THE STUBBORN PROPHET

Jonah 1:12 “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”

Review

God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach against it. Jonah 1:1&2

Jonah instead goes in the opposite direction to Joppa, and boards a ship going to Tarshish, a place at least 2,500 miles west of Nineveh, because he wants to make sure the people of Nineveh don’t listen to God’s warning, repent and have God forgive them. Jonah 1:3&4; 3:10-4:2

God sends a powerful storm that threatens to break up the ship. The sailors cry out to their gods and throw the cargo overboard, but Jonah is in a deep sleep below deck. Johan 1:4&5

The captain wakes Jonah up, the sailors cast lots and determine the storm is Jonah’s fault, and he tells them who he is and that he is running from God. Jonah 1:6-10

Jonah’s Solution to the Storm

Jonah 1:11&12 The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm for us?” “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”

Things Jonah Didn’t Say

“Let me pray and ask God to forgive me.” Jonah 4:2b “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”

“Turn the ship around and go back to Joppa. I’ll go to Nineveh.” Jonah hated the people of Nineveh so much he preferred death by drowning to preaching a message to the people of Nineveh that would cause them to repent and be forgiven by God, and the fact that the sailors might die because of his disobedience and their reluctance to kill him didn’t seem to bother him.

The Sailor’s Response to Jonah’s Suggestion

Jonah 1:13 Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before.

Their going back to Joppa was not the solution, Jonah was the one who needed to repent (change his mind) about his disobedience. They shied away from doing what he asked.

Jonah 1:14&15 Then they cried out to the LORD, “Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased.” Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm.

The Sailors Turn to God

Jonah 1:16 At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.

Jonah Prays

Jonah 1:17&2:1 Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God.

Many, if not most translations, translate Jonah 2:1, “Then Jonah prayed…” This seems to be the clear sense of the passage. Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Finally, he prayed, and God answered his prayer.

Jonah 2:2 He said: “In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry.”

Psalm 30:2&3 LORD my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me. You, LORD, brought me up from the realm of the dead; you spared me from going down to the pit. (Psalm 30 is a Psalm of David.)

Jonah 2:3&4 “You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, ‘I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.’ ”

“Yet I will look again toward your holy temple.” Jonah is beginning to realize God is not going to let him get out of going to Nineveh by having him die in the waters of the Mediterranean.

Jonah 2:5&6 “The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, LORD my God, brought my life up from the pit.”

Jonah 2:7 “When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.”

Another indication that Jonah didn’t really begin to pray until the three days and three nights were almost over.

Jonah 2:8(KJV) “They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.”

“Lying vanities” translates two words both meaning emptiness, vanity or deceit. The main word is used five times in Ecclesiastes 1:2(NASB) “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” The NIV translates Ecclesiastes 1:2, “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

The word translated “lying” in the King James Version is most commonly translated “deceit,” “false” or “vain.” Although “worthless idols” is a possible translation, it seems much more likely that Jonah is talking about himself and his present situation rather than talking about the problems pagans have because they worship idols. His choosing to hold onto his hatred of Nineveh had no real foundation in truth and was keeping him from experiencing God’s mercy.

Jonah 2:9 “But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the LORD.’ ”

The sailors sacrificed to the Lord when the storm stopped. It took Jonah three days in the belly of the fish to decide that he was going to. At some point, Jonah had made a vow to the Lord, probably to speak whatever God told him to speak. He now promises to make good on his vow.

“Salvation” can also be translated “deliverance.” I Samuel 14:45a But the men said to Saul, “Should Jonathan die – he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel?”

God Answers Jonah’s Prayer

Jonah 2:10 And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Some Things to Think About

The problem with getting the people of Nineveh to turn from their wickedness and violence was not in God’s attitude toward them, nor in their unwillingness to turn to God, but in the stubborn hardness of heart of a man who knew that God is “a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”

Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

If America continues on its present course, it is headed for judgment. We can choose to hate those pushing our country in the wrong direction or we can love them enough to courageously share the Gospel with them.

It took three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish to get Jonah to decide he would obey God and go to Nineveh and give the message he had from God. What will it take to get us faithfully proclaiming God’s Word to the people God is telling us to talk to?

Are there “lying vanities” in our lives that keep us from experiencing God’s mercy and doing what He tells us to do. (The word translated “mercy” can also be translated “lovingkindness” as in Psalm 23:6.)