

Some Possible Answers for Week 5 of the Jonah Study

Week 5: By God's grace He offers 2nd chances.

Day 1- Overview - Read Jonah 3:1-10 (All "Application" questions are personal so they are not included in this handout. Answers will vary with all these questions. The answers shown are just some of the possibilities.)

1. What stands out to you in these verses?

- Answers will vary
- **Some points of interest:** God came to Jonah a 2nd time; Jonah responded differently; the Ninevites believed; the king believed; the king *and his nobles* issued a proclamation; God had compassion on the Ninevites.
- Some notes about Ninevites and their beliefs which might help you see the glory of God in these verses and some of the ways He works with people.
- **Note 1:** In the last chapter we saw Jonah being spit up onto dry land by the great fish. We have also seen that the people of Nineveh instantly accepted Jonah. Why? Here is one possibility: The Ninevites worshiped a fish-headed god name 'Dagon'. That being the case, it wouldn't be unreasonable to see the Ninevites accepting this man Jonah, who claimed to speak for God, and who was delivered to them via an immense fish. They could have seen this as a divine sign. They worshiped a fish god; Jonah was delivered by a fish, so it would not be surprising that they would worship him. It's obvious they certainly heeded his warning.
- **Note 2: NINEVEH's RELIGION:** The man *bull* and man *lion* answer to 'Nin' and 'Nergal', the gods of war and the chase. 'Nisroch' the *eagle-headed god* and 'Dagon' *the fish-headed god* often appear in the sculptures. The *sacred tree* answers to 'Asheerah', "*the grove*" [2nd Kings 21:7]. The chief gods were 'Asshur', 'Bel', 'Beltis' or 'Myletta', 'Sin' the moon, 'Shamash' (shemesh in the Hebrew tongue; *Hebrew word #8121*) the sun, 'Vul' or 'Iva' the thunder wielder, 'Nin', etc. Nahum 3:4 denounces the *witchcraft* and *prostitution* in connection with Nineveh.

2. Who is involved in this part of Jonah's story?

- God, Jonah, people of Nineveh, and the king of Nineveh and *his nobles*.

3. What do you learn about God in these verses?

- Answers will vary.

4. Why do you think God was so interested in Jonah (see Matthew 12:39-40)?

- Matt. 12:39-40 – *"He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"*
- One reason is that God is sovereign and does as He pleases.
- A second reason may be that Jonah was a part of God's plan to be used by Jesus as a witness/sign.
- Another reason may be based on what Jesus said, (Matt. 18:12-14) *"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?¹³ And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off.¹⁴ In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost"*
- Maybe God didn't want to lose Jonah just because he had some attitude issues and his heart was hard towards the Ninevites. Thank God that He is so compassionate and patient with us!

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- Maybe the message for us is that God pursues His people even though they run from His call.
- David was called to repentance after he sinned: Samuel 12:13; Peter was reinstated after he denied Jesus, John 21:15-18.
- The grace of God is seen in His pattern of pursuing and seeking his wayward people.
- Much of the Old Testament shows this pattern: God blessed the people, the people rebelled against God, God called His people to repentance through a prophet, the people repented, God blessed His people, the people then rebelled.....

Day 2 – A 2nd chance for Jonah. Read 3:1-2

1. How does God's second call to Jonah differ from His first (see Jonah 1:1)?
 - Straight forward, Jonah ran from God the first time but this time "*Jonah obeyed*" (3a).
2. What hope do you gain from the fact that God came to Jonah a 2nd time?
 - Answers will vary.
 - One hope is that God will be as patient with us as He was with Jonah. That He will continue to come after us even though we have turned and run at times.
 - He is a God of 2nd chances but it is foolish to rely on that when He calls us. He doesn't owe anyone a 2nd chance!
3. What promise does God give Jonah that should give him confidence in his mission?
 - God was going to *give* Jonah the message that he should proclaim.
 - This means that it wasn't Jonah who had to think of what to say, or how to say it, or even if it was received or not. All Jonah had to do was speak as the Lord gave him the words.
 - Jonah was to use the *words of the Lord* not his own.
4. If you have refused a call God has made to you, it may not be over yet. Following Jonah's example, what should you do (see Jonah 2)?
 - Jonah called on the Lord (2:1, 2, 7), he saw the power of the Lord over idols/gods (2:8), he would be thankful, sacrifice (today this could be giving time, talent, money, etc.), and make good what he vowed (2:9).
 - Not sure Jonah actually confessed of his sin, but if he didn't, that shouldn't stop us from confessing.
 - A couple of examples from the New Testament. Peter in Luke 22:54-62 followed with John 21:15-19. Another example can be seen in John 20:24-28 with Thomas.

Day 3 – Jonah is obedient to the Lord for giving him a 2nd chance. Read 3:3-4

1. Compare Jonah's responses to both of the Lord's callings:
 - His response in the first calling was to run from God and in the second calling "*he obeyed*" (3:3).
2. What is different in Jonah's response this time? What is a key word used in 3:3?
 - His obedience to the Lord's calling. No arguments and no excuses.
 - He just "*went*"!
 - There are mixed concepts regarding the phrase "*a visit required three days.*"
 - Some say this meant it took three days to walk around the circumference of the city.
 - Archaeologists know the city of Nineveh had an estimated perimeter of about 8 miles.

