Jonah Disobeys the Lord
Jonah 1:1-3

Background

Doctrinal Points

1. God calls His people to go to Nineveh.

2. God's people disobey when they flee to Tarshish.

Practical Application

1. You can always find a ship going to Tarshish.

Questions

1. Is the book of Jonah just a big fish story?

2. Why didn't Jonah want to go to Nineveh?

3. Why did God call Jonah to go to Nineveh?

4. How did Jonah respond when the Lord commissioned him to go to Nineveh?

5. Why do some critics of the book of Jonah have a difficult time accepting the historicity of this account?

6. What leads us to believe that the account of Jonah is real history?

Answers

1. No. It is the true account of a prophet of God who was called to go and preach to the city of Nineveh, the capitol of the ancient Assyrian Empire.

2. To preach out against the wickedness of Nineveh.

3. Because the Assyrians were pagans, the enemies of Israel, and Jonah did not want mercy shown to them.

4. He tried to flee from the Lord by going in the opposite direction, taking a ship to Tarshish.

5. Probably because of the miracle of Jonah's special transport in the stomach of a fish, they conclude that at best it is an Old Testament parable.

6. Jonah was the son of Amittai, a real person. See Jonah 1:1 and 2 Kings 14:25. The Lord Jesus believed that the account of Jonah was real history. See Matthew 12:38-40 and Luke 11:29-30.

Discuss / Consider

1. God called Jonah to go to Nineveh to preach against the wickedness of that great city. Jonah knew that God was gracious and might spare Nineveh if the people repented. He wanted to see them judged rather than see God's mercy shown to them. Ninevehs are the places and people we would like to see undergo the judgment of God. Are you fleeing from a Nineveh?

2. Jonah tried to flee from God by going in the opposite direction. He was running away in disobedience to God's call to go to Nineveh. Have you ever bought a ticket to Tarshish, trying to put distance between yourself and a situation the Lord wants you to deal with?

Challenge

1. Turn in your ticket to Tarshish. Face your Nineveh.

Jonah is Responsible for the Great Storm at Sea
Jonah 1:4-9

Background

Doctrinal Points

1. God is sovereign over all nature.

2. God is sovereign over circumstances.

Practical Application

1. You cannot escape from God.

Questions

1. Does God love only the Jewish people? Find the answer in the book of Jonah.

2. What is the theme of the book of Jonah?

3. How is the account of Jonah a rebuke to the nation of Israel?

4. God designed a great wind, a mighty tempest on the sea. Why did God design this storm?

5. Trace Jonah's downward path of disobedience.

6. Jonah was fast asleep. What is the spiritual picture here?

7. Who were the unbelievers who rebuked Jonah?

Answers

1. God loves all people, both Jews and Gentiles. Jonah was commissioned by God to go and preach to Nineveh, a Gentile nation.

2. “God’s Mercy to All Mankind”

3. The pagan Assyrians repented when Jonah preached.

4. To turn Jonah around.

5. He went down to Joppa (1:3); down into the ship (1:3); down into the lowest part of the ship (1:5); and he laid down (1:5). The path of disobedience away from fellowship with the Lord is always down.

6. It is a picture of a disobedient, runaway Christian. When Christians disobey and turn away from the Lord, they become indifferent, unconcerned and hard-hearted to the perishing world around them.

7. The captain (1:6) and the sailors (1:8).

Discuss / Consider

1. God’s sovereignty over nature was shown in the storm. The storm was designed and controlled by God to turn Jonah around. All the while, Jonah had the answer. We, too, know the One who allows storms and can bring peace in the midst of troubled waters. Jonah was rebuked by an unbeliever for not sharing his God. Have you ever been rebuked by an unbeliever for not sharing the gospel?

2. God is in complete control over every circumstance. Nothing happens just by chance. God works all things after the counsel of His will. See Ephesians 1:11 and Romans 8:28. In Jonah’s case, he finally gave his testimony to the sovereign God. His problem was not of unbelief, but of attitude. God had to change Jonah’s attitude concerning grace toward sinners. Is your attitude in line with God’s grace toward all mankind?

Challenge

1. Jonah tried to run away from God, but he never made it. You may try to run away and hide from God, but He will turn you around. Be ready for the turn-around.

