

Lesson 3 – Jonah

Text: Jonah

Main Characters: God, Jonah, Assyrians

Key Passages:

- Jonah 1:16 – The sailors on Jonah’s boat, seeing the power of God, vowed to serve Him.
- Jonah 2:8-9 – To rely on anything but the Lord is to rely on something that is vain.

Main Storyline:

Jonah, the son of Amittai, was a prophet who most probably prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). He prophesied at a time when the Assyrian empire was despised because of its great power and, especially, the severe brutality that the Assyrian army used to humiliate and torture its captives. The people of Judah and Israel thus held very negative views of the Assyrian empire.

God instructed Jonah to go to Nineveh (roughly east from Israel), the capital of the Assyrian empire, and instruct them to repent of their sins. God had become tired of their sin and was on the verge of destroying them, so he wanted Jonah to go and warn them that they needed to change. Jonah, perhaps because of personal bias against the Assyrians, decided instead to board a ship which was heading for Tarshish (roughly west) in order to attempt to escape from the presence of God.

God sent a powerful storm on the ship. It was so strong that the boat nearly broke apart from the wind and waves. The sailors were afraid and did everything they could to try to avoid being killed by the storm, including praying to their false gods. In the mean time, Jonah was asleep in the ship and did not realize what was going on. However, the captain came to Jonah and asked him to call on his God.

The sailors decided to cast lots to determine which man had brought the disaster upon them. The lot, of course, fell on Jonah. Jonah explained that he was attempting to flee from God, and that the storm was God’s response to his own sin. He told them that in order for the storm to stop, he would need to be thrown overboard. Despite their initial misgivings, they did as Jonah instructed. As soon as Jonah was in the water, the storm ended. The sailors then feared God greatly and worshipped Him.

God prepared a huge fish which swallowed Jonah and kept him in its belly for three days and three nights. While he was in the fish’s belly, Jonah prayed continually to the Lord and repented for his actions. He realized that despite his sin, God had delivered him from certain death. He also vowed to worship and honor God, as he realized that salvation only comes from God. After three days and three nights, God commanded the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land, and it obeyed.

Once again, God instructed Jonah to go to Nineveh to preach to the people in hopes of changing them. This time, Jonah obeyed the Lord’s instructions. Nineveh was a large city with about 120,000 people in it; it would also take about three days to walk from one end of Nineveh to the other. On the first day of Jonah’s preaching, all of the people, including the king, realized their sin, fasted, and put on sackcloth. The king even forbid the animals from eating during the fast. God saw the good works of the Assyrians and relented concerning the punishment He had promised against them.

The fact that the Assyrians had repented (and thus been spared) angered Jonah greatly. He was so upset about their repentance that he asked God to let him die. God rebuked Jonah for his lack of compassion and used a plant to illustrate how illogical and inconsistent Jonah had been.

Lessons/Applications:

- 1.) We can never hide (even our hearts) from God’s sight; He is always aware of everything.
- 2.) We are often hypocritical in how we view our own sin and the sins of others; be consistent.
- 3.) We should always be glad when someone decides to do right with their lives, never resentful.