

God's Sustaining Love

Key Verse: “Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”
—Jonah 1:17

Selected Scripture:
Jonah 1:1-17

THE BOOK OF JONAH IS unusual because prophets in the Old Testament normally were commissioned to speak to the nation of Israel. In this instance, however, God directed his servant, Jonah, to command the inhabitants of a heathen city, Nineveh, to repent of their wickedness.—Jonah 1:1,2

Instead of obeying God's instructions, “Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.”—vs. 3

We are not informed as to the reason Jonah failed to follow the Lord's instructions. As subsequent events demonstrated, serious consequences may ensue if we disobey God's commands. In this instance, a great storm arose and the winds were so fierce that the ship was in peril of being destroyed. The mariners were very fearful, cried unto their gods and cast their cargo into the sea. While this was occurring, Jonah was asleep in the bottom part of the ship. The captain found Jonah and told him to call upon his God to deliver them from the effects of the storm. Additionally, the sailors cast lots in an attempt to determine the cause of their troubles, and the lot fell

upon Jonah.—vss. 4-7

When the ship's crew demanded to know of his background, Jonah replied, "I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them."—vss. 8-10

Jonah acknowledged that his refusal to follow God's command was the cause of their difficulties. He advised them that by throwing him overboard the sea would become calm. However, they were reluctant to do so and rowed hard to reach safety, but the sea grew more tempestuous. As a last resort, they cast Jonah overboard, and the sea became calm.—vss. 11-15

Our Key Verse demonstrates that God did not allow Jonah to drown. He made provision for his eventual rescue by having him swallowed by a large fish, in whose belly he remained for "three days and three nights." Thus, even though he disobeyed by not going to Nineveh, God manifested his love by preserving Jonah in this miraculous manner. As followers of Christ, we too at times may choose not to obey God's will through weakness of the flesh. However, God is merciful to us, as he was with Jonah, and delivers us from potential harm that might have come to us by reason of our disobedience. Hence, we are provided a new opportunity to demonstrate our faithfulness.

A prophetic lesson from this account is brought to our attention in the New Testament. "As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matt. 12:40) This symbolism illustrates that Christ's experience of being in the sleep of death for three days, and his subsequent resurrection, will ultimately prove beneficial for the entire race of sinners, whom the wicked residents of Nineveh may appropriately picture. ■