

Chapter Twenty Six – Jonah Questions God

Nineveh was a great city in Mesopotamia, but its people were very bad. One day God said to Jonah, “Go to the city of Nineveh and ask the people there to turn away from their sins. They will be punished if they do not repent.”

Jonah was afraid to do so because the people there were wicked and might harm him. Therefore, instead of going east to Nineveh, he took the opposite direction and made his way down to the sea-coast. There he found a ship about to sail to Spain so he went on board. He went down into the bottom of the ship and hid there, thinking he could escape from God’s eyes.

On the journey God sent a great storm that almost sank the ship. All those on board prayed to their gods and offered sacrifices but it was of no use. Suddenly the owner of the ship noticed that Jonah was missing. They went down to look for him and found him hiding in a corner. They brought him up on board and the owner said, “Why do you not pray to your God? We are in great danger.”

But Jonah replied, “I am the cause of this storm. I have disobeyed my God and now he is punishing me. He told me to go to Nineveh and I am running away. If I remain in the ship, you will all be drowned. Throw me into the sea and you will be safe.” After much debate, they did so at last. A big fish swallowed him and the storm ended. After three days the fish vomited him back on the shore. This time Jonah went to Nineveh and spoke God’s message to the people. “Forty days more,” he said, “and you and your city will be destroyed.” The people in Nineveh believed in the message. The king ordered his people to fast and to beg God’s pardon. God heard their prayer and spared the city.

Jonah was very angry at God’s decision. He said to God, “I knew it right from the beginning that you would not punish them. You are a loving and caring God, always patient, always kind. Those people deserve punishment but you let them go.”

God replied, “You do not have the right to be angry.”

Jonah made a shelter for himself right outside the city. He wanted to see if God would really take the wicked Nineveh back. God provided a plant for Jonah to keep him cool in the hot weather. However, the next day, God sent worms to destroy the plant. Under the hot sun, Jonah was about to faint and suffocate, and he was very upset and angry about the plant dying.

Then God said to him, “Why are you so angry about the plant dying?”

Jonah replied, “Of course I am upset. It comforted me.”

God then said to him, "It is not even your plant. You did nothing to make it grow. And you feel upset and angry that it died. Now you should know how upset I will be if the people in Nineveh are destroyed."

The people of Nineveh, who were unbelievers, were sorry for their bad lives and God spared them. But the people of the kingdom of Israel, who were all Jews, became more and more wicked. They worshipped idols and would not listen to the prophets God sent them. Without the protection of God, the kingdom was attacked and collapsed under the reign of the last king, Hoshea.

What was said about the kings of Israel could also be said about the kings of Judah. Although there were several good ones, most of the others were bad and wicked. They led the people to worship idols and to forsake God. Even in the Temple, there were altars for worshipping false gods. God sent them many prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezekiel, to bring them back, but they were treated badly by the people and some were even put to death. Not long after the fall of Israel, King Nebuchadnezzar led the Babylonian army to invade and destroy Jerusalem, and to burn the Temple which King Solomon had built. This was the end of the kingdom of Judah. The Jews were captured and exiled to Babylon for seventy years.



Jonah rests under the plant

Questions:

1. Why was Jonah afraid to go to Nineveh?
2. Imagine you were Jonah. Write a diary entry about what happened on board ship.
3. Describe God's love towards sinners.
4. Why was Jonah so angry towards the people of Nineveh?
5. What is the lesson that God tried to make Jonah understand?
6. Give ONE argument for and ONE against the carrying out of capital punishment.