

Kings and Prophets 15-01-09a

January 2015, we continue our study in Kings and Prophets and we finally get to formally address a prophet after doing a whole bunch of Kings for a whole bunch of weeks. We will be looking tonight at the prophet Jonah and his ministry during the reign of Jeroboam the second in the northern kingdom and the production of the book that bears his name. Why does that prophecy occur in the Bible and not only why but why at this time and in this historic circumstance? We're not always given a specific notation as to when a writing prophet ministered.

We do have that information for Ezekiel. We do have it for Isaiah, major prophets. We don't always have it for the minor prophets but we do have it for Jonah and it is not without significance.

The Lord Jesus Christ refers specifically and directly to this prophecy in connection with his own ministry under the sign of Jonah. So it is a fascinating subject. We're going to try to cover the whole thing tonight so that we can move on to the contemporaneous prophecies of Hosea and Amos and eventually getting into the prophecy of Joel.

But tonight it is Jonah. He is the first that is mentioned. He is the first chronologically as near as we can ascertain and there is a reason.

We have built a great background and foundation and chronological sweep through the kings of the divided nation of Israel and we come now to the first jewel inserted into that setting in terms of a prophetic book. Let's take a moment as we approach this study to go before the Lord in prayer and ask his blessing and his superintendence, his grace and his supernatural investment in our study so that we will each come away from it better equipped to live in a way that pleases him. Shall we pray? Father it is an exciting thing to see the forward progress of your plan.

We see it in the pages of scripture. We see it in events that surround us in the present day. We see it in our daily lives and particularly we see it in our personal relationship with you through the Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Spirit illuminated by your word.

We thank you for the potential that each day brings. We thank you for the bright hope that lies before us. We thank you for the security that undergirds us and we thank you most of all for the Lord Jesus in whom we have secure possession of all these things.

We pray that tonight as we look at this portion of your word that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to our hearts that we will be impressed with its truth and motivated by its content that we may live our lives in its light enabled and empowered by your grace laying hold of righteousness by faith and securing our eternal inheritance as a result. We pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.

We saw in our travels shall we say through the books of Kings and Chronicles that there has been a decidedly less illustrious history in the northern kingdom. It hasn't been great in Judah. There's been a lot of problems down there.

Probably the Nadir. You know what the Nadir is don't you? It's the opposite of the Zenith. You get the Zenith and the Nadir.

N-A-D-I-R not Ralph Nader. But he's even still around. I think he might have checked out to that great Edsel inspection facility in the sky or something.

I'm not sure where he went but he used to be something of a self-proclaimed consumer advocate. But the low point shall we say in the southern kingdom has to probably be the time of Athaliah just before the return through the ministry of Jehoiada the priest of Joash and the line of David reasserting sovereign rule on David's throne. But the northern kingdom has had serious problems and for this reason much of the spectacular ministry of the prophets Elijah and Elisha and men of God proclaiming the Word of God has been in the north because they are in greatest need.

God can minister more quietly and more effectively through the shadow pictures of the Levitical system down in Judah. There are generally a greater number of relatively faithful kings who ensure that the Word of God is taught in the non-spectacular and regular basis that actually produces more fruit. This of course is the case in our own day and our own lives.

I don't want to be in such desperate straits that God had to do miraculous things to get my attention, to wave a supernatural flag at me to stop me from going over the cliff. You often find that there is this almost cartoon quality to what God does in the northern kingdom, graphic novel, simplistic communication of a very spectacular kind to get people's attention and try to turn them from their ways which can lead only to death and are absolutely counter to all of God's purposes for them. Well, as we have seen in recent times, the reign of Jeroboam II and Jonah is ministering during his time.

This is found for us in 2 Kings chapter 14 and if you want to just quickly review how we know that this is the time of Jonah, you can turn again to chapter 14 and as we saw last time in verse 23, in the 15th year of Amaziah, the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Jehoash we have been calling him up in the north, this is Jeroboam II, the first Jeroboam was the first northern king as you'll remember, came to reign in Samaria and he's going to reign for over 40 years, he does evil in the sight of the Lord, he does not depart from all the sins of the first Jeroboam who made Israel sin. He does have some successes though, he restores the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the sea of the Arabah according to the word of the Lord God of Israel which he had spoken through his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Heffer. Gath Heffer is up in the mountains of Zebulun, the territory ascribed to Zebulun and it's certain that this is the same Jonah that belongs to the prophetic book because this name appears nowhere else, you can have multiple Joashes, you can have multiple Amaziahs and Azariahs, you can have multiple Jehoidas and many other relatively common

names, there is no other Jonah and there is no other Amittai and there certainly is an extreme unlikelihood that there would be a Jonah son of Amittai who was a different Jonah son of Amittai than the Jonah son of Amittai we have here.

