THE PERILS OF FAILING TO DELIVER GOD’S MESSAGE

Jonah 1:3a But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish.

Historical Background

Matthew 12:39-41 He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.”

2 Kings 14:25 He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Dead Sea, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hepher.

Jeroboam II reigned from 793-752. His son Zechariah reigned six months (2 Kings 15:8). He was assassinated by Shallum who reigned one month (2 Kings 15:10-13).

He was assassinated by Menahem who paid tribute to Pul king of Assyria who deported the two- and one-half tribes east of the Jordan (I Chronicles 5:26). The Assyrians would later conquer all Israel and all Judah except Jerusalem.

This puts Jonah’s ministry either before or probably during the reign of Jeroboam II. According to the notes in the Ryrie Study Bible (and numerous other sources) there was a plague in 765BC, a total solar eclipse in 763BC and another plague in 759BC, which probably would have made the people of Nineveh very receptive to the idea that God or the gods were about to destroy them.

It is generally accepted that the Assyrians were the most violent and cruel of all the Middle Eastern empires. Captured soldiers and rulers were routinely tortured horribly and then killed.

Why Jonah Ran from God

Jonah 3:10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

Jonah 4:1&2 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD, “Isn’t this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home. That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”

The Original Call

Jonah 1:1&2 The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”

Jeremiah 18:7-10 “If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do to it.”

Proverbs 14:34a Righteousness exalts a nation,

Jonah’s Response

Jonah 1:3 But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.

Gath Hepher, Jonah’s home town, is due west of the southern part of the Sea of Galilee, about two and one-half miles n.n.e of Nazareth. Nineveh is about 500 miles to the northeast. Joppa is about 60 miles southwest. The location of Tarshish is not firmly settled, but it is at least 2,500 miles due west. Jonah went in the opposite direction God told him to go and then tried to go at least 2,500 miles further away from where God told him to go.

God’s Response to Jonah’s Disobedience

Jonah 1:4 Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.

The Sailors and Jonah React to the Storm

Jonah 1:5 All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep.

Zephaniah 1:12 “At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, ‘The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad.’ ”

Jeremiah 48:11 “Moab has been at rest from youth, like wine left on its dregs, not poured from one jar to another – she has not gone into exile. So she tastes as she did, and her aroma is unchanged.”

Jonah 1:6 The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.”

In an article in the Jerusalem Post on 4/2/20, quoting a poll by McLaughlin & Associates conducted in March 2020 “44% of Americans saw ‘the global coronavirus pandemic and economic meltdown’ as ‘a wake-up call for us to turn back to faith in God’ (or)as ‘signs of coming judgment’ or both.” What was fascinating about the poll was that although more Evangelicals thought this way than other groups, the difference was not terribly large.

God Identifies Jonah as the Problem

Jonah 1:7-10 Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

Proverbs 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

Jonah 1:8 So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”

Jonah 1:9 He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and dry land.”

Jonah 1:10 This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)

Things to Think About

Jonah is not primarily a story about a big fish that swallowed a man, but a true story about God’s love for a wicked group of people who had been made open by circumstances to listen to a message about God.

Jonah is also a true story about a man who knew God but didn’t want to tell people he considered his enemies about God.

Unless God continued to send plagues and signs in the heavens, there was probably a limited amount of time in which the Ninevites would be open to turn to God.

So Jonah going when God told him to go was critical.

Thinking that “The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad,” is a complacent, sinful attitude whether held by those living in sin and encouraging others to sin or held by those who should be sharing God’s truth with those who are willing to listen.

We likely have a window of opportunity in the next few months that may not be repeated. We need to be taking advantage of it.

Proverbs 10:5(NKJV) He who gathers in summer is a wise son; he who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame.