

## **JONAH DISOBEYS THE LORD**

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*Lessons: Jonah 1 and 2*

You remember that after the days of the great and wise King Solomon the powerful kingdom that he had built up was divided. The northern part of the land called Israel was ruled by a separate king who had his capital in the city of Samaria. The southern part was ruled by another line of kings having their capital at Jerusalem. This southern kingdom was called Judah. And from this time on the kings that ruled these two kingdoms became more and more wicked, turning away from the worship of the Lord and setting up idols, and breaking many of the ancient laws of Moses. Because of this the Lord could no longer lead the Israelites by means of the kings because they would not hearken to Him. So it came to pass that He raised up Prophets who were upright and God-fearing men to whom He might appear and give the Word which they were to speak to the kings and to the people of the land. The writings of many of these prophets have been preserved as part of the Word of the Lord, and we find them at the end of the Old Testament.

About a hundred and fifty years after the division of the kingdom, in the reign of Jeroboam II, King of Israel, there arose a Prophet named Jonah. He was born in the city of Gath-Hepher, in the tribe of Zebulun, and was the son of Amittai. One day the Lord appeared to him and told him to go far away from his own country and prophesy in the streets of Nineveh, the great city of the kings of Assyria. He had several times before prophesied to the King of Israel, and had been faithful to the Lord, and obeyed His voice in all that He told him to do. But never before had a prophet of Israel prophesied outside of his own country. It was an entirely new thing that the Lord asked him to do. He did not want to prophesy in the streets of Nineveh. The Assyrians were bitter enemies of his people. They were wicked idolaters who knew not the Lord God. He feared that if he went to Nineveh and prophesied, as the Lord commanded him, that the Assyrians would be given power to conquer his own people, and that then the Lord would forsake Israel and become the God of the Assyrians.

Thus reasoning within himself he was determined to disobey the Lord's command; and instead of going to Nineveh he went in the opposite direction and took ship to cross the sea to the far distant city of Tarshish, hoping that thus he might flee from the face of the Lord and escape doing that which had been asked of him. But of course he could not escape from the Lord. The Lord saw him all the time and knew all that he did. And the Lord was angry because Jonah had refused to obey the Word which He had given him. Therefore He sent a great storm to destroy the ship in which Jonah had set sail. The wind

## Family Talk

rose high and mighty waves tossed the frail bark this way and that, threatening to dash it against the rocks and send it to the bottom of the sea. The men who sailed the ship were sore afraid. They were idolaters, and each one fell upon his knees and began to pray to his god to save them. But their gods were made of wood and stone and had no power; and at the Lord's command the winds and the waves rose still higher. Jonah was asleep in the bottom of the ship and knew nothing of the storm that raged until one of the crew found him there and awakened him, calling on him to pray to his God for deliverance lest they all perish.

Now they knew there was some reason why this great storm should have come upon them. They knew that someone among them had sinned against God and this great calamity had been sent to punish him. So they cast lots to find out who it was among their number that was the cause of all this trouble and danger. The lot fell upon Jonah. When they asked him what he had done, he told them that he was a Hebrew, that his God was Jehovah, and that he fled from His face because he had been commanded to prophesy among the enemies of his own country. Then they were sore afraid for they had heard of all the wonders and the great power of Jehovah, and they trembled at the thought of the destruction which threatened them. So they asked Jonah what they might do to allay the anger of Jehovah, and he told them to take him up and cast him into the sea. They did not like to do this but when they saw that they could not row against that storm, and that the ship was about to be broken to pieces by the great storm they said among themselves that it was better that one should die rather than for all to perish. So they cast Jonah into the sea. And as soon as they had done so the wind abated, the waves were quieted, and they continued on their journey in peace.

But the Lord had not forsaken Jonah. He had prepared a great fish who swallowed Jonah that his life might be preserved. The Lord did not wish to slay Jonah but only to punish him for his disobedience; and for three days He kept him alive in the belly of the great fish. Jonah repented of what he had done and prayed to the Lord out of the midst of the fish, and the Lord commanded the fish to throw Jonah up upon the sands of the seashore that his life might be saved.

Now the Lord did this in order that He might teach Jonah to obey the Word of the Lord—even if that Word commanded him to do something which he did not want to do. And as it was with Jonah so it is with us. We seldom want to do those things that are best for us. And unless we learn always to obey the Lord in all that He commands—no matter how strange or how impossible it may appear to us—He cannot lead us to heaven. For every time we do what we think is best and refuse to do what the Lord tells us to do, we draw nearer to hell. If we are to be saved we must be punished, and so be led back to the right way.