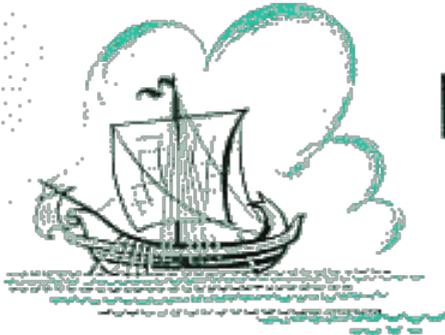


IN THE STOMACH OF A FISH



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JONAH was a servant of God who was a good man and loved God, but not well enough to obey him as he should. If you love your parents more than you love anybody else, you will always do the very best you can to please them. Isn't that right Well, Jonah didn't love God as much as he should have, so when God asked him to do something that was not pleasant to Jonah, he tried to run away from God so he wouldn't have to do it.

Jonah was one of God's prophets.

A prophet is one who tells people about God, and what God wants done. A prophet also tells people when they are doing wrong, and

that they will have trouble if they keep on doing wrong. A prophet also tells about things that will occur long before they take place. Jonah, being one of God's prophets, was asked by him to go to a very wicked city called Nin-e-veh and tell the people of that city that they were all to be destroyed because of their wickedness. Jonah didn't want to do this, so he decided that he would run away to avoid doing what God wanted him to do. He went to a seaport called Joppa, and found that a boat was sailing to Tarshish, so he paid his fare to sail from Joppa to Tarshish. Jonah was sure that by sailing on a ship that was going to Tarshish he would land far from Nineveh.

Well, Jonah was wrong. The ship didn't go to Nineveh, Jonah did! A short time after the ship left Joppa, God caused a fierce storm to arise, and the wind whipped the sea so terribly that the waves were breaking right over the ship, and all the sailors were sure it would be wrecked. These sailors were heathens, who did not believe in the true God. But being afraid, they prayed to their own gods. Their gods were not really gods at all, and of course could not do anything for them.

Meanwhile Jonah had crawled under the deck of the ship and was sound asleep. Probably the air wasn't very fresh down there in the hold of the ship, and that is why he had gone to sleep. The captain of the ship missed Jonah and started to hunt for him. When they found the prophet, the captain asked him to pray to his God to save the ship. Before Jonah had a chance to say very much the sailors cast lots to see if they could find out who had brought this terrible storm upon them. They decided, you see, that someone on the ship had done wrong and was being punished.

They didn't know that the ship was in God's hands because his prophet was aboard. Yes, God was taking care of everything, so when they cast lots they found out that it was because Jonah was on the ship that the fierce storm had arisen. Then they went to Jonah and asked, "Who are you, and where did you come from? Why has this trouble come upon us?" Jonah knew he was doing

wrong in running away from God and from what God wanted him to do, so he confessed his wrongdoing to them.

Jonah was a good man, though, and he did not want all the sailors to be drowned just because he was running away. The sailors asked Jonah, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm?" And Jonah said, "Throw me into the sea, and the sea will be calm, for I know that it is on my account that the great storm has come upon you."

Jonah was willing to be drowned in order to save the lives of those heathen sailors. That was very noble of him, wasn't it? The sailors did what Jonah asked, and as soon as he was out of the ship and in the water, the storm died down and the sea became Calm, and the ship was safe!

But poor Jonah! You probably think he couldn't live long in the water, and you are right. But God helped him, and that made a big difference.

The Bible tells us that God had "prepared a great fish, to swallow up Jonah." We know there are fish large enough to swallow a man.

Whales are very large, aren't they? But it wasn't a whale, because whales have very small throats, although the stomach of a whale is big enough to hold a man.

God knew what Jonah would do, so he had this large fish ready to swallow the prophet as soon as he was thrown overboard from the ship. You may think that wasn't a very good way to take care of Jonah, but it worked out all right. Jonah was in the stomach of the fish for three days. Of course God took care of him there, or else he would have been digested by the fish. And while Jonah was in the stomach of the fish, he prayed very earnestly to God, and God heard him.

Yes, God heard Jonah's prayer, and delivered him, and he found himself on the beach, safe and sound. My, but wasn't that an experience!

Did he go back home then? Oh no! Where he landed on the beach was not very far from Nineveh, the city God had asked him to visit.

Jonah knew then that there was no use in trying to run away from God and from what God asked him to do, so he walked to the city of Nineveh and told the people what God had asked him to tell them. He told them that they were very wicked, and that God would destroy their city in forty days.

What did the people of Nineveh do?

Did they try to kill Jonah because he brought them such bad news?

No, they were very sorry. The King of Nineveh who lived in the city sent word to the people that they should repent and do what God wanted them to do. Because of this God did not destroy the city.

And now you probably think that Jonah was very happy that the city was not destroyed, but he was not. Jonah thought God was unfair because he didn't do what he had told the people he would do.

Jonah was too proud, and did not want the people to think that he had made a mistake; so instead of being happy that the people were sorry, and that God loved them and didn't destroy them, he became sulky and cross.

But Jonah was a good man, just the same, and he got over being sulky, and God loved him. My, wasn't it wonderful how God made him go to Nineveh and tell the people what he asked him to tell them?

QUESTIONS

- Who was Jonah, and why did he try to run away, and not do what God asked him to do?
- Why was Jonah not drowned when he was thrown overboard from a ship?
- Where was Jonah when he was delivered from the stomach of the fish, and what was the work that God wanted him to do?