So it is the same guy, lest there be any doubt. Jonah, Yonah in Hebrew means dove, Amittai means the truth of God, Amitt there the first part of that that derives from Emeth, E-M-E-T-H which you may recognize as the Hebrew word for truth and so this is the dove, the son of the truth of God, related to partaking of the truth of God, Yonah son of Amittai. Well, he has prophesied that the kingdom is going to expand this and and there would be a restoration of earlier territorial holdings and this comes to pass in these days despite the fact that Jeroboam the second is a bad guy.

Now, why would God send a prophet to prophesy material success, military victory, territorial acquisition in the days of yet another bad king? Well, what has God done in previous reigns, previous generations? He has sent foreign invaders in to take away land, to depress the economy, to produce negative results and he predicted and foretold that as well. God is taking a different tack. He says, look, I am the sovereign God and I'm telling you now that despite your unfaithfulness, despite your idolatry, despite your wicked king, I am going to restore to you.

This is just a pro bono, no strings attached, not earned or deserved sign that I am your God. A good thing is going to happen. Don't read into this fulfillment of covenant promise in terms of if you are obedient you will be blessed.

I'm going to send a blessing that you don't deserve, that you aren't in line for, that you do not qualify for. It is completely a grace sign to remind you that I am the sovereign God. Not only can I fulfill my covenant promises, both positive and negative, but I can invent, I according to God's own will.

He can bless when blessing isn't even expected or deserved. All of these things are designed to draw people to himself, to turn his people back to their God, right? He's tried the stick, now he is essentially trying the carrot. It isn't idle.

If it was a happenstance, why would he send the prophet to predict it? I am the God, unlike any other, who tells you what is going to happen before it happens, right? This is one of the uniquenesses of God. He tells them beforehand, you are going to have these territories restored. According to the word of the Lord, 2nd Kings 14, 25, that comes through Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gathhepher.

Why? Verse 26, the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter. Do they deserve bitter affliction? Yes, they do, but God relents, God remits. This reminds me, I've told this story a time or two before, but this type of thing always reminds me of a time when I malfunctioned, I had my head in the clouds and wasn't thinking and wasn't doing what I was supposed to, doing my chores, feeding the horses, throwing out hay and whatnot.

I left the gate open and the horses got out. Well, it was totally my fault, totally my responsibility. I was remiss, I was disobedient, I was careless, and I deserved the verbal rebuke that I received from my father.

Fully deserved, guilty as charged, I had no qualms, no questions, but a few minutes after that, my dad came back into the room and just hugged me, and he stood there and hugged me for several minutes. It was my birthday. Doesn't change the fact that I had malfunctioned, doesn't change the fact that I was absolutely deserving of rebuke and correction and instruction and righteousness that I had received, but despite that, my dad loved me, and I belonged to him, and undeserved and unmerited and above and beyond.

There was that expression. This is what God is doing, I think, to the Northern Kingdom. He looks down at his people in verse 26 and saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter.

They deserve it. Look at them. Jeroboam is repeating the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

He's leading Israel into sin. There's idolatry. There's still a golden calf in Dan, and there's another one in Bethel.

They have failed to heed the ministry of prophet after prophet. Elijah, Elisha, men of God, bringing words of stinging correction and rebuke, all deserved, but God balances and tempers this bitter judgment with an expression of his concern and his love. He is still their God, and there are people in the land who are susceptible to response, who will remember their God because of his grace.

The Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, and whether bond or free, there was no helper for Israel. And the Lord did not say that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, but he delivered them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash. He delivered them by a rascal king.

King doesn't deserve it. King isn't in line for it. King's not seeking the will of God, but God uses him such as he is to be an instrument of deliverance for the nation.

The rest of the acts of Jeroboam and all that he did are written in the books. But these are the days of Jonah. Turn now a significant chunk of your Bible over from 2 Kings to the book of Jonah.

This goes in my Bible from page 496 to page 1192. So it's about 700 pages further on in the Minor Prophets, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah. And you'll see that several of the prophets that are ministering at this time that we are going to look at, Hosea, Amos, Joel, are right here in the same part of the Bible with Jonah.

The book of Jonah. Now we have actually done a full study of this book. I'm just going to try to survey and summarize the import and the significance of this prophecy at this time in the history of Israel, specifically the history of the Northern Kingdom.

The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, Arise go to Nineveh that great city and cry out against it for their wickedness has come up before me. Now here's what's interesting. There have already begun to be prophecies about the rise of Assyria.