The Response of the Sailors to Jonah's Testimony
Jonah 1:10-14

Background

Doctrinal Points

1. A believer's disobedience results in disruption for unbelievers.

2. A believer's disobedience results in rebuke from unbelievers.

Practical Application

1. Would you rather die than change?

Questions

1. Why did Jonah run the other way when God called him to go to Nineveh?

2. What disrupted Jonah's plans to run from God?

3. Jonah finally gave his testimony to the mariners in the midst of the storm. What was Jonah's testimony?

4. Trace the mariners' response to the storm.

5. What was the mariners' response to Jonah's testimony?

6. Is orthodoxy the same as with spirituality?

Answers

1. Jonah did not want God to show mercy to wicked Nineveh.

2. God sent out a great storm.

3. “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land” Jonah 1:9.

4. They were afraid, they cried out to their gods, they threw cargo into the sea to lighten the load (1:5); they sought the cause of the storm (1:7-8); they were exceedingly afraid (1:10); they sought an answer to calm the storm (1:11); they rowed hard to get to shore (1:13).

5. They cried out to the Lord (1:14); they asked for God’s mercy in throwing Jonah overboard (1:14-15); they feared the Lord exceedingly, offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows (1:16).

6. No. Jonah was right in his theology, but he was not righteous in his life.

Discuss / Consider

1. Because of Jonah’s disobedience to the Lord, the lives of the mariners were disrupted. The point? No one can sin in a vacuum. When a believer disobeys the Lord, he affects not only his personal relationship with the Lord, but other people as well. Consider this when you are tempted to disobey the Lord. How would your disobedience affect others?

2. The captain and the sailors rebuked Jonah for failing to share his Lord God, the controller of the storms of life. Fortunately, just as God used Jonah’s testimony, He can use the testimony of believers in spite of their disobedience. What a God of grace! Can you think of a time when you were a testimony to God without trying?

Challenge

1. Would you rather die than change? Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh. He chose the sea instead. Would you be willing to change your lifestyle to become a more effective witness? How great is your concern for the Ninevites in your life?

Jonah is Swallowed by the Great Fish
Jonah 1:15-17

Background

Doctrinal Points

1. Jonah is a type or picture of Christ.

2. Jonah is a type or picture of Israel.

Practical Application

1. You are never too old to disobey.

Questions

1. List the three miracles found in this passage.

2. How does this portion of Scripture show God's sovereignty over nature?

3. Read Matthew 8:23-27 and Mark 4:35-41. List some common points between these passages and Jonah 1:4-15.

4. What is the application today for Question #3?

5. Was the big fish a whale?

6. Define the word "type."

Answers

1. - Jonah is swallowed alive by a big fish and doesn't die.
   - Jonah is thrown into the sea in the midst of a catastrophic storm and the sea becomes calm.
   - The men feared the Lord, offered a sacrifice and took vows (true conversion is a miracle, a work of God).

2. God is in complete control of the wind, the sea, and the fish of the sea.

3. The occupants of the boats were fearful because of lack of faith. The Lord controlled the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.

4. People are fearful because of lack of faith. The Lord has sovereign control over the storms of life, and He can calm the storms with His words, "Peace, be still."

5. It could have been, or it could have been another large sea creature. It could have been a whale shark, or perhaps it was a genetically altered large fish, perfectly prepared by the Lord for Jonah ("The Lord prepared a great fish..." Jonah 1:17).

6. "Type" by definition is an Old Testament person, place, event or other item which pictures or illustrates a New Testament truth.

Discuss / Consider

1. Jonah is a type or picture of Christ. As Jonah was preserved for three days and three nights, he pictures Christ in His death and resurrection. The Lord Himself confirmed this (see Matthew 12:40). Isaac was also a type of Christ. Review Hebrews 11:17-19 and consider how he was a type of Christ in his death and resurrection.
2. Review Doctrinal Point #2. Discuss the ten parallels between Jonah and Israel. What a great picture of God's dealing with the Jewish nation.

Challenge

1. In 2 Kings 14, we saw that Jonah prophesied in the early days of King Jeroboam II. Those prophecies were already fulfilled by the time the book of Jonah was written when Jonah was an older and mature prophet. However, even in his "maturity," he was a disobedient prophet. Is it possible that this fits you? Even in "maturity," are you disobedient? We are all vulnerable. Remember the story of Jonah.

