

## Jonah: the Value of Life

The book of Jonah is about a prophet named Jonah. He was like a doomsayer prophet; God sent him places to warn of the coming destruction unless they repent. He saw firsthand God's mercy when the people repented. So when God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, Jonah refused, expecting God to grant him mercy as he fled to Tarshish (*Spiritual*, Jon 1.3). Nineveh was a city where modern day Syria is; they were probably a city full of Muslims and idol-worshippers. They were known as crude, dangerous people that all of God's people avoided—and even hated. Jonah knew that God would grant Nineveh mercy, but he hated the Ninevites so much that he didn't want them to receive mercy (Jon 4.1). He fled from the job God had given him out of rebellion, jealousy, and possibly racism. Jonah ran not because he was scared of the task before him, but because he knew God would forgive the city—and Jonah wanted Nineveh destroyed. God was, reasonably, mad at Jonah, and sent a storm to the sea where Jonah was sailing (Jon 1.4). The crew threw Jonah overboard to appease God, and the storm stopped (Jon 1.15). The crew started praising God and made their vows to Him instead of their old gods (Jon 1.16). Jonah was swallowed by a big fish, possibly a whale, that God sent (Jon 1.17). Jonah repented of his ways and promised God that he would go to Nineveh if allowed to live (Jon 2.9). God showed Jonah mercy and made the fish vomit him up on land (Jon 2.10). When Jonah got to Nineveh and started warning them of coming destruction, the whole city, including the king, put on sackcloth and ashes to pray for mercy (Jon 3.5-6). Jonah knew that God would show them mercy, and he hated it (Jon 4.1). He left the city to watch from afar what would become of it; he obviously was still hoping it would be destroyed (Jon 4.5). However, God didn't destroy Nineveh. He made a plant grow to shade Jonah, for which Jonah was grateful (Jon 4.6). Yet the next morning, God destroyed the plant (Jon 4.7). Jonah was angry at God—for Nineveh and for the plant. God asked him why He shouldn't have pity on Nineveh and show them mercy (Jon 4.10-11).

In a sense, I think God was trying to tell Jonah that not one life is more valuable than another. Ninevites were just as worthy of mercy as everybody else—not worthy. God's grace is for everybody who asks, however. Jonah knew that, but didn't think that certain people deserved it. He thought he was better than the 120,000 people in that city. God stated in the last paragraph that, if He were to have mercy on Jonah, why wouldn't he have mercy on 120,000 "Jonahs" (Jon 4.10-11)?

What bothers me is that Jonah expected God's mercy before he was swallowed by the fish. Later in the book, he stated that he knew God would forgive him and give him a second chance (Jon 4.2). Knowing God's grace and mercy, I feel totally undeserving all the time. I don't always accept God's

mercy or grace right away. Jonah seemed to accept it like it was something to be taken lightly. Yet he threw a huge fit when God extended the same courtesy to the Ninevites.

I think God showed mercy on the men in the boat, too. They repented and turned from their ways when destruction was removed from their path. They were allowed to live, which caused them to believe. Same thing with Jonah and the whale. With Nineveh, they believed and repented first, and then were allowed to live. Jonah was this way, as well. Jonah should relate to both the men in the boat and to the Ninevites. The boat crew didn't deserve destruction, though. The storm might've just been to show Jonah that God was angry and make Jonah feel guilty. I'm not sure the crew were ever in any danger. Still, from their point of view, God spared them certain death. Points for God!

One thing I noticed was that, in the fish, Jonah referred to the belly of Sheol (Jon 2.2) and the book mentioned the belly of the fish (Jon 1.17). It's possible that the fish symbolized Sheol, and that Jonah's repentance symbolizes our repentance that saves us from hell. Isn't that cool? Another little tidbit that I picked up, which seems to be the focus of most sermons about Jonah, is that you can't hide from God. You can't run from His presence. Most people only see that message, though. I believe that studying it reveals a lot more about this story, just as it would with any part of the Bible.

As far as the plant goes—it seems like it's supposed to be parallel to Nineveh (Jon 4.10-11), but that doesn't make a lot of sense because God destroyed the plant but not the city. Also, God talked about Jonah having pity on the plant and Himself having pity on Nineveh (Jon 4.10-11). Maybe it's a symbol that we're all headed for destruction unless we repent and God's mercy gets involved. I hadn't thought of that before now. The plant had something to do with compassion, pity, and mercy. God applied all three to Nineveh and to Jonah in the whale, but by destroying the plant, He took it away from Jonah, I assume because of his attitude.

I think the message of Jonah as a prophet is that destruction will befall you if you do not repent and follow God. God will show you mercy if you do. However, God holds His people to a higher standard than others, and He shows mercy to anyone who asks—whether they were a follower before repentance or not. Jonah knew better than to cross God, but the people of Nineveh didn't know any better. God viewed them as naïve, and He held Jonah to a higher standard because Jonah wasn't naïve.

The message of the book is the value of human life to God. God loves everybody the same. The Ninevites were “entitled” to mercy just as much as

Jonah was. No one life is more valuable than another. Especially for prophets and pastors and other people called by God, it is important to know that God loves the Muslim just as much as the Christian, just as much as He values the criminal and the politician. God will extend mercy to anybody, but he holds Christians to a higher standard than other people.

#### Works Cited

*Spiritual Warfare Bible*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2012. Print.