



*A Systematic Expository Study of the Word of God*

## **JONAH, THE PRODIGAL PROPHET**

### **Jonah 1:1-3**

We know about the prodigal son, the one who left home and would not stay with his father. In this study, we are looking at a prodigal prophet who did not stay at the centre of the will of God. Many Bible scholars and commentators treat the book of Jonah as an allegory espousing some high defining moral lessons about the nation of Israel. Others see it as a fictitious story built around a fictitious character called Jonah just to teach some moral values. But testimonies from both the Old and New Testaments confirm the book of Jonah to be a historical document. As a historical figure, Jonah lived and ministered in the land of Israel (2 Kings 14:25; Matthew 12:39; 16:4; Luke 11:29, 30, 32). From these references, we discover that (1), Jonah actually lived (2), he was swallowed up by a whale (3), he was vomited out alive (4), he went to Nineveh and preached to them the Word of God which he had originally refused to preach (5), the people of Nineveh repented at Jonah's preaching.

### **THE DIVINE DIRECTIVE**

Jonah 1:1, 2; Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19; Acts 5:19, 20; Jeremiah 1:7; Luke 9:60.

Jonah knew right from the onset what he was to do. It was very clear as to what the Lord wanted him to do. The Lord made clear Jonah's commission and ministry in the city of Nineveh. The prophets of the Old Testament received instruction and revelations direct from God. The Lord called them and communicated His will directly unto them. Here, **"the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me."**

The nobility of Jonah's call is underscored by the contents of the divine directive. First, it was a call into ministry. To accomplish that ministry, he needed to **"arise."** Second, it was a call into a foreign mission, a call that would take him from his nativity to a distant land, to people whom the Lord wants to reach through His message. He needed to **"go."** Third, it was a call in which he was given a message to deliver unto the people. He was not to shut up his mouth when he gets there. He needed to **"cry."**

The Great Commission given to the Church is no less noble and imperative. In the clarion call to **"go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"** lies the divine directive given to every member of the church. If ye love me, keep my commandment, the Lord said. What He said unto the church believers and His followers then, He says to us today. Nobody can claim to know God, to love Him, to belong to the church of the living God who ignores the divine directive, who disobeys the call of the Great Commission. **"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."** The Great Commission highlights our responsibility to a wicked, sinful and perishing world. We fail in our duty when we neglect to take the gospel to the world and lead the people into the saving knowledge of our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ.

Nineveh was the capital city of ancient Syria. For years, the Assyrians waged war and committed atrocities against the nation of Israel. This naturally evoked hatred and animosity in the hearts of the people against the Assyrians. The Israelites saw the Assyrians as their enemies. Among the children of Israel, it was viewed as a mark of patriotism to be seen as having nothing to do with the people that your own people regard as their enemy. This thinking largely informed Jonah's recalcitrant attitude, his refusal to preach to the inhabitants of Nineveh and his attempt to flee to Tarshish. But God's controversy with Jonah shows the regard God has for the Great Commission over tribal sentiments, political allegiances, cultural affinity and national ethos. Not even trials, suffering, persecution should make us stop preaching the gospel. The

Lord's answer to the young disciple and His charge to Peter show the pride of place that the Great Commission occupies in His heart and the priority we need to accord it in our lives. It takes priority over burial and other ceremonies. The Lord expects every believer to give priority to the preaching of the gospel. The divine directive to Jonah was very clear. Somebody said that his message can be summed up in three words: turn or burn. The judgement of Nineveh was imminent; hence their urgent need for repentance. The judgement of this world is, likewise, at hand. God's command to the church demands no less a sense of urgency as Jonah's.

## A DELIBERATE DISOBEDIENCE

Jonah 1:3a; 4:2-4; Exodus 4:12-14; Jeremiah 20:9; Acts 26:19.

Jonah knew the will of the Lord. He knew the divine directive. He knew the Great Commission. He knew the call of God upon his life. He knew that he was to go on a foreign mission to Nineveh and declare the Word of God unto them. He knew where to go. But he chose to disobey God. In deliberate disobedience to the command and will of God, he **"rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa."** Joppa, a seaport is situated midway between Nineveh and Tarshish. Archeologists say the distance between Jonah's home and Joppa is about 75 miles. There, **"he found a ship going to Tarshish."** How providential! Oftentimes, circumstances can aid us to disobey God. A seemingly favourable situation may make us want to justify some deliberate disobedience against the word of God. Somebody said that the world will always provide a ship to take us away from the will of God. But Jonah **"paid the fare thereof."** Deliberate disobedience to God's command cost Jonah dearly. His ordeals as recorded in the scriptures show how much he had to pay. Besides the few coins he dropped into the hands of eager sailors, he went through intense suffering and mental agony in the belly of the whale and scorching heat of the sun on the street of Nineveh. Deliberate disobedience to divine directive always attract a very high price. Moses, Jeremiah and a few other prophets, at one time or the other, deliberately tried to disobey divine directives. Many believers, for purely selfish reasons, still deliberately neglect God's directive on the Great Commission. They neglect to preach the gospel. For the church, there is need to reinvent our original commitment and zeal for holiness and evangelism - the two pillars of truth on which the church stood and for which the church was known in days gone by.

## A DOWNWARD DESTINATION

Jonah 1:3b, 5b; 2:6; Genesis 12:10; 26:2; Judges 14:1; Isaiah 31:1; 30:1, 2.

Jonah's departure from the will of God marked the beginning of a downward journey in his career. First, on getting **down** to Joppa, he went **down** into the ship. Next, he went **down** into the sea, then **down** into the belly of the whale. Finally, the whale carried him **down** into the depth of the sea. When a believer forsakes the way of the Lord, when he deliberately neglects or refuses to carry out a divine directive, his career always assume a downward trend. Besides Jonah's, the cases of Abram and Samson are quite instructive. Together, they show the danger in abandoning the work or call of God for any reason. Self-presumption and ignorance sometimes may make us want to blame our misfortunes and setbacks on enemies and economic depression. In reality, our problems may have more to do with divine displeasure at neglect of divine directive than with anything else. When we neglect the Lord's command, we expose ourselves to problems, troubles, hardship and disappointment of life from which hitherto we had been shielded by the love and grace of God.

**"Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!"** Egypt symbolises the world. To abandon the call of God, to neglect the preaching of the gospel, to go back into the world, to plunge oneself into purely personal pursuits to the detriment of the gospel is to come under the curse of God. It is to diminish in rank, position and fortunes.

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