Jonah's Prayer from the Stomach of the Great Fish
Jonah 2

Background

Doctrinal Points

1. God uses discipline to turn the believer away from disobedience.

2. God uses discipline to turn the believer back to Scripture.

Practical Application

1. Would you be able to quote Scripture from inside a fish?

Questions

1. Explain the “three days and three nights” phrase.

2. How did Jonah get out of the big fish?

3. Jonah was a disobedient prophet with a bad attitude. How was he turned around?

4. Was Jonah aware of the fact that God was disciplining him?

5. Did Joseph’s brothers know that God was disciplining him?

6. Paraphrase “out of the belly of Sheol” Jonah 2:2.

7. What is meant by repentance?

Answers

1. This is a Hebrew expression or idiom. The phrase “day and night” can refer to any part of the day or night. It is the same expression the Lord used of His time in the grave between death and resurrection. See Matthew 12:40 and Luke 24:46.

2. The Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

3. God used discipline to turn Jonah away from disobedience.

4. Yes. See Jonah 2:3.

5. Yes. See Genesis 42:21.

6. “Out of the depths” or “from death’s door”

7. Repentance is more than just being sorry for your sins: it is a change in direction, away from disobedience and back to the Lord.

Discuss / Consider

1. God uses discipline to turn the believer away from disobedience. God used discipline to turn Jonah away from disobedience and back to Himself. Have you sensed the Lord using discipline in your life to bring you back to Himself?

2. God uses discipline to turn the believer back to Scripture. Most of Jonah’s prayer is a series of Scripture quotations. His prayer is not a plea for deliverance, but rather a psalm of praise and thanksgiving. God’s discipline does not result in bitterness, but in the fruit of righteousness. Have you had the experience of turning toward Scripture under God’s hand of discipline?

Challenge

1. It is obvious that Jonah knew a lot of Scripture by heart. The Holy Spirit brought Scripture to Jonah’s mind to use as a means of restoration. Could the Lord bring Scripture to your mind to restore you? Be sure that you have His word hidden in your heart.

The Lord Recommissions Jonah to Go to Nineveh
Jonah 3:1-4

Background

Doctrinal Points

1. God graciously recommissions His erring servants.

2. God graciously re-engages His erring creatures.

Practical Application

1. You can know the Lord as the God of the second chance.

Questions

1. When God called him, Jonah went in the other direction. God called him a second time, “Arise, go...” How did Jonah respond this time?

2. Describe the physical grandeur of the ancient city of Nineveh.

3. Is it because of this grandeur and power that God called the city great?

4. “Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three day’s walk.” Does this mean that it would have taken Jonah three days
to walk across or around the ancient city of Nineveh?

5. Nineveh needed grace to be saved. What did Jonah need?

6. Is the Book of Jonah a message of judgment or of grace?

Answers

1. Jonah arose and went according to the word of the Lord.

2. The buried ruins of ancient Nineveh have been excavated in modern Iraq. Magnificent buildings and sculptures have been found in the ruins. Two massive walls surrounded the city. The huge inner wall was 100' high and 50' wide, wide enough for three chariots to ride abreast.

3. No. God called Nineveh great because of the great number of people who lived there. It is estimated that at least 500,000 people lived in the city itself. He looked at the number of people who needed to be saved.

4. No. The point is that there were so many people that it would have taken Jonah a three-day journey to preach to all of the people.

5. Jonah needed grace to serve.

6. It is a message of grace. God is not willing that any should perish (See 2 Peter 3:9.)

Discuss / Consider

1. God loves to recommission His servants when they are restored. He did this with Jonah. He did this with Peter, and He did this with John Mark. Has He done this with you?

2. Sin broke the relationship and communion between God and man. From the moment of the fall, the human race has been alienated from God. But God graciously re-engages His erring creatures because He still loves them. Review how God has reached out, seeking to re-engage His creatures through the ages.

Challenge

1. You can know the Lord as the God of second chance. Have you failed the Lord in some way? God is a God of second-time grace. Are you a Jonah? A Peter? A John Mark? God has not written you off.

