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THE MINOR PROPHETS  
BOOK 6 – JONAH

Jonah is (along with Daniel) my favorite book of the thirteen minor prophets. It shows the human vulnerability of even the most anointed of God's ministers. Each of Jonah's four chapters is a story within itself.

The time period of this book is somewhat uncertain. It is somewhere between 862 B.C. to 780 B.C. depending on your reference source. Jonah was a very established and respected prophet of Judah. This is established in 2 Kings 14:25 which refers to the fulfillment of a remarkable prophecy from Jonah.

In Jonah 1:2 the prophet is told by God to go to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh and preach against it. Nineveh was located north of Babylon (Iraq) near the headwaters of the great Tigris River. Assyria became the largest empire of Jonah's day, even greater than Babylon. It was the most warlike, fiercest, and most brutal of the empires.

Jonah loved Jehovah and Judah. He seems to have had the common belief of the day that God hated the pagan gentiles. He did not want to go to them, so he fled in the opposite direction by ship. A storm arose because of his disobedience, which caused the ship to start sinking and would have taken the lives of all aboard. Jonah realized it was his fault. He preached Jehovah to the sailors. Jonah insisted that they should throw him overboard so they would be saved, and they did just that. He would rather die by drowning than go to those heathen Ninevites. When the sea calmed, all the sailors gave sacrifices, worship, and vows to Jehovah.

A huge fish (probably a whale shark) swallowed Jonah and he spent three days and three nights in the belly of this huge fish. Jonah repented of his sin and the huge fish cast him out onto land in the direction of Nineveh, so he went there. Nineveh was so large with its surrounding villages that it took Jonah three days to walk from one end to the other. He preached that they had only 40 days until Jehovah would overthrow them.

Because of his preaching, the people repented. The King decreed an absolute fast, told his people to repent, and seek God (Elohiym). In chapter 3 God saw Nineveh's repentance and He then repented of His judgment upon Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire.

Chapter 4 shows Jonah's disappointment that God had spared Nineveh. Jonah waited outside the city to watch their downfall and when it didn't happen, he wanted to die because his prophecy did not happen. God sent Jonah a gourd and worm as an illustrated lesson as to why he spared this city of 120,000 people.

Jonah had believed Nineveh should be destroyed because of their sin, but God had other plans for this Assyrian capitol. Assyria would return later to their wickedness and God would use them in 722 B.C. to destroy and enslave Israel (Samaria) due to Israel's idolatry. A hundred years later Assyria was defeated by Babylon for its role against Israel and never regained eminence.