Not a lot, not like there's going to be later on, but there are already suggestions that God is going to use the up-and-coming Empire of Assyria to be the rod of God's judgment and the staff of his indignation. Jonah knows this. He knows that the Northern Kingdom is in line for judgment and he knows that Assyria is one of the instruments by which God is going to bring about that judgment.

So when God says go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and proclaim their wickedness to them, there is a reaction in Jonah's heart. You have to ask yourself, if Jonah is a functioning prophet, why would he decide he's not going to obey? Well, we're given the specific answer to this at the end of the book. We're not given it here and so I'm not going to talk about it yet.

We're just going to kind of go through sequentially. He is given this command. Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it, for their wickedness has come up before me.

Their wickedness has come up before me. Can you think of other historic instances where the wickedness of men or a group of men has come up before God? When's the first big instance where the wickedness of men came up before God? It's in Noah's day, right? The stench of it goes into God's nostrils. The imagination of men's heart is only evil all the day.

Can you think of another instance after the flood? How about Abraham's nephew? The wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah has come up before me. God tells Abraham, I've got to wipe this stuff out. In the case of the wickedness that came up before God in Noah's day, what was the result? The flood.

In the days of Lot, what was the result of the wickedness coming up before God's face? The Holocaust that destroyed the five cities of the plain, including Sodom and Gomorrah, right? So when Jonah hears that the wickedness of Nineveh has come up before God's face, what's his idea? If you think he doesn't know his Bible, wait till we get to his prayer from the belly of the fish. It's all scripture quotes. It's nothing but scripture quotes.

Jonah knows his Bible. He knows his existing Old Testament scriptures, and as soon as he hears God say the wickedness of Nineveh has come up before my face, he's saying, right on. It used to be lived in the 70s, that's what he'd say.

Right on. Let's, you know, bring it on down. I don't care if it's a flood or it's a fire.

Anything that destroys those people is good in my book. But God says go cry out against them for their wickedness has come up before me. Jonah says, well, if I cry out, that opens up the possibility of no judgment, as we'll see.

I said I wasn't going to anticipate it, but I did anyway. But this explains why in verse 3, Jonah

arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Understand now, Jonah is no dummy.

He knows the Lord. He knows the Psalms. He knows what David said about that there's no place you can go to flee from the presence of the Lord.

In Hebrew, this is a little easier to understand. Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from serving in the presence of the Lord. He's in the presence of the Lord and he is arising to flee from that location.

He's not expecting that he can find that there is no presence of the Lord in Tarshish. It simply says, and this tells us that these events occurred after, at least it implies that it occurred after his prophetic ministry to Jeroboam II. He has been in the presence of the Lord.

He's been functioning and serving as a prophet, but now he is going to arise and flee. Now God said in verse 2, arise, go to Nineveh. Jonah arises and goes the other way, almost directly opposite.

Nineveh is north and east of his location, assuming he's in and around the environments of Gath-Hepher. He instead goes to the coast, to the port of Joppa, it tells us in verse 3, and he found a ship going to Tarshish. Tarshish is basically clear over in what is now Spain, opposite end of the Mediterranean Sea.

He wants to get so far away that God can't even lift him up by the hair of the head or use a whirlwind or something and blow him over there. Jonah probably knows that Elijah used to travel by wind conveyance from time to time. He says, well, if I get far enough away, God can't send a wind that's going to blow me clear across the Mediterranean.

So he's getting well away. And he paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went there from the presence of the Lord.

This means he is abandoning, relinquishing, ending, revoking, quitting the service of God. I quit. Don't want to be a prophet anymore.

What is the presence of the Lord? The presence of the Lord is that place where God communicates with him and gives him his instructions and he obeys. And by the way, he found a ship. This is a really interesting word.

There's been some feeble attempts to discount the Book of Jonah and say that it was written late and couldn't possibly reflect actual events. And one of the things they do is they come to this word for ship and say, well, this is a late word. It's not the usual Hebrew word for ship.

Well, this is a really specific word and it refers to a decked ship, a ship with multiple decks. And this is not the kind of boat that you would typically find on the Sea of Galilee or going up and down the coast of the Mediterranean, even when Israel had its sovereignty extend all the way to the coast. These little coastal ships and inland sea vessels are not as big and as robust as this

one.

This is a multi-decked ship and this is a technical term for that. It's a Phoenician term because this is a Phoenician ship, which has its own significance. But it's actually more of an indication that this is a very ancient and accurate account than evidence that it is late.

