

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

THE LESSONS OF THE SON OF AMITTAI

Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But 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.

Jonah 1:1-3

It would probably be hard to find a child who has been raised in a home where the scriptures are valued, honored, and taught, who has not heard the account of Jonah and the great fish which swallowed him. The unfortunate truth is that many have grown to adulthood with little consideration of the depths of truth which are hidden in this account, other than the usual moral lesson, that Jonah's disobedience caused his uncomfortable situation.

Now it is surely true that Jonah did indeed seek to flee from the presence of the LORD and thought he could escape from the task which the LORD had sent him to do. Yet we can be certain that Jonah's path from Joppa to Tarshish was as much ordained by the LORD, as was his path from the fish's vomit on the sea shore to the city of Nineveh, since HE prepared a great fish to swallow him at the exact place and moment when he was cast overboard by those men who were caused to fear as the ONE who rides upon the storm stirred the heavens and the sea to that end, in order that they might carry out the task HE ordained them to perform.

This great fish grew to adulthood and no doubt swam around in the Mediterranean Sea with not a care in the world other than where his next meal would come from. Yet this fish was no ordinary fish for it was prepared (i.e.; fitted ahead of time for a certain task) by the LORD; not only to be able to swallow Jonah but to preserve his life as it rescued him from drowning in the stormy sea. The timing of this occurrence is no less miraculous than Jonah's preservation in a hopeless (as Jonah considered) situation. This fish, nor Jonah could possibly have been anywhere else than the exact spot they both were, at this exact instant according to the predestined purpose of GOD.

We are certain that all of these events worked together for good to Jonah (see Rom.8:28) even though he did not enjoy them as they unfolded. The religious moralists of the world would opine that Jonah could have avoided this situation if only he had made better choices. Or they would see the main lesson found in the book to be about the Ninevites' and their repentance in order to avoid judgment. The scriptures do tell us that the LORD did indeed grant a measure of repentance to the inhabitants of Nineveh as the LORD sent HIS prophet to them with the declaration that apart from repentance they would surely perish. Yet even the repentance of the Ninevites was brought to pass in order to benefit Jonah and to teach him important truths which he either did not know or through hardness of heart could not see.

Jonah learned the high price of disobedience as he "paid the fare" for his supposed excursion to Tarshish. He never arrived at that place he desired to go and bought the ticket to; but he did arrive safely at that destination to which the LORD had sent him. This is that which the apostle Paul alludes to when he says, "*How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?*" (Rom 10:14-15) "*For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!*" (1Cor 9:16)

Jonah learned that the LORD is in the dark and low places of the Earth as much as HE is in the great heights and glorious light. *"Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me."* (Jon 2:1-3) Yet he was exercised by deep despair at the hopelessness which he felt even as CHRIST HIMSELF was cast into the very depths of hell as HE bore our sin and carried our sorrows. *"I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God."* (Jon 2:6) *"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."* (Heb 5:8)

Jonah learned that there is no salvation except in the LORD. *"But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD."* (Jon 2:9) The LORD JESUS CHRIST came into the world with this exact purpose, *"thou shalt call his name JESUS: (i.e.; JEHOVAH is SALVATION) for he shall save his people from their sins."* (Mat 1:21) Jonah could not deliver himself but was totally dependent on HIM who is SALVATION.

Jonah learned the glory of being set free from the fish's belly, which was to him a sealed tomb. Thus he serves as an illustration of HIM who has triumphed over death. *"For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's (i.e.; great fish's) belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."* (Mat 12:40) The very basis of the hope of all of those who have fled for refuge to CHRIST, rests on the fact that HE has risen from the dead and ever lives and reigns as the GREAT HIGH PRIEST over the household of GOD.

Jonah learned that every man will perform the exact activity which GOD has ordained for HIM to do. *"So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD."* (Jon 3:3) This cannot be denied, though men will even use this truth to try to accuse GOD of unrighteousness. *"Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?"* (Rom 9:18-20)

Jonah learned that GOD will show mercy according to HIS sovereign prerogative and will call whom HE wills. Even as the Jews learned that HE would save HIS people among the Gentiles. *"When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."* (Acts 11:18) *"And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."* (Acts 13:48) The LORD testified of this very truth when HE said, *"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."* (John 6:37)

Jonah learned that the LORD is of tender mercy to all who shall call upon HIM. In his carnality he became angry as he judged the Ninevites to be unworthy of the LORD's mercy. Yet the lesson which he had to learn was that he had no reason to expect that he should receive mercy either. As Jacob of old confessed, *"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant."* (Gen 32:10) A man cannot have a true understanding of mercy until he is made to see that the merit and activity of man is of no consideration in the LORD's decision to grant mercy. *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of GOD."*

I can only surmise that as Jonah had time to contemplate the wonders which he had been a witness too and an unwilling participant in (*"Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power."* (Psa 110:3)); that he could then rejoice in all that he had seen the LORD do. *"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."* (Heb 12:11) The book of Jonah reveals the lengths to which the LORD will go to instruct those whom HE loves. HE will not forsake them but shall bring forth judgment unto victory even when they act as a weaned and unthankful child. *"This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.* (Lam 3:21-26) mam