

## **JONAH-DEAD OR ALIVE?**

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### **LECTURE - 2**

#### **THE PRODIGAL SON LEAVES HOME**

**"And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country" (Luke 15:13.)**

First of all, let us consult the timetable. Jonah left Israel for Nineveh. He probably was in his home town of Gath-Hepher when the call to go to Nineveh came to him from GOD. Another likely place for him to have been would be Samaria. At any rate, he was somewhere in the land of Israel, and GOD called him to prepare for a journey, to go to Nineveh, **"that great city."**

Three times the writer has called our attention to the greatness of Nineveh. At one time this was another one of the bones which the critic enjoyed picking, for it was his contention that Nineveh was just a "whistle stop" in the ancient world. That rumor has been spiked now by the spade of the archaeologist. When we come to Lecture Four, we shall have occasion to refer to this significant statement.

#### **The Wicked City of Nineveh and the Brutal Assyrian Army**

It was not the size of the city of Nineveh which called it to GOD's attention. It was the wickedness of this city.

History fully corroborates this statement. The Assyrian army was one of the most brutal and cruel ever to be put on the march. The ruthless conduct of the army toward all helpless peoples, and the acts of barbarity committed against tribes and nations are only matched by the recent conduct of the Nazi war machine. Acts of aggression were commonplace and injustice ran rampant throughout the Assyrian hordes.

The Assyrians were dreaded in the ancient world, and rightly so. It was the policy of the army, when a nation or tribe was conquered, to uproot the inhabitants from the land, root, stock and branch, and remove them to some other section of the Assyrian Empire, preferably near Nineveh where those subject peoples might be slaves in position. This policy entailed a

great deal of suffering on the part of the vanquished and many peoples were destroyed by such acts of aggression.

A consideration of the tenth chapter of Isaiah will throw further light upon this nation whose wickedness made it infamous not only in the world but before GOD.

### **GOD'S Commission to Jonah**

GOD commissioned Jonah to take a message of salvation to this wicked city of Nineveh, which is something difficult for mankind to understand. **GOD never provides salvation for the goodness of man. Salvation is provided for the sin of man. GOD saves men because they are sinners and not because they are good. GOD'S plan of salvation only considers sinners as the objects of His love and the recipients of His love and the recipients of His grace. Anybody can work out a plan to save good people, but only GOD has a plan with which to save sinners. But "all have sinned," and "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."** It forever stands as a foundational fact that **"God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."** It is a salutary to take our rightful place before GOD and to trust His mighty arm of salvation to redeem us entirely and completely.

### **JONAH GOES WEST**

We come now to the most phenomenal statements in the entire Book of Jonah and one that by all odds seems inexplicable. GOD told Jonah to go to Nineveh, but, the record says, **"Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord"** (verse 3). GOD told Jonah to go East, but he started in the other direction as if he liked better the advice of Horace Greeley of the New York Tribune who, in the early days of our nation, advised young men to leave the crowded Eastern coast and go to the interior, with this now famous saying, "Go West, young man! Go West!" At any rate, Jonah went West, and all the time GOD was calling him to go East.

Tarshish was on the coast of Spain, about as far toward the end of the world as a man could go in that day, in that direction.

This strange conduct of Jonah requires some explanation. The phenomenal thing, as has been suggested, is that the Book of Jonah provides no satisfactory explanation. This is the most difficult feature to explain; the fish is not the real difficulty. In order to explain Jonah's strange conduct, let us return to a brief discussion of the Assyrian nation.

Assyria was a brutal nation, as has been stated. The historical Books of Kings and Chronicles supply us with data concerning the fact that the Assyrian hordes had made forays down into the land of Israel. There they had practiced their diabolical acts. The people of Nineveh were bitterly hated by the Israelites, and surely there was justification for this hatred. It is reasonable to suppose that on one of these expeditions to Israel the Assyrians had laid siege to Gath-Hepher, the hometown of Jonah. Perhaps the city was destroyed and many of the inhabitants slain. Some loved one of Jonah may have suffered and been killed at this time. There is a possibility that his own mother or father was slain before his eyes when he

was a boy. This would not only put a terror in his heart, but also an everlasting hatred against this city and this nation. He could never forget and he could not humanly forgive.

When GOD called Jonah to go to Nineveh on an errand of mercy, it was too high a hurdle for Jonah. In the bitterness of his soul, he was out of harmony with GOD who wanted to extend mercy to this wicked city of Nineveh. GOD had more difficulty in getting His servant back into fellowship than He did in saving a city.

The strange action of Jonah to the command of GOD can only be explained on the basis of Jonah's attitude toward Nineveh. Frankly, he did not love the city, and, furthermore, he did not want to see the city delivered from the impending judgment of Almighty GOD.

On the contrary, Jonah wished to see the city in smoking ruins, and that explains why he took up his place of observation on the east side of the city of Nineveh underneath a gourd vine:

**“So Jonah went out of the city, 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. 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 grief.”**

From where he, Jonah, was, he hoped to witness the destruction of Nineveh.