And this also informs the continuing progress of the story because it says that Jonah went down into it. He's not up on the deck sunning himself, you know, feeling the, you know, doing the Leonardo DiCaprio thing with the wind blowing through his beard. He went down into it.

He's not just going down to the sea and going in the other direction. He's going down, he's sort of hiding below decks. He's down amongst the cargo.

He may have coiled up something soft and maybe they had a little cabin down there, but he's below decks. He doesn't want to even be visible, as it were, to heaven. So he's gone down into this ship.

He's below decks, way below decks, below a couple of decks. But the Lord sent out a great Ruach. It's very interesting because it's the same word, wind, is also translated spirit.

Just as in Greek, you have pneuma, used for both wind in John chapter 3, and spirit. The spirit lists where it will, and you don't know where it comes from, where it goes. Jesus talking to Nicodemus, and he uses pneuma, pneumatismos, interchangeably for what appears to be spirit or wind, at least in your English translation.

Well, same thing here, Ruach. God hurled a powerful Ruach into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea so that the ship was about to be broken up. This is one of the biggest, strongest, most well-built ships in the world, and the ship is about to be broken up.

This is like the perfect storm sort of thing in the Mediterranean Sea, and you can imagine with this level of water movement and wind and storm that the entire sea is going to be greatly disturbed. Disturbed not just on the surface, but even below. So the mariners, this is another interesting word because it almost literally means salts, the old salts that were, these are experienced seamen, were afraid.

Every man cried out to his God and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten the load, but Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, below several decks, had lain down, and was fast asleep. Any other place in the Bible, great storm, somebody fast asleep? Yes. Is there a connection between the Lord Jesus Christ and Jonah? Yes, there is, and this is one of those connecting threads.

It's really interesting to see the, I wouldn't, you can't say inhuman, but the non, if you and I, if somebody in Hollywood, if a storyteller were going to try to connect Jonah and the Lord Jesus, they would never do it the way God does it. Jonah is a bad guy here. He's disobedient.

He is doing the wrong thing. Why would you connect the Lord Jesus in the New Testament to Jonah in the Old when Jonah in this chapter is doing every single thing in disobedience to the will of God? Only God would craft this kind of link and do it at the level that only God inhabits and communicates on, but we'll see that a little bit later. So Jonah is fast asleep despite a storm that is scaring experienced sailors.

So the captain, and this is another term that critics have objected to because this word isn't found earlier in the Old Testament. Well, guess what? There's no previous case where the Old Testament is referring to Mediterranean Sea sailors with these giant ships and a guy who is a captain of such a ship. There's been no occasion to use this word.

It doesn't mean that it's late. It doesn't mean that the story was manufactured later. It simply means that this is a very good and accurate term for the guy who actually was the captain of this ship.

But he comes to him and says, What do you mean, O sleeper? Arise, call on your God. Remember in the New Testament, Awake, O sleeper, and Christ will give you light. Well, this is a very similar and perhaps related state.

What do you mean, O sleeper? Arise and call on your God. Perhaps your God will consider us so that we may not perish. And they said to one another, Come, let us cast lots that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.

Now these guys have seen storms across the years. There are probably decades of seafaring experience among these sailors, but they know as they look at this storm that this is a supernaturally instigated storm. In the midst of trying to save the ship from breaking up, in the midst of casting cargo, which is their profit, their livelihood, their reason for the journey overboard to save their lives, they stop and cast lots because they say, We have got to figure out whose fault this is.

Some God is so angry that he is in the process of slaying us. They have a God consciousness that survives the fear of the storm, the impressive nature of this never-before-seen hurricane type of situation. They are driven to believe that there is a God at work, and they must find out who it is that is bringing this disaster upon them.

In the midst of all of this chaos, and I can only imagine the stormy seas, and they are all trying to hang on to something, and they are trying to cast these lots. This straw is for you. This straw is for the captain.

This straw is for the passenger. This straw is for the guy that is in the fo'c'sle. This straw is for the guy that is back there throwing the last of the cargo off.

They throw these lots, and it points to Jonah. Now are lots a valid means of ascertaining truth? Casting some objects with designated meanings like rolling the dice, or is this normally an accurate way of ascertaining truth? No, it's not. In Israel, and in this case, God supernaturally

communicates through what is normally not a valid method of communication to these Phoenician sailors.

He guides the lot so that it points to Jonah. God did that. God lets the sailors know through a very unorthodox means that it is he who is at work, and it is his man who is at fault.

There's only one man on the ship who can communicate to them the truth of the God of Israel, and God supernaturally causes the lot to fall upon Jonah so that Jonah is forced to testify. Why did Jonah get on the ship? Because he did not want to testify about the mercy and grace of the God of Israel to Gentiles. What is he now doing? Testifying to the grace of God to Gentiles.

