

THE DISOBEDIENCE OF JONAH

BIBLE TEXT : Jonah 1:1-17; 2:1-10; 3:1-10; 4:1-11.

LESSON 320 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?" (Hebrews 2:2, 3).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Jonah 1:1-17

¹ Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

² Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

³ But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

⁴ But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

⁵ Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that *were* in the ship into the sea, to lighten *it* of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.

⁶ So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

⁷ And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil *is* upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

⁸ Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil *is* upon us; What *is* thine occupation? and whence comest

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I Tarshish Instead of Nineveh

1. The Lord commanded Jonah to preach to the Ninevites, Jonah 1:1, 2.
2. Jonah started toward Tarshish, trying to flee from the presence of the Lord, Jonah 1:3.
3. A great storm arose upon the sea, Jonah 1:4-6.
4. Through his own counsel, Jonah was thrown into the sea, Jonah 1:7-16.
5. The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah, Jonah 1:17.

II Jonah's Vows

1. Jonah's misery caused him to pray, Jonah 2:1-7.
2. When Jonah promised to pay his vows, the Lord caused the fish to cast Jonah out upon the dry land, Jonah 2:8-10.

III Effective Preaching

1. The Word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, Jonah 3:1, 2.
2. Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, Jonah 3:3.
3. "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," Jonah 3:4.
4. The people of Nineveh believed God and repented of their wickedness, Jonah 3:5-9.
5. God saw their works and turned the judgment, Jonah 3:10.

IV The Sullen Preacher

1. Jonah wanted immediate judgment upon Nineveh, Jonah 4:1-3.
2. God taught Jonah the lesson of mercy, Jonah 4:4-11.

NOTES:

Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, was of Gath-hepher, a city of Zebulun. He lived and prophesied during the years of the reign of Jehu's family over the Children of Israel. Jonah's prophecies must have been known and recognised throughout the land of Israel, for they were prophecies of deliverances from Israel's enemies and of restoration of lost territory. (**2 Kings 14:25-28** ²⁵ He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which *was* of Gathhepher. ²⁶ For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, *that it was very bitter: for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel.* ²⁷ And the LORD said not that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven: but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash. ²⁸ Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he warred, and how he recovered Damascus, and Hamath, *which belonged to Judah, for Israel, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?*)

A New Message

One day Jonah received the Word of the Lord, but it was

thou? what *is* thy country? and of what people *art* thou?

⁹ And he said unto them, I *am* an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry *land*.

¹⁰ Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

¹¹ Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.

¹² And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest *is* upon you.

¹³ Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring *it* to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

¹⁴ Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.

¹⁵ So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

¹⁶ Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.

¹⁷ Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah 2:1-10

¹ Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly,

² And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and

directed to an entirely different people. Jonah knew the voice of the Lord, and he could not mistake God's Word, but what was this message? "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me." Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrians.

When God talked to Abraham about the exceeding sinfulness of Sodom and His contemplated overthrow of that wicked city, Abraham immediately started to pray for its preservation; but Jonah was a different sort of person. Instead of praying for Nineveh or starting on his journey to preach to that city, Jonah made haste to travel as far as he could go in the opposite direction from that city. Preaching God's Word to the Ninevites would open the possibility of their salvation, even though they were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise. For some reason Jonah had no desire to see Nineveh saved or spared.

No prophet who turns his back upon God's will and Word is any longer a true prophet. The man or woman who refuses to follow God's revealed plan and desire is no longer a member of God's family, even though he was once saved. He is an ex-Christian who deliberately forsakes the pathway of right and duty. Disobedience is sin, and sin causes the severance of all relationship with God.

Excuses

Why would a prophet like Jonah, who had been used by the Lord and had seen the success of his work, suddenly want to flee from his duty and from the presence of the Lord? No doubt Jonah had some reason in mind for his actions. Some sort of excuse presented itself to Jonah that he tried to use to relieve himself of his obligations.

