

Lesson 21 - God's messenger

Jonah and the big fish, from Jonah 1 - 4; Hebrews 1:1 - 2

The Jesus Storybook Bible - pgs.160 - 169

Lesson

In the book of Jonah, God calls a Jewish prophet to go and preach in Nineveh, to the Assyrians. There was great racial animosity between the Jews and the Assyrians. They were mortal enemies. In effect, God is saying to Jonah, “I want you to go and preach to your mortal enemies. I want you to call them back to me” (see Jonah 1:1 – 2).

Two things happened as a result. For one, Jonah tried to run away, God sent a storm, and Jonah was eaten by a big fish and regurgitated — the only regurgitated prophet we have! The second thing was that Jonah then actually went to Nineveh and preached to the people he hated; unfortunately for him, they repented. He was then furious because he wanted to see God “destroy” them. The book ends with him still furious.

A few things to note:

- Jonah could not see how preaching to Nineveh would help him or his nation. But if God is King, then we must obey even if we don't understand why. The evaluation question to ask is: “Am I willing to obey whatever God says about this area of my life, no matter how I feel about it?”
- The essence of the gospel is stated by Jonah in chapter 2, verse 9 — “Salvation comes from the Lord.” The whole world needs to be saved from the penalty, power, and presence of sin. Through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God accomplishes this salvation for us — it is “from the Lord.” We cannot accomplish it ourselves. We can only accept it by faith.
- Jonah is the only Old Testament prophet sent to a pagan city to call it to repentance. At the end of the book of Jonah, God asks the prophet a rhetorical question in reference to Nineveh, which at that time would have been one of the largest and most powerful cities in the world and one of the most hostile to God: “Should I not be concerned about that great city?” (Jonah 4:11 NIV 1984). The expected answer, much to Jonah's chagrin, was “of course.” God cares about people, their suffering and pain, their heartaches and trials, the oppression they experience, the injustice they bear. He wants his creatures to experience joy, love, and peace. The logic goes like this: God loves people, the human creatures he has brought into being. Cities are where a lot of people live. Therefore, God cares about cities. And if God cares about cities and the people who live there, so should we.

The New Testament tells us that Jesus came to earth the first time not to bring judgment, but to bear it. Had he come to put down all evil and sin, there would have been no hope for anyone. Therefore, he calms the storm the way Jonah did: by being cast into the sea of sin in order to save others from the storm of judgment (Jonah 1:4 – 17). Jesus is the true Jonah (see Matthew 12:40), who was consumed by the storm and sea of God's wrath, so that we could have peace and calm and be saved.

Memory Verse

Salvation comes from the LORD. (Jonah 2:9)

***Lesson taken from *The Jesus Storybook Bible Curriculum*, written by Sally Lloyd-Jones and Sam Shammas.

If you do not have a copy of The Jesus Storybook Bible, we will have them for purchase in Cranmer Hall for \$10.