

Home Group study: week beginning 7th September 2020

Jonah: Sorry, Can't Hear You

Read: Jonah 1: 1-3

Discovery

The only other historic reference we have to Jonah in the Bible is **2 Kings 14: 25**. Although King Jeroboam II of Israel (see v23) 'did evil in the sight of the Lord' through his 41-year reign God enabled him to grasp back territories of Northern Israel that had been lost to Damascus, 'in accordance with the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hepher.'

Jonah clearly had a prophetic ministry and had already proved God to be true and faithful. Yet here we see him doing exactly the opposite of what God tells him to do. God wants him to go to Nineveh to the East, so Jonah gets on a ship and heads west for Tarshish. Tarshish is believed to be Tartessus, roughly where Cadiz is today, just beyond the Strait of Gibraltar from the Mediterranean. For an Israelite what we know today as the Strait of Gibraltar would represent the western end of the known world: so he's gone far away as he could possibly get from Nineveh.

Understanding

Why might a notable prophet of God want to be so disobedient to the God whom he had already proved to be trustworthy? Tim suggested two reasons on Sunday:

- 1 He was terrified of going to Nineveh because its inhabitants were so vile that he might meet a very nasty end;
- 2 Because he didn't want God to forgive the Ninevites for their wickedness.

Who are people in this day and age that we might consider to be hostile to the Gospel in the way Jonah presumed the Ninevites would be? If God gave us a challenge to go and proclaim the gospel to those people, how would we react?

As Christians we at least try to live in ways that we know to be acceptable to God. Many practices of our modern Western society are contrary to the will and commands of God. We also believe in a God of grace and want to reflect a Gospel of Grace to those around us. Yet Jonah was commanded by God to 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.' Are we called upon to confront non-Christians about their lifestyles?

Interestingly, God is sending Jonah to preach the Jewish message to a Gentile city: we think of the message of God in the Old Testament being exclusive to the Jewish people. What does this tell us about God's character and his attitude to mankind in general? Might Jonah be perturbed at the idea of giving the Jewish message to a Gentile city, or, given the level of wickedness in Nineveh that Tim told us about on Sunday, do you think he just resents the idea of God letting them off the hook?

Application

Is God asking any of us to do anything in particular at the moment? What might he be asking us to do?

Tim mentioned the vision of a fortress having had its walls broken down by prayer and helicopters with the letter 'W' coming into rescue people. The letter 'W' is for 'Word'. Churches have been praying for the nation; the next stage is bringing God's word to people: that will mean each of us being more open to talking about the Gospel. How obedient do we feel like being to the things God is asking of us?

Sometimes we don't understand what God is doing in our lives. Might this be because what he asks us to do is just one part of a much bigger picture? What might that bigger picture be? Can anyone in the group testify to doing something prompted by God that turned out to be part of something bigger?