Excuses are too often substituted for doing the whole will of God. God calls for missionaries, but many who hear the call excuse themselves because they are too much occupied with their work at home. He would send men into the harvest fields to proclaim the Gospel, but some men excuse themselves as not being qualified. The Lord needs someone to spread His word of cheer in the hospitals and in the prisons, but many people think of themselves as being too busy to leave their secular employment. Jesus said: "A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. . . . I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper" (Luke 14:16-18, 24).

Jonah may have tried to excuse himself from preaching to the Ninevites because he could see that the strong, conquering Assyrian nation would soon overrun the land of Israel. Jonah's prophecies had concerned the restoration of much of Israel's frontiers; and, being a true, patriotic Israelite, he was jealous that those frontiers be kept intact. The power of the Assyrians would be greatly broken if their capital city were suddenly destroyed through God's wrath against its wickedness. That seems to be what Jonah wanted. He resisted preaching to the Ninevites. He said: "I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil" (Jonah 4:2). He resisted preaching, lest Nineveh should repent and be spared. But God's thoughts are not man's thoughts, neither are man's ways God's ways. Man's reasoning becomes void in God's presence; and when God speaks it is time for man to listen and do, regardless of all preconceived ideas.

he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, *and* thou heardest my voice.

³ For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.

⁴ Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.

⁵ The waters compassed me about, *even* to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.

⁶ I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars *was* about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.

⁷ When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.

⁸ They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.

⁹ But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay *that* that I have vowed. Salvation *is* of the LORD.

¹⁰ And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry *land*.

Jonah 3:1-10

¹ And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

² Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

³ So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

⁴ And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

⁵ So the people of Nineveh

Stormy Seas

In his flight from the presence of the Lord, Jonah went to Joppa, the principal seaport of Israel. He soon found a ship going to Tarshish, so he paid his fare and entered the ship, thinking only of escaping from his duty to God. It seems that the devil always has some sort of conveyance ready for those who would escape from their duties to God. Millions of people have paid their fares to flee from the presence of God, only to find that all their actions were in vain; for there is no fleeing from the presence of God. "Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD" (Jeremiah 23:23, 24). It is impossible to flee from the presence of the Lord.

Jonah's ship started on its voyage to Tarshish, but soon the mariners sailed into trouble. The Lord sent a great wind and a mighty tempest. The ship was in danger of being broken to bits. The sailors realised their danger and began crying to their gods; but Jonah had gone down into the ship and was fast asleep, totally unaware of the trouble and danger he was causing.

"The way of transgressors is hard" (Proverbs 13:15). The Lord compares the wicked man to the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isaiah 57:21). God's displeasure will be as the storms of life, blowing against every soul who refuses to answer God's call and do His bidding. Jonah tried to run away from God, but he found himself in the midst of stormy seas, facing disaster and death. The man who runs from God runs into trouble every time; and eventually he must answer to God, anyway. How much better to believe and honour God and be able to walk through life with triumphant victory!

Arrested

The mariners awakened Jonah from his deep sleep of unconcern and carnal security and told him to call upon his God for help. Before long, the seamen knew that Jonah was the reason for their trouble, and asked him what could be done to make the sea calm for them again. Jonah answered that they would have to cast him overboard. The sailors did this with great reluctance, only after a very determined effort to save themselves in their own way. True to Jonah's word, the sea ceased from her raging.

"Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." God sometimes has to use special means to bring rebels to repentance, and the rebel always suffers greatly from the stringent measures that God finds necessary to use.

Jonah's Prayer

Jonah felt as though he had reached the depth of hell when he went down into the fish's stomach. As dark as his plight was, Jonah knew that a worse fate awaited him unless he prayed. Many people think that all the hell they will ever know is the miseries they experience on earth; but no one has been in any worse predicament than Jonah. Jonah knew that his uncomfortable situation was just a foretaste of what was to come in reality if he did not repent of his actions and sin. Jonah prayed! In the depth of despair, with the weeds wrapped about his head and with his soul fainting, Jonah prayed. He promised once again to pay his vows. The prayer of desperation went through. God heard and answered, speaking to the fish and causing it to cast Jonah out upon the dry land.

believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

⁶ For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered *him* with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

⁷ And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:

⁸ But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that *is* in their hands.

