 439-444*



There is much more to this book than a “great fish story...” Debate still ensues to this day whether this event could really have ever happened. Some argue that it is impossible to be swallowed by a great fish for three days and have survived. But the argument misses the point! This event, like many other miraculous events in the Bible, are unusual and even impossible under normal circumstances. But under divine intervention these can occur, that is what miracles are. Furthermore, recall even Jesus references this event (Matt. 12:40).

The book of Jonah identifies the prophet as the “son of Amittai,” a prophet mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25. From this reference, scholars date Jonah to the reign of king Jeroboam II (786-746 BC).

Jonah is a book about obedience. Ironically, of all the 16 other Bible prophets with books named after them, Jonah is the only prophet who rebels against God. God tells Jonah to go and preach to the city of Nineveh, capital of Assyria (modern day Iraq). Instead of obeying, Jonah initially heads in the opposite direction to Tarshish (southern coast of Spain). The Assyrians were known to be very vicious; in fact, their idea of art included stone-chiseled images of dead Jews impaled on poles. Understandably, Jonah being a Jew, thought being sent to Nineveh to deliver God’s message of coming judgment was too great of a personal risk.

Unlike most other prophets in the Bible, Jonah’s message gets through and the Assyrians believe and repent, unlike the Jews in most of the other situations. In the history of Israel’s prophets, Jonah is a success because the Ninevites turn to God, yet Jonah considers himself a failure because God spared the Assyrians, Israel’s enemies.

One of the obvious applications from this book is that if God tells us to do something, we need to obey. Another lesson is to realize that God’s compassion is boundless and that He loves everyone (even the cruel Assyrians). Lastly, the story of Jonah is an indictment against us if we are more concerned about our well-being than the plight of the lost.