

JONAH

1. The storm sent by God

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Who hasn't heard the story of Jonah, the man who lived in the belly of a fish? However, this well-known story somehow does not end there. There is a lot more to it. This book is not about that big fish story, nor the rebellious fugitive prophet, but it is about the God who was abounding in mercy for the wicked nation, Assyria and it is about the greatest missionary project God set up in the Old Testament.

Is the Book of Jonah "the Achilles' heel" of the Bible? To the liberal Bible scholars, if that is what we call them, and any skeptics, this book is ridiculous because of the fact Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish. They cannot possibly understand it.

But then again, they are the same group of people who cannot accept the wonderful creation fact of God, but they'd rather hold onto the silly theory that they believe everything came out of nothing. For those people, I'd love to ask the definition of 'nothing'. That means no-thing. Nothing, no even one single atom, not a DNA, not a breath of air, not anything existed according to their theory. From there, there was supposed to have a big bang. Then where did that big bang come from? How can you have a big bang when there was nothing? The evolution theory has no base from the beginning of their concept.

A. THE AUTHOR

Of course the author of this book is none other than Jonah himself. Those who consider the Book of Jonah an allegory or a parable should note that 2 Kings 14:25 identifies Jonah as a real person, a Jewish prophet from Gath Hopher in Zebulun who ministered in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II.

2 Kings 14:25 He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hopher.

The moment any Bible critics question the historical record of the Book of Jonah, they question the credibility of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is very strange to hear the liberal say, "Jesus was the greatest teacher that ever lived," since one of the marks of a great teacher is that what he teaches is accurate and truthful. If Jesus is a great teacher, then His authentication of the Book of Jonah has to stand. Because Jesus talked about Jonah's very existence in the belly of the fish in Luke 11:29-32.

Luke 11:29-32 And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He began to say, "This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. 30 For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation. 31 The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here. 32 The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.

B. THE BOOK

As I stated previously, many liberals think that this book is a little fishy, but it is not at all when you read it with the understanding of who God is. What we see is God's sovereignty over nature, over a rebellious prophet and over the wicked nation. We can act anyway we want against God, but God will accomplish His purposes.

We also see His love for the Gentiles. God doesn't want anyone to perish, but they may come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Our God also display His grace to this rebel Jonah who is very much like anyone of us from time to time. God's compassion fail not, great is His faithfulness.

C. THE RUNAWAY GOD'S MESSENGER

Jonah 1:1-3 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me." 3 But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

Historians and archaeologists found the city of Nineveh in Northern Iraq area. It was the capital of the Assyrian Empire and was located on the Tigris River. It was the world power in that day.

I measured the distance from Joppa of Israel to Nineveh of Assyria with a help of the Bible software I have, it was over 560 miles northeast of Joppa. I couldn't measure the distance to Tarshish which was a port city of southern Spain from Joppa, but I did from Joppa to Rome which was over 1300 miles. I guess that it is somewhere around 2000 miles away. It was like God calls me while I am in Atlanta, GA and tells me to go to New York, instead of being obedient to God I head to Los Angeles.

Why did God want Jonah to go Nineveh? Because God saw their wickedness. None of man's wickedness can escape from God. He sees it all, and it may come to a point where it demands a specific warning and judgment of God.

I believe that the great wickedness of America also has gone up to the Lord. Unless America repents from her wickedness and seeks God's forgiveness, He will judge it like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Jonah hated the Ninevites and Assyrians with passion and prejudice. The bottom line is that he did not want them saved. There was a basis for his hatred. Assyria was one of the most brutal nations of the ancient world. They used very cruel methods of tortures and treatments to their enemies including the nation of Israel. They often cut off their enemies' forearms and legs and burned the wounds. If they survive after that, they couldn't do anything other than becoming the food for wild animals.

We often think that if we are out of the will of God, everything would go difficult and the things start to fall apart. On the contrary, if we are in the will of God, it should be a smooth sailing and the things should fall into its place.

If that is the only indication of whether we are in God's will or not, so far Jonah would think that he is not out of God's will. Purely depending on the sign of circumstances to find out the will of God can be extremely dangerous.

Jonah didn't have a problem going down to Joppa from Gath Hopher, nor he had a problem buying a ticket to the farthest location at that time.

For the prophet Jeremiah, nothing could go right. When you read the Book of Jeremiah, you feel sorry for that guy. Everybody in Israel hated him to the point of death. God told him to prophesy the warning from Him to the people of Israel. Did they repent and turn to God? Not one single person. What did they do? They threw him in the jail. Not one thing went right for Jeremiah. His pillow was soaked with his tears for his fellow Israel people. It is no wonder why they call him the Weeping Prophet. But Jeremiah was right smack dab in the center of God's will.

