

the water and began to sink (2:2, 7) and from the belly of a great sea creature (2:1). Therefore, no matter where you are and what is happening in your life, you can always pray and call out to God!

Circumstances in life can help bring you to repentance. While Jonah was fleeing from God, he did not seem to want to repent. But, when he was sinking in the sea and in the belly of the sea creature, he realized what his sin had done and called out to the Lord (2:1-9). He could even learn from a plant (4:5-11). In the same way, God can use various circumstances in life to bring people to a point of being open to repentance (Romans 2:4; Hebrews 12:5-11).

God's word is powerful. We can see God's word being powerful to command a great sea creature (2:10) and causing a wicked city to repent (3:4-10). Today, God's word continues to be powerful enough to accomplish whatever He wants it to accomplish (Isaiah 55:10-11) and to save people from sin (Romans 1:16; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12)!

Salvation has conditions. God did not save Jonah or Nineveh without them doing something. For Jonah, he called out to God (2:4). For Nineveh, they believed God's word and repented (3:5-9). Similarly, God will save those who have true obedient faith in Him and turn from their wicked ways today (Matthew 7:21-23; Hebrews 5:9; Acts 2:38).

We should rejoice when others repent. God was greatly displeased whenever Jonah did not want the people of Nineveh to repent (evidently wanting to see them be destroyed, 4:1-3). Likewise, it is possible for people today not to want God's enemies (and our enemies) to repent. Yet, God wants us to desire and work for the salvation of all, not just those we like (Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 15:25-32)!

Conclusion

Although Jonah did not want to see Nineveh repent, they did repent at the preaching of God's word. And, God also dealt with Jonah's disobedience along the way. We can learn some great lessons from this true story that are relevant to living to please God today! Let us never forget these lessons and make the proper applications of them.



The Bible is a living and effective book (Hebrews 4:12), containing many true stories that are useful to understand the overall story of the Bible and to learn many valuable lessons applicable to people today (Romans 15:4). One such story is how God sent a prophet named Jonah to the wicked city of Nineveh (Jonah 1-4).

The purpose of this lesson is to learn about Jonah being sent to Nineveh to preach God's message and lessons applicable to us today.

Context

Jonah was a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel. Outside the book bearing his name, Jonah is only mentioned one other time in the Old Testament. This reference helps to see that Jonah's work as a prophet also included a prophecy concerning the northern kingdom of Israel (during the divided kingdom, 2 Kings 14:25). This was during the reign of King Jeroboam II (the longest reigning king of Israel during the divided kingdom period at 41 years).

Israel expanded according to Jonah's prophecy. King Jeroboam II's reign was a prosperous one for the nation (2 Kings 14:23-29). However, this was not because of his righteousness; but despite his unrighteousness (vv. 24, 26-27). The prophets Amos and Hosea also prophesied during Jeroboam's reign, warning of the coming judgment on Israel for their wickedness (Amos 1:1; Hosea 1:1). Yet, God was allowing Israel's kingdom to reclaim the land it previously held under the rule of King Solomon (2 Kings 14:25-29; 1 Kings 8:65).

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. Nineveh was the great capital city of Assyria located northeast of Israel (Jonah 1:2; 3:2), with more than 120,000 people (Jonah 4:11). The book of Jonah indicates that this city was wicked and in danger of God destroying it if the people did not repent (1:2; 3:3-4, 9-10). Historically, after the time of the book of Jonah, Assyria would

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be the nation that would take Israel into captivity (about 30 years after Jeroboam II's reign ended). Therefore, the story of Jonah is likely around 50 years before this takes place. Interestingly, this would have been where the spoils of Israel would be carried when it fell (Isaiah 8:4).

Story

Jonah sent to Nineveh (1:1-2). God's word came to Jonah, instructing him to go to the great city of Nineveh so he could preach against all the evils of the city. We will see later that God wanted to warn them so they could repent, else He would destroy them (3:4, 9-10).

Jonah flees to Tarshish (1:3). Rather than obeying God's instruction, Jonah went the opposite direction God wanted him to go (going to the seaport city of Joppa to get on a boat headed to Tarshish, in southern Spain). Remember that Nineveh was the capital city of a next-door enemy nation – and Jonah was to preach a message that could result in their survival!

Jonah punished for his sin (1:4-17). God brought a great storm that threatened the ship on its way to Tarshish (1:4). The crew called out to their gods and Jonah was also told to call on his God to save them. After identifying that Jonah was to blame for the storm and that he was fleeing from the God who made the sea and dry lands, all the people feared. The only solution was to throw Jonah into the sea (though they were afraid of doing so). There, the Lord had appointed a great sea creature (specific identity unknown and unimportant) to swallow Jonah and he was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights (1:17; Matthew 12:38-41).

Jonah's repentance (2:1-10). From the belly of the fish, Jonah prayed to God (2:1). As he sank, it had looked hopeless and he called out to God, knowing he was being punished for his sin. Yet, God raised his life through the great sea creature. Jonah was now thankful to God and intent on living for God. Then, God commanded the sea creature to vomit Jonah onto dry land.

Jonah goes to Nineveh (3:1-4). God now commands Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach, a second time. This time, Jonah got up and went from wherever he was. Nineveh was an extremely great city (a three-day walk is mentioned in connection with its size). The first day of his walk in the city, he warned about their destruction.

Nineveh repents (3:5-10). The people of Nineveh proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth, calling out to God and turning from their evil ways (including the king)! When God saw this, He changed His plans regarding the destruction of the city.

Jonah's anger and God's rebuke (4:1-11). Jonah was not pleased by their repentance and God's decision to spare them. This is why Jonah said he fled in the first place. Now, Jonah thought he would be better dead (likely due to what the people of Israel would think when they heard that his warning resulted in God sparing Nineveh). To teach Jonah a lesson, God provided a plant for Jonah to give him shade – and then appointed a worm to attack the plant so it would die. As the sun and wind beat on Jonah, God asked if it was right for him to be angry about the plant. In the same way, God was right to care about the people of Nineveh!

Lessons

God wants all people to be saved. Bible texts like Jonah are reminders that God is concerned about the salvation of all people. For, He is (as Jonah recognized) a God abounding with grace, compassion, patience, and loving kindness (4:2)! And, God continues to want all people to be saved today, not wanting anyone to perish in sin (1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9).

God expects His people to go and preach His message of salvation to others. Jonah was expected to take whatever message God gave Him, wherever He wanted it to go. For, it is through such messages that God would teach and warn, just as He does today through the gospel! Just as Jonah was told to go to Nineveh (1:2), God's people today are told to take the gospel's message of salvation throughout the world (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16)! Without God's people doing this, people will not be properly taught about what God wants and has warned about the coming judgment against them (Romans 10:13-18)!

Obedience is doing what God says, even when it is not what we want. When Jonah did what he wanted, God was not pleased with him (1:3; 4:2-3). Instead, God was only pleased when Jonah submitted to Him. So, rather than just listening to God when God's word fits with your desires, you must determine to obey Him always – even when what He wants you to do is something you may not want to do!

You can't run or hide from God. Jonah did not get away from God and His command by running from God (1:3). Even though he went the opposite direction, God knew exactly where Jonah was (down to the exact location of a sea creature) and Jonah still paid the price for his disobedience. And, no matter where you go, you will never escape God (Proverbs 15:3)!

You can pray anywhere at any time. Because God can see and hear everywhere at all times, God can hear prayers from anywhere and at any time! For Jonah, this included calling out to God as he was thrown into