

Book of Jonah

Lesson 4

God is not only attentive to His own people; He is also concerned for the Gentiles. In this Old Testament book, the Ninevites represent the Gentiles and Jonah represents God's own.

After experiencing severe chastisement (the Lord disciplines those He loves), Jonah finally accepts his assignment and goes to preach against the wicked city of Nineveh. The Ninevites believe Jonah's warning of impending destruction. All of them, from the greatest to the least, repent of their violence and humble themselves by wearing sackcloth. Even the king takes off his royal robes, puts on sackcloth and sits down in the dust. Then he issues this royal proclamation:

“By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and turn from their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we will not perish” (Jonah 3:6-9).

Jesus referred to the Ninevites when speaking to the sceptics of His day who were asking for a sign that He was the promised Messiah. He told them that no sign would be given except that of the prophet Jonah: “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” (Matthew 12:40). Jesus went on to say that the Gentile Ninevites would condemn His generation at the judgment because they repented at

the preaching of Jonah, whereas His generation was not repenting at the preaching of One greater than Jonah (Matthew 12:41).

Our present generation also has need to repent of its violence and wickedness and to call upon God's mercy. Who knows? Perhaps God may yet relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that this people will not perish.

As you prepare to study, take a moment to thank God for His mercy to you and to ask Him for courage to proclaim His mercy and love to a world sorely in need of repentance and reconciliation to Him.

The Sovereignty of God and Our Free Will

In the concluding chapter of the Book of Jonah, we will touch upon the tension between the sovereignty of God and our free will. It is only possible to scratch the surface of these two theological truths, but the book of Jonah does offer some interesting insights into them.

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1. Review Jonah 1:1-3 and Jonah 3:1-3.
 - A. Once again, compare Jonah's two responses to the word of God. What do these responses suggest to you regarding the free human will?

B. Review Jonah 3:4-10.

(1) In verse four, Jonah proclaims as instructed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” The next we read is that “the Ninevites believed God.” Then they fasted and repented of their evil ways. What do these verses suggest is the interplay between God’s sovereignty and our prerogative to make decisions?

(2) From verse ten, how does God in His sovereignty respond to the Ninevites?

C. If Jonah had obeyed the Lord the first time, do you think the Ninevites would have responded in the same way they did after Jonah’s experience with the fish? Why or why not?

- D. Consider the following and then comment on how you see the sovereignty of God working simultaneously with freedom of choice: God's initial command, Jonah's disobedience, his attempted flight from God, the storm, the sailors, the drawing of lots, the futile attempt to row back to land, Jonah's testimony, his being thrown overboard, his being swallowed by a fish, the calming of the sea, the increased terror of the sailors, Jonah's cry for deliverance, the fish vomiting Jonah onto dry land as the means of God's deliverance for Jonah from certain death, Jonah's obedience to the renewed command of God, how the Ninevites responded to God, and how God responded to them.

God's Compassion and Jonah's Anger

2. Read Jonah 4:1-4.

A. From Jonah 4:1-2, why is Jonah so displeased and angry?

B. From Jonah 4:3:

(1) What does Jonah request of the Lord?

(2) Does this appeal seem unusual to you?

(3) Why or why not?

C. From Jonah 4:4, what is the Lord's answer to Jonah?

D. Considering Jonah's own deliverance

(1) Is his anger justified?

(2) Why or why not?

3. Refer to a dictionary or Bible dictionary to define “anger.”

4. What do the following verses say about

A. God’s anger

(1) Exodus 34:5-7

(2) Joshua 23:16

(3) Judges 2:10-13

(4) Psalm 103:8-11

(5) Hebrews 3:7-12

B. Human anger

(1) Ecclesiastes 7:9

(2) Ephesians 4:26-27

(3) James 1:19-20

C. What are the differences between righteous and sinful anger?

D. When is it permissible for people to be angry?

5. Read Jonah 4:5-8. Jonah is grateful for his own miraculous deliverance, but he is less than sympathetic to the plight of the Ninevites.

A. From verse five, what does Jonah decide to do?

B. From verse six, how does God demonstrate His consideration for Jonah's comfort?

C. Read verses seven and eight and Job 1:8-22. Compare the responses of Jonah and Job to adversity.

6. Read Jonah 4:9-11.

A. Does Jonah have just cause to be angry about the vine?
Please explain.

B. Considering Jonah's delayed repentance, does he have good reason to be angry about the repentance of the Ninevites?
Please explain.

- C. Considering God's merciful deliverance, does Jonah have a right to be angry with God for showing compassion and mercy to the Ninevites? Please explain.

7. Read Jonah 4:10-11.

- A. What might have been a righteous response from Jonah to God's statement recorded in these verses?

- B. Refer to Isaiah 6:1-8 and Matthew 28:18-20. What is to be our response to God's concern for the spiritually lost?

8. Read Matthew 5:43-48 and Luke 6:27-36. What is to be the response of God's people to those who are unbelieving, ungrateful, disobedient and/or unkind?

