

Jonah

Bible Study – Scene 1

Jonah 1:1-3

Dr. Reed Lessing in his Concordia Commentary (CC) of Jonah divides his remarks on Jonah into seven scenes. This is the first section.

1. Verse 1 states: “The Word of the Lord came Jonah.” How does it come to us in our lives?
2. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, a powerful, ruthless nation more than 500 mi NE of Jonah’s hometown in Israel. Assyria posed a threat to the entire region including Israel. (TLSB) It was great in many ways: a large population for that time (120,000 – 4:11) and it was filled with great evil.

Going to fierce, pagan Nineveh to preach is not a coveted assignment for a Hebrew prophet who likely enjoyed favor under the king of Israel, Jeroboam II. It appears that Jonah’s ministry was quite comfortable until Yahweh’s Word came, directing him to arise and go to address the most violent people in the ancient Near East.

What are some “great cities” of today? How would you feel about going to one of them and telling them their faults?

3. Verse 3 says that “Jonah runs away from the Lord.” Normally prophets protest their inability to speak. Moses protests that he is not a “man of words” (Ex 4:10). Jeremiah fears that he does not “know how to speak” (Jer 1:6). Isaiah insists that his lips are unclean (Is 6:5). But Jonah goes the opposite direction—without saying a word! What is wrong with Jonah’s thinking and action?
4. At the end of verse 3 we see that Jonah wanted to “flee from the Lord.” This reminds one of Luke 15:12 where the younger son wants to go away from the presence of his father. Is it possible to be away from the presence of God?
5. What is Jonah leaving behind?
6. Where can we be certain to find God’s presence?
7. What can you learn from these verses?

Some Answers to the above Questions:

- 1. It comes to us when we attend worship, participate in Bible study and read it.**
- 2. Can name any large city in the USA or around the world. Going through them could be intimidating.**
- 3. Jonah’s refusal to go to Nineveh seems to reflect this warped thinking. “Lord, I’m not going to preach repentance to that good-for-nothing wicked city of Nineveh, because if they repent you will spare them. That’s not fair! We’re your chosen people, we’re the**

believers. Outsiders don't have any right to your blessings of love and mercy. They're ours, remember? Besides, Assyria is our worst enemy. Spare them and they'll come down hard on us. (PBC)

Jonah is going against the Lord's commands.

4. Jonah knows he can't escape from that (1:9).

5. Jonah is fleeing from Yahweh's gracious, incarnational, sacramental presence, which in the OT era was centered in the tabernacle and then the Jerusalem temple. There Yahweh in his glory dwelt above the cherubim. To escape from that presence, Jonah must leave the land of Israel and the temple in Jerusalem. Supporting this interpretation is the fact that Jonah experiences no Word of Yahweh when he is on the ship, in the sea, or within the great fish (1:3–2:10). It is only after he is deposited again on the dry land, that is, presumably somewhere along the coast of Israel, that the Word of Yahweh comes to him a second time (3:1). (CC)

6. God comes to us in His Word and Sacraments.