

Mission to the Community

Key Verse: “So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.”
—Jonah 3:5

Selected Scripture:
Jonah 1:1-3; 3:1-9

inclined to dismiss the story of Jonah’s experiences in the belly of the great fish as being merely fiction. However, we know that the great Teacher of men refers to Jonah and his experiences in the belly of this great fish, and those who believe in him have no better ground to accept the account as being true. (Matt. 12:39-41) We further know from our studies that the preparation and deliverance of Jonah from the great fish was a sign, or type, of our Lord’s own entombment and subsequent resurrection from death.

If we recall from historical accounts, Nineveh was a great city that was situated outside of the influence of the city of Jerusalem and, therefore, outside of divine favor. From the giving of the Law Covenant until three and a half years after our Lord’s death on the cross, God’s favors were exclusively confined to the Jews. God knew of the sin that was in this city, and he instructed Jonah to go there. “Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah, . . . saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.”—Jon. 1:1,2

Jonah was a bigoted Jew who was unwilling to testify to a Gentile city, and angry that God had spared it. So instead of quickly obeying the word of God, he fled from his mission. He fled from God, and boarded a ship to take him to Tarshish. The LORD “sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea.” (vs. 4) The seamen were so fearful during this storm that they confronted Jonah concerning the peril that they were in. After questioning him, they determined that he was the cause of their problems. They asked him what they should do, and he told them, “Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you.” (vs. 12) The men eventually did as Jonah had asked them to do. After three days, God delivered him out of the belly of the great fish. He had humbled himself and had prayed to God for deliverance. “I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.”—chap. 2:9

He was again commissioned by God to go to Nineveh, and this time he obeyed the word of the LORD. After entering the city, he told them that their destruction was soon to come. “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” (chap. 3:4) The king and all of the people repented from their evil ways, and did what God required them to do to be right in his sight.—vss. 5-9

Jonah typically foreshadows the nation of Israel, cast out of its own land, and a resulting burden to the Gentiles. Witnessing to them, Israel was cast out by them, but then miraculously preserved. In their distress, they will call upon the Heavenly Father, and find deliverance from all of their problems.

Jonah also represents Christ as the one sent from God, raised from the dead, bringing salvation to the Gentiles and in turn to the whole world of mankind. “They repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas [Christ] is here.”—Matt. 12:41 ■