So they said to Jonah, please tell us, for whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation, and where do you come from? What is your country, and of what people are you? I am a Hebrew. This goes all the way back to Genesis and the identification of Abraham. This is how the Gentiles understood the descendants of Abraham.

This term is one that Israelites don't normally use of themselves unless they're being identified by Gentiles. I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry. He is the creator God.

So the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, why have you done this? For the men knew that he had fled from the presence of the Lord because he told them. Fled from the service of the Lord. Fled from obedient function before the Lord.

That's what the presence means. God is obviously present. He made the lot fall on Jonah.

So they said to him, what shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us? For the sea was growing more tempestuous. He said to them, pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that this great tempest is because of me.

Nevertheless, the men rode hard to return to land. Unlike Jonah's disregard for the safety and fate of the people of Nineveh, unlike Jonah's disregard for the safety and fate of the sailors, and you notice Jonah doesn't fess up until the lot falls on him and the sailors pretty much surround him and question him. He doesn't volunteer the information even after he's awakened and told to pray to his God.

He doesn't. He doesn't volunteer the information. He does it under pressure.

Pretty much when he's given no choice. Given a choice, he says nothing. But God puts him in a situation where he's squeezed hard enough that the information kind of pops out.

So these sailors, even with this information and given the knowledge of how to escape the storm, have concern for Jonah. They don't want to throw him overboard. They don't want to be responsible for his apparently certain death.

Who's the better man? Who are the better people here? The man from Israel or the man from

Phoenicia? Who has more concern for fellow man? What a rebuke. What an indictment. What a conviction that these professional mariners have more concern for Jonah's well-being than Jonah has for theirs, much less for the great city of Nineveh.

It's an astounding conviction. The men rode hard to return to land, but they could not. Verse 13, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them.

God is not going to let Jonah off the hook. That's probably not the best phrase to use in this context. Therefore, they cried out to the Lord.

Look at this. Verse 14, what has Jonah not done to this point, even at the behest of the captain? These guys cry out to the Lord before Jonah does. They cried out to the Lord.

We pray, O Lord. This is the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the creator God, whose glorious presence is enshrined in the temple in Jerusalem in the Holy of Holies. These Phoenician sailors are crying out to God.

God's own prophet won't cry out to him. We pray, O Lord. Please do not let us perish for this man's life.

Do not charge us with innocent blood for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you. These guys are totally convinced. So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows. These men are now absolute believers in God. They not only believe, they make sacrifices and make vows.

They pledge their loyalty, their obedience, their love and service. That's what vows are. And that is pretty much how the first chapter ends.

I would have put the chapter break after verse 16. 17 says, Now the Lord had prepared. Prepared is not a very good translation of this Hebrew word very quickly.

This is appointed, directed, sent. There are other words that mean to prepare, like what David uses. Thou preparest a table before me.

But this is appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Endless seas of ink have been spilled on this.

I like a quote I saw somewhere where the whole incident of the great fish swallowing Jonah and vomiting Jonah up occupies three verses out of 48 odd verses in this book. And men have spent far more time analyzing the great fish than they have the great God that this book testifies to. The book is not about the fish.

The book is not even about Jonah. The book is about God. The sailors figured this out in chapter

one.

The Ninevites are going to figure this out. Very soon, it's about God. What is the import and the message of this book of Jonah in the days of Jeroboam the second? It's about God.

It is the grace of God. It is the righteousness and justice of God. It is the recognition of God as the creator.

Of the sea and the dry, the heavens and the earth. That's what the book is about. Change of mind faced with the reality of that God.

In our discussions and our perambulations and our arguments and our contentions and our apologetics as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ in this day and age faced with cultural shifts and all of the other developments that seem to be eroding away the last vestiges of Christian influence in our culture and so on. Remember, the issue is not what constitutes marriage. The issue is not what was the origin of biological life.

The issue is not what portion of the Ten Commandments should our national laws and local ordinances reflect. The issue is God. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No man cometh to the Father but by me. Hebrews 11.6, he that comes to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. We do not serve the Lord God unless we testify to him.

In the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, we are to shine as lights so that men will see our good works and do what? Glorify the Father who is in heaven. So when you think of the book of Jonah, first thing you think of is, wow, man swallowed by fish. What we ought to first think of is, what a great and gracious God.

That's the theme of the book of Jonah. We'll pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll try to finish our quick survey and summary of the book and, again, try to ensure that we understand why this episode occurs at this particular point in the history of the divided kingdom.