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- That being the case, it would not require a three days journey since they estimates are an average daily walk was approximately 20 miles.
- Others say it would take three days to walk through the city proclaiming the message on many streets.
- Others say the *three days* would include the many suburbs around the city. Some archaeologists estimate that the city with its suburbs would have possibly been 60 miles across (3 days walk).
- All these *Greek thoughts* of details are interesting, but what would a *Hebrew* be interested in?
- He/she would focus on the fact that Jonah went to Nineveh, a large, pagan, wicked city, and per the Lord's instruction and proclaimed the Lord's message!

3. Jonah had a long trek to Nineveh. He had time to think things over. God is pleased to give us times for prayerful thinking and reflecting. How often do you take time to prayerfully think things over? How pleased do you think God is with how you use your "free" time?

- Answers will vary.

4. Why do you suppose God didn't use a more willing prophet?

- It seems that is the way God works. A perfect example of this same situation is how Jesus keeps working with Peter.
- For instance, when Jesus approached the disciples in the boat and Peter was first to jump up and go over the side but then failed to keep his eyes on Jesus and began sinking (Matt. 14:25-32).
- Another instance is Peter being willing to die for Jesus and then denies him 3 times in the courtyard where Jesus stood near by (Luke 22:54-61 & John 21:15-19)
- It seems that God isn't really bothered by our short comings when He wants to use us.
- You see, its all His sovereignty, His enabling, His discipline, His words of encouragement, His words of warning, His plan for saving the Ninevites, He sets the course of history, He saw Jesus in the future using Jonah as a sign for the people of His day, so God used exactly the person He wanted to!
- **It is all about God!**
- Jonah was the person God chose to use, to discipline (see Psalms 94:12-13; Prov. 1:7; Prov. 3:11-12 and passages), to save, to proclaim His words through so the Ninevites could be saved.

Day 4 – Jonah's obedience results in the people of Nineveh being saved. – Read 3:5

1. At this time, Nineveh had a population of about 120,000. What are your thoughts regarding the way the people reacted to Jonah's prophecy?

- Answers will vary.

2. List the steps the people went through to indicate they were serious:

- They believed God – their faith
- They declared a fast for everyone and put on sackcloth. This was putting their faith into action.
- **FASTING:** As fasting was a perfectly natural and human expression and evidence of the subject's grief, it readily claimed a place among those religious customs whose main object was the pacification of the anger of God, or to encourage Him to have compassion. To manifest a still profounder humbling of the soul before God it was not unusual to put on sackcloth, rend (tear) the garments they were wearing, and scatter ashes over the head [*1st King 21:27; 2nd Sam 13:19; Lam. 2:10*].
- **SACKCLOTH:** A rough, coarse cloth, or a bag-like garment made of this cloth and worn as a symbol of mourning or repentance. In the Bible sackcloth was often used to symbolize certain actions. In the

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case of mourning, either over a death [Gen 37:34; Joel 1:8] or another calamity [Ester 4:1-4; Job 16:15], the Israelites showed their grief by wearing sackcloth and ashes. This was done also in instances of confession and grief over sin [1st King 21:27].

3. What are some things you do to demonstrate you're serious about God's calls, warnings, blessings, promises, and commands?

- Answers will vary.

4. Do you believe people would react to a true prophet from God today who gave a warning such as Jonah's? Explain.

- Answers will vary.

Day 5 – Jonah's obedience results in the king of Nineveh being saved. – Read 3:6-10

1. What was the reaction of the king when he heard Jonah's prophecy?

- He was drastically affected by the news Jonah had proclaimed and did the following:
- He removed his royal robes (6)
- He covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust (6)
- He made a proclamation to Ninevites (7).
- The proclamation was from the king and his nobles (7).
- Notice the king included animals as well as the people (7) – no food or drink.
- All to be in sackcloth!
- Notice the seriousness of the king in (8) when he says "*Let everyone call urgently on God.*" Notice also the upper case "G" for God no longer are they relying on their little "g" gods!
- He also tells the people to give up their *evil ways and their violence.*"

2. What does this tell you about the power of God's word when spoken through a person He calls?

- The Holy Spirit can use the words spoken by a person God calls to do powerful things.
- God was earnestly seeking to save the people of Nineveh!

3. How far reaching was the king's reaction to Jonah's message? Could you see a President of the USA doing such a thing today? How would you react?

- Throughout his entire kingdom!
- Answers will vary.

4. Did the people of Nineveh know God would forgive their former wicked behavior? Explain.

- 3:9 says, "*Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we will not perish.*"
- These people did not know if God would save them or not but they demonstrated their faith by action.
- 3:10 says, "*When God saw.... He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened.*"
- Next week we will discuss this action of God further. Be sure to do the study lesson.

5. How do you see God's grace working in this chapter?

- Answers will vary.