

2 Kings 14:23-29 – Jonah's World

Most of us have heard about Jonah from our childhood. We have sung about Jonah and the whale, we have read children's books about him and we possibly think about him as something of a cartoon character. After all someone being swallowed by a big fish seems more Walt Disney than Holy Scripture. But how well do we really know Jonah? Why is there a book about him in the Bible? Why does Jesus refer to the “sign of Jonah”? What does Jonah have to say to us today? Hopefully over the next six studies we will find answers to these questions and also learn something about ourselves as we meet Jonah's God.

We are going to start our study of Jonah by exploring the world in which he lived. To do that we will go to 2 Kings 14 where we find that, although the book of Jonah reads like a parable, it is about a real person who lived at a particular time in history. We find that Jonah was a prophet from Gath Hopher, that he had a father called Amittai and that he was a servant of the God of Israel. He prophesied at the time of Jeroboam II, King of Israel, and we learn that his prophecies were fulfilled. If we look back at 2 Kings 13 we find that the prophet Elisha had died during the reign of Jehoash the father of Jeroboam II so that makes Jonah an immediate successor to Elisha. If you look at the first verses of the books of Amos and Hosea you will see that these two prophets were also around during the reign of Jeroboam II. It was, therefore, a time of great prophetic activity, a time when God was speaking to his people. Does that mean then that it was a time of godliness and spiritual growth?

We know from this passage that it was a time of political expansion. “Jeroboam II (c. 793–753 BC) was the 4th king of Jehu’s dynasty and one of Israel’s most illustrious rulers (2 Ki. 14:23–29). Co-regent with his father for a decade, Jeroboam II carried on Jehoash’s policies of aggressive expansion.”¹ During his reign the territory that had been lost to the Aramaeans was recovered and the land expanded to the boundaries previously known in Solomon's time. Politically things were good, the Aramaean kingdom had been broken by Assyrian campaigns in 802 BC but the Assyrians had since then become weakened and preoccupied with other parts of their empire. “Jeroboam’s administrative skills combined with comparative freedom from foreign attack to bring unparalleled economic prosperity.”² Does this mean that Jeroboam was a good King deserving the favour of God?

As well as looking at our passage we will need to look at some verses in Amos and Hosea to get a picture of the kind of world that Jonah lived and worked in. When we start to get a picture of Jonah's world we can begin to grasp more fully what God was saying through his prophets to that generation. We may find that we see some parallels to our own world and as we do so we need to ask, what is God saying to us at this time?

Open

- What today do you think people value most, a successful life or a good character?

¹Wood, D. R. W., & Marshall, I. H. (1996). *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed.) (557). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

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Jonah

Study

Read together 2 Kings 14:23-29

1. What do we read about Jeroboam in these verses that show that he was a successful king? In what sense was he successful. (see vs 23, 25, 28-29)
2. A secular historian might describe Jeroboam as a “good” king. What is the writer's assessment of him? Why? (v 24 see also 1 Kings 12:28 – 13:6 and 13:33-34)
3. “He did evil in the eyes of the Lord” why then did God allow him to be so successful? (vs 26-27 see also 2 Kings 13:22-23)

Commit Question

4. How does this passage overturn our ideas about success and failure? To what extent do you think we have allowed the world's assessment of success to impact the way we think and behave as Christians?
5. What was Jonah's message to Israel at this time? In what way did this fulfil one of the signs of a genuine prophet? (v 25 see also Deut. 18:18-22)

Jonah

Read Hosea 5:1-15 and Amos 2:6-16

6. How did the messages of Hosea and Amos differ from that of Jonah? Why do you think that was? Who had the easiest message to deliver to Israel?

Commit Question

7. Paul said that the message of the gospel is like an aroma to those who hear, believer and non-believer, “to the one we are the smell of death; to the other the fragrance of life.”³ To what extent does the fear of being “the smell of death” stop us from sharing the gospel? How can we help one another in this difficult task?
8. Jonah was born in Gath Hopher which is a few miles North East of Nazareth on the border of Naphatali and Zebulun. Why did the Pharisees forget about Jonah when they spoke to Nicodemus in John 7:52? Why are we sometimes selective in how we use scripture?
9. From our study how would you describe the world in which Jonah lived? In what ways is it similar to the world you live in and in what ways different?

³ 2 Corinthians 2:16