

RELIGION

Insight on the Word: Jonah on the Rebound. Lessons on Acceptance

BY MICHAEL LINDSEY
Dean of North Portland Bible College

The Bible text for our Sunday School classes this Sunday will be Jonah 3:1-5; 3:10-4:4,10,11. I suggest we just read and meditate on all of Jonah 3 and 4, and get the whole impact of the message of the Scripture.

This week we study "the rest of the story" of Jonah, following his rescue from the belly of the great fish (1:17; 2:10). Perhaps the greater miracle happened when Jonah did obey the command of the Lord, and went out to preach against Nineveh.

Where and what was the city of Nineveh? Nineveh was one of the greatest cities of the ancient Near East, lying on the Tigris River in the land of Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq). It was one of the major accomplishments of Nimrod, the great Cushite (Hamitic) prince of the early years following the Flood (Gen 11:8-12). By the time of Jonah, the city of Nineveh had become independent of Babylon and was laying the foundation for an awesome military state. The Assyrian Empire's heyday was still over a hundred years ahead, but Nineveh was already a magnificent symbol of the power of humanity to create its own destiny.

Then why didn't Jonah just go and preach against it as he was told, the first time? Racial prejudice. That's the simplest answer. But it was more than that, I think. Israel, in spite of all its failures, was still the people of Yahweh (the Lord). He had rescued them from slavery in Egypt and brought them into the promised land. The people of Israel and Judah thought they were superior because of their relationship to the Cre-

ator God. Even the true prophets of Israel, like Jonah, suffered from this mistaken sense of pride.

God had set apart the nation of Israel for a purpose. As He told their ancestor Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:2-3). It wasn't enough that Israel grow into a great kingdom under the rule of the Lord's Anointed King (David, and someday Christ Jesus), but that they also share the blessing of knowing the Creator to all peoples, everywhere on the earth.

I think Jonah knew that, but he didn't want to share the blessing with others, outside Israel. He foolishly tried to outrun the Lord, and ironically he ended up sharing the blessing of the knowledge of God with those pagan sailors, and they worshipped the true God. So, given a second chance, he decided he had better "just do it," and preach against the city of Nineveh.

Why did the Lord want His prophet to warn the people of Nineveh? That's the kind of God He is. He is a "gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil" (Jonah 4:2). Don't let anyone tell you that the God of the Old Testament was purely a wrathful God of a small tribal community in Palestine. He is a holy God, and ready to judge those who break His righteous commands. But He is a God of great love as well, and wants to give all people adequate opportunity to turn from their evil ways, and obey Him and worship Him. In this sense God is even ready to "repent" of doing "evil" to

people—changing His mind about executing the judgment He announced through His prophets.

So what happened? Did the people of Nineveh listen? Jonah went to Nineveh and preached all around it, that God was going to destroy the city in 40 days. (Notice that the people of Nineveh never referred to God as "the Lord." They knew Him only by Jonah's preaching, and His place as their Creator.)

They listened and they responded—like their lives depended on it! Perhaps they had heard about the wondrous storm and the Lord's amazing rescue of Jonah with the great fish. In any case, the whole city, from the king to the people on the street, admitted their evil and believed God. They showed this by fasting (going without food as a sign of humility) and putting on sackcloth (like burlap bag material). God saw their works, and their hearts, and changed his mind about the destruction.

Isn't there any record of this among the Assyrians? We haven't found any record yet. But that's not too surprising, given the piecemeal nature of much archeological work. We do know that this change was not permanent; in later days the Assyrians were still worshipping the old idols and the same heavenly bodies as before. And I doubt later historians of Nineveh would want to recall the powerful works of an Israelite God. So maybe there's no other record to be found.

Shouldn't Jonah have felt some sense of accomplishment? I would think so—look at all the people who had turned from idols to serve the true and living God. This was even better

than the "revival" on the ship!

But instead, Jonah got depressed, angry, and fit to die. He really wanted to see the sinners get their due! And now instead, the Lord was showing mercy on them, and they were going to live through it.

Notice that Jonah had a wonderful opportunity here to teach the people of Nineveh about the Lord, while they were receptive. He could have really been a blessing to them, and they in term could have spread the good news of the Lord to other people. That really was God's plan, you know. (See Joshua 2:8-12; Isaiah 49:1-7 and many other Old Testament texts.)