No matter what kind of situation occurs, the Word of God is our guide and we must not depart from it under the pretext of necessity or circumstances. We can easily justify the circumstances around us to favor what we have decided, but God's Word doesn't change.

In v. 3, Jonah found a ship bound for Tarshish. Whenever we try to run away from God's will, we can be sure that satan will do anything to help us including preparing a ship to run away from God.

Did you notice that Jonah had to pay to get into the ship that would take him away from God's will? Whenever we get into sin, we have to pay the fare. Oh yes, there are moments of pleasure in sin, but we pay the fare for our sins, sometimes with our lives.

D. THE RAGING SEA AND THE MIGHTY WIND

Jonah 1:4-5 But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. 5 Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.

These sailors accustomed to the Mediterranean, and they detect that this is no natural storm.

God allows us to have storms in our lives or He actually sends storms to us to get our attention. Not every storm is sent because of our sins and rebellion against God. Some storms are sent by God to develop our characters. The stronger the winds of our lives blow, the deeper the root of our faith in Christ Jesus grows.

Everyone has someone to cry out in the midst of mighty storm of life. There is a saying, "There is no atheist in the fox hole."

Jonah was not sleeping because he was at peace with God like Jesus did in the boat with His disciples in the middle of storm. But Jonah was duped by satan. When we get into sin in the beginning, we get convicted by the Holy Spirit. But the more we get involved with sins, the more we become callous against the conviction of the Holy Spirit. At this point, Jonah was so callous that he could ignore God's knocking with the storm on the door of his heart.

E. THE PROPHET WHO WAS REBUKED BY HEATHENS

Jonah 1:6-10 So the captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so

that we may not perish." 7 And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 Then they said to him, "Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" 9 So he said to them, "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." 10 Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, "Why have you done this?" For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.

Jonah had brought trouble to everybody instead of blessing, nor was he living up to his calling as a prophet. The worst part of the whole situation was that he was rebuked by heathens who don't know God and he was representing his God in a wrong way to them.

Whenever a believer of Jesus Christ sins, the results of the sin doesn't only affect that person, but also many people around him.

Jonah thought he got away from God and everything would be fine. Far from the truth. Be sure that our hidden sins will find us out.

Numbers 32:23 But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out.

Luke 12:3 Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.

F. THE FIRST SUBMARINER – JONAH

Jonah 1:11-17 Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?"--for the sea was growing more tempestuous. 12 And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me." 13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. 14 Therefore they cried out to the Lord and said, "We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You." 15 So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows. 17 Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

I heard a funny story about the raging sea. Pastor Gayle Erwin whom some of you well know was leading a Holy Land Tour in the sea of Galilee in Israel. As we all studied in the Gospels, all of sudden the sea became wild and shaking their boat side to side.

One brave soul got on the front of the boat and yelled at the sea as he read in the Bible, "Peace, be still." The moment he commanded, the motor of their boat stopped but the storm continued. The rest of people asked him not to say anymore.

Why did Jonah ask to be thrown into the sea? Perhaps out of compassion for the sailors? I think not. Because they were Gentiles and Jonah was a hardcore Jewish nationalist who didn't care any other country men than Jews. Jonah was determined

to go to the end to run away from God. In other words, he'd rather die than obey God's call to help the people of Nineveh.

Jonah became the first submariner in the human history. Did you notice, "*the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah?*" It wasn't a whale. We don't know, but God said it in His Word. That is good enough for me.

From the moment Jonah ran away from God, he went down to Joppa, he went down to the bottom of the ship, he went down to the fish's mouth, he went down to the bottom of the ocean.

Whenever we go against God, nothing will go up in our own way, but everything will go down including our relationship with God.

I am sure that when the sailors threw Jonah over board, he thought it was all over. But God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah and allowed him to think about what he had done for three days and three nights. Jonah could say with the psalmist this:

Psalm 118:18 The Lord has chastened me severely, But He has not given me over to death.

Are you in the midst of the storm of your life? Are you still thinking that you can give a deaf ear to God and get away with it? God is full of mercy and love to forgive us from our sins. But remember this, God's millstone turns slowly, but He grinds it exceedingly fine.

G. APPLICATIONS

1) No matter what kind of situation occurs, the Word of God is our guide and we must not depart from it under the pretext of necessity or circumstances.

We can easily justify the circumstances around us to favor what we have decided, but God's Word doesn't change.

2) Let's not think that our sins affect only us.

Whenever a believer of Jesus Christ sins, the results of the sin doesn't only affect that person, but also many people around him.

3) Whenever we go against God, nothing will go up in our own way, but everything will go down including our relationship with God.