That is why we read in the early part of the Book of Jonah that he, **“rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.”** He fled with bitterness of soul and hatred in his heart.

## **THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM**

Judging from the events which ensued, one might deduce that everything was propitious for Jonah's journey to Tarshish. On arriving at the seacoast city of Joppa, he found a ship ready to sail for Tarshish on which he booked passage. All of this would indicate favorable circumstances which might lead a superficial servant of GOD to believe that GOD was in the change of plans. This is what another has called "the fortuitous concurrence of circumstances."

But apparently favorable circumstances are not always a harbinger that GOD is in them.

Oftentimes all of us have heard some Christian explain a particular project as having the blessing of GOD upon it because all difficulties and problems have been removed and everything moves along smoothly. To that Christian, the favorable circumstances seemed to be indicative of the hand of the LORD. On this basis, Jonah could have justified his trip to Tarshish. He could have testified that when he arrived at Joppa, there was a ship ready to sail and GOD provided the money for the fare.

**But, my friend, do not always interpret favorable circumstances as the pathway of the Lord. It may be the calm before the storm which is ready to break upon a back-sliding servant of GOD. GOD's servants customarily encounter difficulties and problems as they go along in the pathway of His blessing.**

Consider the missionary travels of Paul, the life of David Livingstone and the thrilling records

of Judson of Burma and John G. Patton of the New Hebrides. These men met disappointments on every hand and had to overcome handicaps daily; this is the record of GOD's servants as seen in Hebrews 11:36-38:

**“ And others had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;(of whom the world was not worthy) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”**

## **THE GREAT WIND**

The favorable circumstances were but the calm before the storm indeed, for we are told in the very next verse, verse 4, that **“THE lord sent out a great wind into the sea.” Every ship is heading into a storm that is carrying a backsliding child of GOD, and this ship was no exception..**

Every prodigal son who leaves the father's house is on the way to the swine sty, even when he is most unconscious of it.

This was no ordinary storm, for even the sailors were frightened because it seemed likely that the ship would be broken momentarily. However, neither the backsliding condition of Jonah nor the storm prevented him from sleeping. Surely this is contrary to the argument that the conscience of a backslider will disturb him until he returns to GOD.

Apparently Jonah needed no aspirin tablet to put him to sleep. He could sleep right through a storm which terrified even the sailors. **Men out of the will of God sometimes find a relief when the HOLY SPIRIT no longer smites their consciences, and they become numb to the promptings of GOD.**

Men who have had experiences in the frozen North say that the gravest danger is when men begin to freeze because they go to sleep and forget the danger. This is always fatal. We should be thankful to GOD that oftentimes, under such circumstances, He has present some one to prod us and chide us with the statement, **“What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God.”**

The shipmaster awakened Jonah from his sleep and bade him call upon his GOD. Then they cast lots in order to locate the man who had brought down upon their heads such a disturbance of the elements. Consequently, Jonah was ferreted out and found out. The sailors immediately put to him some rather personal questions:

**“What is thine occupation?”** He had not told them that he was a backsliding prophet.

**“Whence comest thou? What is thy country?”** Again, he had not given them very much information concerning himself in spite of the fact that he had talked with a glib tongue.

**“Of what people art thou?”** He had not told them he was one of the children of Israel, and evidently his appearance did not betray him. The thing which made the children of Israel a peculiar people was their religion, which identified them in the ancient world. Jonah had not

been a very commendable witness for GOD to the sailors on board ship. Although he had evidently been loquacious regarding the fact that he was running away from the LORD, these men were not apprised of the fact that he was a prophet of the living and true GOD. Jonah was forced then to make his confession, "I am an Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of Heaven, which hath made the sea and dry land

## **MAN OVERBOARD**

This confession of Jonah brought consternation to the sailors and they appealed to him to help them out of the difficult straits in which they found themselves. Jonah knew he was on the wrong ship, going in the wrong direction and that GOD, through all of these adverse circumstances, was giving him the command to right-about-face. So, he told the sailors, **"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."**(verse 12).

This suggestion did not meet the approbation of the sailors and they refused to do it at first, attempting to bring the ship through the storm to land by rowing very hard. This was of no avail and so they turned to the living and true GOD to deliver them from committing a crime against Jonah by following his instruction in throwing him overboard.

It is well to note at this point the courteous treatment of Jonah by these pagan sailors. Although they were steeped in idolatry and heathenism, they exercised a courtesy toward Jonah which is remarkable. It was with reluctance that they threw him overboard. Sometimes the outside world, by its courteous treatment, puts the Christian to shame. The unlovely attitudes and actions of so-called Christians give the cause of CHRIST a black eye before a pagan world which is majoring in manners. It is begging the point to say that the world has courtesy only on the surface and does not mean it at heart. Perhaps not, but does that prove the Christian has the lovely attitude in his heart because he does not show it on the surface?