So what was left for Jonah to do? He went out on the east side of the city, probably on a mountainside overlooking the city. And there he made himself a little shelter, and sat down to see what the Lord would do. What a waste of time!

But the Lord patiently taught Jonah a lesson about human self-centered behavior, and about prejudice. He "prepared" a "gourd," (4:6) a fast-growing vine, which grew up overnight and provided Jonah with much better shade than he'd had before. This vine was foreign to him, but it treated him good, so Jonah was "exceedingly glad" for it.

But the next day, God "prepared" a worm to eat the roots of the vine, so it dried up. He also "prepared" a strong east wind, which added to Jonah's misery. By midday the man was ready to die (again). And the Lord was able to speak to Jonah in the style of a parable.

You see, by Jonah's standards, that vine in the desert was wonderful and valuable. But by God's eternal values,

that vine was only a passing thing; in the desert heat it probably would have only lasted a few weeks at best.

Yet by Jonah's standards, the people of Nineveh had no real value, and he still hoped (I believe) that the Lord would destroy them. By God's value system, every person has immeasurable worth, and there were 120,000 people in that city! Morally speaking, they were as ignorant as babies; shouldn't God have cared about them, and their destiny?

And even by Jonah's standards, weren't the cattle worth something? (4:11) This is subtle humor from the Lord: when a person is prejudiced against any group of people, he/she will always, in some ways, treat them like animals—not as intelligent, not as dignified, not as lovable, as one's own group.

Did Jonah ever come around to God's point of view? I really think he did. After all, he's the most likely author of this little book, and I don't think he could have so clearly pointed out his own faults, if he hadn't come to admit them.

The real question for us is this: are we ever guilty of treating people like things, or valuing things higher than people? Nearly all of us know first-hand the sting of prejudice, and yet it's very easy for us to mistreat those around us. No wonder so many people come to our church meetings, and revivals, looking for hope and salvation—and so many go away with heavy hearts, feeling rejected and used. Let's all resolve today, to live lives of love and acceptance of our fellow human beings, and to share the joy of Jesus Christ with every one, everywhere.

Charles Luebbert Joins Human Resource Strategies



Charles Luebbert, former Vice President of Personnel for Freightliner corporation in Portland, Oregon, has recently been named an Associate with Human Resource Strategies, Inc. Luebbert specializes in assisting companies with long-term personnel planning, placement of women and minorities in mid-to-upper-level management positions and providing confidential internal employee audits to ensure that a company is in compliance with State or Federal equal opportunity legislation.

Human Resource Strategies, Inc. is a Vancouver, Washington business consulting company providing Human Resource support to organizations in the Pacific Northwest.

Time

Through the years we've had good times as well as bad. Through time we've had a chance to grow together like a mother and daughter should.

From the time I was little girl I wanted to be just like you, courageous, strong, and all around beautiful woman. Sometimes I think what a lucky black girl I am to have a mom just like you.

Time, what is time? Is it the memories we share? Is it the old saying time flies when your having fun? What ever time is, I know I want more of it with you.

My love for you is strong, my memories of you are bookshelves, your heart is open, so take my love and store it. Let's take one day at a time, live day to day, hour for hour, you never know our time together might be cut short.

In any case I want you to know you are and will always be loved. In time we will meet again.

By: Tanisha Nicole Vann

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Michelle Lee Graduates From Harriet Tubman With 4.0



Michelle graduated from Tubman in June of this year. She will enroll at Lincoln High School in the fall.

She won a Student Achievement Award given by the Oregon Alliance of Black School Educator. She was selected on the basis of her academic achievement, demonstrated leadership and service to others.

Grocers Support Jobs For Teens

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sonable and unfair," McCoid says. "We value all of our workers and work hard to ensure their safety and comply with our understanding of the law."

The majority of fines assessed were for the operation of a cardboard baler or a meat processing machine by teens. According to the U.S. Department of Labor's interpretation, cleaning and loading constituted operating even when the power was turned off or the machines were disassembled.

The Association of Oregon Food Industries is the trade association representing the food distribution industry in Oregon. Oregon Food Industries' 420 corporate members operate over 1,000 places of business throughout Oregon.

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