⁹ Who can tell *if* God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

¹⁰ And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it* not.

Jonah 4:1-11

¹ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

² And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, *was* not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou *art* a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

³ Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for *it is* better for me to die than to live.

⁴ Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

⁵ So Jonah went out of the city,

Some people find it hard to believe the story of Jonah, but faith in God and His Word removes any difficulty of believing. "The LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah." God created everything that we see and know, so why deny Him power to create a fish for the reception of Jonah? Jesus bore witness to the truth of Jonah's imprisonment in the fish's belly when He said: "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). The same power of God that caused the fish to cast Jonah upon the land, that he might preach to the Ninevites, caused the Son of God to come forth in resurrection from the grave, that repentance and remission of sins might be preached in His Name: "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold, a greater than Jonas is here" (Matthew 12:41).

Forty Days

The call of God came to Jonah the second time, giving him the same message that he should preach to the Ninevites. May every Christian learn the lesson that the call of God is not to be trifled with, that the sooner the call of God is obeyed the easier it will be. Jonah learned his lesson the hard way. Had he gone directly to Nineveh the first time God called, how much trouble he would have spared himself!

"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Jonah's message was short, but it was clear and unmistakable. The Ninevites did not question the message nor Jonah's authority, for without doubt the Spirit of God spoke to the people's consciences louder than the voice of Jonah rang on Nineveh's streets. All the inhabitants of the city took action — from the king, who got down from his throne and laid aside his kingly robe, to the most humble servant. All put on sackcloth. The decree went forth from the palace that neither man nor beast should taste anything, neither food nor water. "Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" (Jonah 3:8, 9). God did repent of the evil that He intended for Nineveh. True contrition will avail with God in every instance.

Seeking God First

The Ninevites sought the mercy of God with prayer and fasting as soon as they heard Jonah's message. God said, "Yet forty days," but the people did not take a chance. The people of the world hear just as certain a message of doom as did the Ninevites, but there is no determining when that day of doom is coming: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matthew 24:35, 36). Because the Lord delays His coming, many people delay their preparation for that day.

Most people of this modern age, had they lived in Nineveh and heard Jonah preach, would have waited until the fortieth day to start praying. Many people console themselves with the thought that they will pray in the last hour of their lives or in the last hour of this world's day. How presumptuous of a man to scorn, refuse, or neglect the love and mercy of God and expect God to forgive a lifetime of sin in exchange for one feeble prayer uttered in the last flickering moments of a misspent life! He may not have an opportunity to utter that feeble prayer. It is a very dangerous

and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

⁶ And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made *it* to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

⁷ But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

⁸ And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, *It is* better for me to die than to live.

⁹ And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, *even* unto death.

¹⁰ Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

¹¹ And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and *also* much cattle?

and uncertain road to travel.

On the other hand, God bountifully rewards His faithful servants. The Christian never has to beg for happiness, contentment, or peace. All the days of his Christian life he cherishes the thought of Jesus' soon coming. He passes into the valley of death, if need be, with an assurance of eternal life and hope beyond the grave. God stands by his side with all the comforts of Heaven. There is only one way of life so far as the Christian is concerned, and that is the way that Jesus opened on Calvary — the Gospel way.

QUESTIONS

1. Why did God send Jonah to Nineveh?
2. Why did Jonah start toward Tarshish?
3. How was Jonah's trip to Tarshish interrupted?
4. What means did the Lord use to prevent Jonah from drowning?
5. Why did the fish deposit Jonah on the dry land?
6. What was the message that Jonah preached to Nineveh?
7. How did the Ninevites receive God's warning?
8. How do we know that the story of Jonah is true?