There is one last look at these sailors which we need to take before turning to Jonah again. Notice the remarkable statement concerning them in verse 16: **"Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows."** In spite of the poor witness which the LORD had in Jonah, he was effective, for these heathen men turned to GOD, offering a sacrifice, which, we believe, is the Old Testament manner of saying, **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."** They also made vows which means that these men offered themselves to GOD for consecration and service.

## **CAN A FISH SWALLOW A MAN?**

Were we not familiar with the story of Jonah, our interest at this point would be at white heat as we ponder what became of Jonah. This would be the proper place to continue the story until the next issue. But we know that the LORD prepared a fish to swallow Jonah. The important thing about this fish is that the LORD prepared it; it does not make much difference what kind of fish it was or whether a fish can swallow a man or not; this fish was specially prepared.

There were four different "prepared" things in this book, all of equal and remarkable importance: A prepared fish, a prepared gourd, a prepared worm and a prepared east wind.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to raise the old question: Can a fish swallow a man? There are several accounts on record of men being swallowed by large fish and living to tell the tale. Grace W. Kellogg, in her excellent little booklet on the subject, "The Bible Today," has compiled a list of the records - which have been authenticated - of the experiences of living creatures in fish who later were rescued alive. We are quoting from this section of Grace W. Kellogg's book in full:

"There are at least two known monsters of the deep who could easily have swallowed Jonah. They are the Balaenoptera Musculus or sulphur-bottom whale, and the Rhinodon Typicus or whale shark. Neither of these monsters of the deep have any teeth. They feed in an interesting way by opening their enormous mouths, submerging their lower jaw, and rushing through the water at terrific speed. After straining out the water, they swallow whatever is left. A sulphur-bottom whale, one hundred feet long, was captured off Cape Cod in 1933. His mouth was ten or twelve feet wide - so big he could easily have swallowed a horse. These whales have four to six compartments in their stomachs, in anyone of which a small colony of men could find free lodging. They might even have a choice of rooms, for in the head of this whale is a wonderful air storage chamber, an enlargement of the nasal sinus, often measuring seven feet high, seven feet wide, by fourteen feet long. If he has an unwelcome guest on board who gives him a headache, the whale swims to the nearest land and gets rid of the offender as he did Jonah."

"The Cleveland Plain Dealer recently quoted an article by Dr. Ransome Harvey who said that a dog was lost overboard from a ship. It was found in the head of a whale six days later, alive and barking.

"Frank Bullen, F.R.G.S., who wrote, 'The Cruise of the Cachalot,' tells of a shark fifteen feet in length which was found in the stomach of a whale. He says that when dying the whale ejects the contents of its stomach.

"The late Dr. Dixon stated that in a museum at Beirut, Syria, there is a head of a whale shark big enough to swallow the largest man that history records! He also tells of a white shark of the Mediterranean which swallowed a whole horse; another swallowed a reindeer minus only its horns. In still another Mediterranean white shark was found a whole sea cow, about the size of an ox.

"These facts show that Jonah could have been swallowed by either a whale or a shark. But has any other man besides Jonah been swallowed and lived to tell the tale? We know of two such instances.

"The famous French scientist, M. de Parville, writes of James Bartley, who in the region of the Falkland Islands near South America, was supposed to have been drowned at sea. Two days after his disappearance, the sailors made a catch of a whale. When it was cut up, much to their surprise they found their missing friend alive but unconscious inside the whale. He revived and has been enjoying the best of health ever since his adventure.

"Dr. Harry Rimmer, President of the Research Science Bureau of Los Angeles, writes of another case, 'In the Literary Digest we noticed an account of an English sailor who was swallowed by a gigantic Rhinodon in the English Channel. Briefly, the account stated that in

the attempt to harpoon one of these monstrous sharks, this sailor fell overboard, and before he could be picked up again, the shark turned and engulfed him. Forty-eight hours after the accident occurred, the fish was sighted and slain. When the shark was opened by the sailors, they were amazed to find the man unconscious but alive!

He was rushed to the hospital where he was found to be suffering from shock alone, and a few hours later was discharged as being physically fit. The account concluded by saying that the man was on exhibit in a London Museum at a shilling admittance fee; being advertised as "The Jonah of the Twentieth Century."

"In 1926 Dr. Rimmer met this man, and writes that his physical appearance was odd; his body was devoid of hair and patches of yellowish-brown color covered his entire skin.

"If two men could exist for two days and nights inside of marine monsters, could not a prophet of GOD, under His direct care and protection, stand the experience a day and a night longer - so why should we doubt GOD's Word?"

Jonah was a prodigal son who ran away from GOD. Although he did not arrive in the pig pen with the animal world, he came to a place of equal debasement in the stomach of the leviathan of the fish world. **Every prodigal son who runs away from GOD is either on the way to the pigpen of disgrace or to the fish's belly of ignominy..**

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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