Nineveh Repents at the Preaching of Jonah
Jonah 3:5-10

Background

Doctrinal Points

1. When people believe God, they turn from their wicked ways.

2. When people turn from their wicked ways, God withholds His judgment.

Practical Application

1. You'd be surprised who might listen to you.

Questions

1. What happened when Jonah preached to Nineveh?

2. How does this relate to Matthew 12:40 and Luke 24:46?

3. List the four factors that God used to soften up the people of Nineveh to receive Jonah's message.

4. Explain the difference between a revival and a spiritual awakening.

5. Was this true conversion or only a temporary turning way from evil?

6. Did Jesus believe it was true conversion?

Answers

1. The entire population of the city, from the king down, repented.

2. It was confirmation by the Lord Jesus that the preaching of Jonah was one of the great events in all the history of the New Testament.

3. - The economy was down and God allows hard times to soften up hard-hearted people.
   - Devastating plagues had swept through Nineveh.
   - An eclipse occurred, considered by the ancients as an agent of divine intervention and divine wrath.
   - The appearance of Jonah himself after having been in the fish.

4. A revival is for people who are already believers, but need to be revived (like those who are backslidden, apathetic and lukewarm). A spiritual awakening, on the other hand, refers to unbelievers who become converted. They were spiritually dead, but have been awakened from the dead through the preaching of the word of God.

5. It was a true conversion that this generation did believe in the one true God, and they repented and turned from their wicked ways. See Jonah 3:5.

6. Yes. See Matthew 12:41.

Discuss / Consider

1. When people believe God, they turn from their wicked ways. The spiritual awakening in Jonah's day was unprecedented in history. As many as 600,000 people were converted. Could a spiritual awakening happen today? Discuss.

2. When people turn from their wicked ways, realizing and responding to the grace of God, He relents and withholds judgment. This happened to Nineveh. Could it happen in our country today?

Challenge

1. Jonah might have thought that none of the Ninevites would listen to his message. They were pagan Assyrians, known in the ancient world for their cruel and wicked ways. Do you discount some people because they are wicked and seem to be indifferent to the gospel? Continue in your witness, because it could mean salvation for a seemingly hard-hearted person.

Jonah is Angry that Nineveh Didn't Receive Judgment
Jonah 4:1-4

Background

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers may be obedient but not joyful.

2. Believers may be orthodox but not merciful.

Practical Application

1. Do you have a good reason to be angry?

Questions

1. In Jonah chapters three and four, two second chances were given. Who was offered these second chances and why?

2. What was Jonah's attitude when he said the words of Jonah 4:2?

3. What was God's attitude toward Nineveh?

4. What was the angels' attitude toward the great awakening in Nineveh?

5. Although Jonah came to repentance and was back in fellowship with the Lord, and although he obeyed when he was recommissioned, there was something lacking. What was it?

Answers

1. In Chapter 3, God gave Jonah a second chance. In chapter 4, Jonah gave God a second chance, hoping that he would still judge Nineveh.

2. It was not in an attitude of thanks and praise, but of displeasure and anger.

3. God was long-suffering, not willing that any should perish (see 1 Peter 3:9).

4. There was joy in the presence of the angels because the Ninevites repented. See Luke 15:10.

5. Jonah became an obedient prophet, but not a joyful prophet. Why? Because he did not have the mind of the Lord. Jonah's idea of what God should and should not do, were not in accord with what God was actually doing. Jonah was obedient, but not joyful about it.

Discuss / Consider

1. Jonah's ideas and God's ideas did not line up. Who was wrong? Jonah finally came to the place of obedience, but not joyfully. Jonah was like a pouting child having a temper tantrum because he didn't like what God was doing. Have you ever been obedient but not joyfully? Remember how God dealt with Jonah. God will deal with His joyless children. If there's a conflict in your mind right now, settle it with God's word, and let the joy of your salvation be evident in your life.

2. Jonah was orthodox in his theology, but he was self-centered. What about your attitude? God loves all sinners. Do you love all sinners? When we step outside our comfort zone, we can know that God has put a Nineveh in our way. What will you do with your Nineveh?

Challenge

1. "The Lord asked Jonah, 'Is it right for you to be angry?'" Jonah 4:4. Is God asking you that question right now? What is your answer?

The Lord Uses Object Lessons to Teach Jonah
Jonah 4:5-8

Background

Doctrinal Points

1. All of life's comforts are under God's control.

2. All of life's circumstances are under God's control.

Practical Application

1. Are you an emotional yo-yo?

Questions

1. Why do the Assyrian Christians hold a three-day fast every year during the month of February?

2. Was Jonah thankful and happy that the entire city of Nineveh repented when he preached?

3. How did Jonah answer the Lord when asked if it was right for him to be angry?

4. Why did Jonah build a shelter for himself outside the city?

5. God's message to Nineveh through His servant Jonah was, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Did God overthrow Nineveh after the forty days?

6. List objects that God used to teach Jonah some important lessons.

Answers

1. To commemorate the great spiritual awakening that took place in Nineveh according to the Book of Jonah.

2. No. He was angry because the Assyrians were the enemies of Israel, and Jonah did not want mercy shown to these cruel and pagan people.

3. He didn't answer him. He just stomped out of the city.

4. He was giving God another chance, so to speak, to send judgment on Nineveh.

5. No, because the people had truly repented and had turned from their wicked ways. God withheld His judgment of the entire Assyrian Empire for approximately 150 more years.

6. God used a plant, a worm and a vehement east wind.

Discuss / Consider

1. Jonah was happy for the comfort that God gave to him, the shade of the plant. Perhaps Jonah took this comfort as a sign of God's approval of his attitude and actions, but nothing could be further from the truth. Have you ever taken God's blessing as a sign of His approval? God provides the comforts, the shade plants along the way, but remember they are all under His control. When the comforts come, thank the Lord, but also ask Him if there's a lesson to learn.

2. The comforting shade plant was only good for one day because God had prepared a little worm to attack the plant. Then He prepared a hot scorching wind that sapped Jonah's strength. God was sovereign over all the circumstances. Contrast Jonah's response to Job's response when their comforts were taken away. See Job 1:21. Is there a little worm eating away at your comfort right now? Maybe there's a strong wind of opposition sapping your strength and leaving you faint. Is the Lord speaking to you? What is your response? Listen, hear, and pray!

Challenge

1. Jonah was an emotional yo-yo because his emotions were governed by outward circumstances and not by his faith. Are you an emotional yo-yo? Do you yo-yo with outward circumstances? When the devastating storms of life come in, do you, like Jonah, wish you were dead? Recognize that God is sovereign and in control of the worms and the winds, and that He is working all things for your good.

The Lessons that Jonah Needed to Learn
Jonah 4:9-11

Background

Doctrinal Points

1. God is more concerned about people than plants.

2. God is more concerned about compassion than condemnation.

Practical Application

1. Let God have the last word.

Questions

1. How does the Book of Jonah end?

2. How does Jonah answer God's last question?

3. Jonah wrote this book as a rebuke to Israel. Explain.

4. As a prophet, did Jonah become increasingly popular in his old age?

5. Did Jonah continue to be the proud, selfish, narrow-minded and short-sighted prophet who had fled to Tarshish?

6. How did the Lord deal with Jonah in these last verses?

Answers

1. Abruptly, with a question from God to Jonah.

2. Probably with a “Yes, Lord, it is right that you should pity Nineveh.”

3. Israel was not the light to the Gentiles that she was supposed to be.

4. Not likely, because his book was a rebuke to the nation of Israel. Earlier, he had prophesied prosperity, which had come true.

5. No. Now he was willing to speak out against Israel. Jonah had changed and had come to appreciate the breadth of God’s mercy.

6. God in His grace reasons with Jonah. He points out that Jonah is more concerned with the plant than with the perishing people.

Discuss / Consider

1. Jonah was more concerned with a plant than with perishing people. God is more concerned with people, and He wants His servants show this same concern. Do you cry and pout when the Lord chooses to take away some of your comforts? Do you cry for the lost people around you?

2. Read Ezekiel 33:11 and 2 Peter 3:9. God is more concerned about compassion than condemnation. Jonah reversed this concern, and had to learn this lesson as God graciously disciplined him. Have you learned this lesson? Is there a Nineveh that God wants you to go to? Do you have a heart of compassion for the lost?

Challenge

1. Jonah finally let God have the last word. He no longer questioned God’s ways. Have you come to the place where you are no longer questioning God’s ways? Does God have the last word in your life?