



## BIBLE RADIO PRODUCTIONS

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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

**A1934 ~ Jonah Warns Nineveh.**

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*Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.*

In our last *Bible Adventure* story, the prophet Jonah had disobeyed God's directions to go to Nineveh the capital city of Assyria to tell the people there that God's judgment would come on them if they didn't repent from their sins. Instead, Jonah travelled in the opposite direction on a ship because he didn't want to help those cruel people find God's mercy or salvation. But God brought a violent storm on the ship that Jonah was travelling on. To calm the sea and save their lives, Jonah told the sailors to throw him overboard. He fully expected to die for his disobedience. But as soon as he sank beneath the water, he was swallowed by a great fish that God had prepared to receive him there.

Jonah then spent three days and nights inside the fish, praying to God and asking for His forgiveness. He promised to obey God in the future, and so God caused the fish to spit Jonah out onto a beach. Then God told Jonah a 2<sup>nd</sup> time to go to Nineveh and deliver His message to either repent or be destroyed. This time, Jonah obeyed and discovered that the city was very large. It was situated 400 kilometres north of Baghdad, on the eastern bank of the Tigris River. On the day he entered the city, he started shouting to the crowds, "Forty days from now, Nineveh will be destroyed!"

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How gracious God was to give Jonah another opportunity to serve Him! God is always as concerned about the worker as much as the work to be done. God could have dropped Jonah from the task and sent someone else to Nineveh, but Jonah would have missed out on the lessons that he needed to learn. There's no guarantee that after we've sinned and repented, that we'll always end up like Jonah and get our ministry back. This is particularly true of sexual sins and especially if committed by a church leader.

Why would a holy God give the cruel Assyrians a chance to repent from their evil deeds towards Him and their enemies? God's care for the people He created is so great that He's not willing that anyone should perish without coming to a saving knowledge of His own Son, Jesus Christ. Do each of us have a burden to share the Gospel of Christ with a lost world that doesn't deserve to be saved? God blessed the ministry of the imperfect servant Jonah, even though Jonah didn't love the people that he preached to. But God used Jonah's message to bring the whole city to humble repentance, which shows that the power of God's Word can convict and convert the greatest of sinners.

Although Jonah obediently but reluctantly went to Nineveh, he still feared that Nineveh might be spared judgment that he believed they deserved. So Jonah preached that God's judgment was coming to them soon. And the people of Nineveh, including the king himself, believed this message. All of them put on sackcloth as a sign of mourning over their sins and repented. They stopped their evil ways and didn't drink or eat for three days and nights. As a result, the judgment was no longer necessary as God's mercy had pardoned them. Some scholars believe that this dramatic turnaround came because an earthquake and solar eclipse occurred just prior to Jonah's arrival, and that the people were already alert and alarmed about what would happen next.

But Jonah was greatly displeased about the people of Nineveh repenting as a result of his preaching! He became very angry and complained to the Lord. Jonah's message to Nineveh reveals that prophecy is sometimes conditional upon a people's response to it, but Jonah didn't want things to be that way. In Chapter 4 of the book of Jonah, Jonah said that he knew that the Lord is a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. But he wanted all these blessings from God to be for Israel alone. So Jonah asked to die because now, what he had predicted wasn't going to happen. He felt betrayed by God as now Assyria would become bolder in its military outreach. Jonah saw no future and just wanted to die. But God asked him if he had a right to be angry about this good outcome.

Jonah's anger came from not getting his own way in the matter of having the city of Nineveh destroyed. Anger produces ungodliness and evil motives within a person, and leads to conflict and arguments. We can easily forget that anger can disrupt our lives, cause pain to our loved ones and others, and bring on serious emotional problems. A pastor once said that there are two universal sins of people: anger and fear. Unresolved anger can lead to bitterness, plus an unfavourable impression of what a Christian's behaviour should be like.

How can we restrain our angry episodes? Although we may be right in our position on a certain matter, we may be wrong in our attitude and in the way we express our opinions. This is the opposite of 'speaking the truth in love.' When we're provoked to anger, this will show how much or little self-control the Holy Spirit has developed in us. Remember Jesus' example: His anger was always used on behalf of others, never for Himself.

Angry, depressed Jonah went outside the city of Nineveh and made himself a roofless shelter out of stones to protect himself from the hot wind while he waited to see what would happen to the city. Yet the Lord arranged for a leafy plant to grow beside the shelter and soon, it spread broad leaves over Jonah's head and shaded him from the sun. Jonah was very grateful for the plant. But God also arranged for a worm to eat through the stem of the plant early the next morning, so that it soon withered away. As the sun grew hot, God sent a scorching east wind to blow on Jonah. Again, in self-pity, Jonah just wanted to die.

God spoke to Jonah and asked him if it was right for him to be angry because the plant had died. Although Jonah felt sorry about the plant, he had done nothing to put it there. It came quickly, and it died quickly. Jonah had cared more about the vine than he did about the people of Nineveh. The Lord told Jonah that Nineveh had more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals living among them. The Lord then asked Jonah why God Himself shouldn't feel sorry for such a great city.

God cares for every living thing on earth. He doesn't care only for Israel, as the Israelites thought. He chose Israel as His special possession, not just for its own sake, but so that it might be a blessing to all people in the world. This is the heart of the missionary call and here in this little book of Jonah, we meet the first missionary to the Gentiles.

The basic problem with Jonah's attitude was that Jonah wasn't completely yielded to God. His mind knew God's truth, and his will obeyed God's orders but he didn't do the will of God from the bottom of his heart. He obeyed only because he was afraid of what God might do to him next, and so his message wasn't a ministry of love. Although Jonah had his weaknesses, God still used him to gather the single greatest missionary harvest in Old Testament history. And God has been sending imperfect missionaries into the harvest fields ever since. It's essential in Christian service to be happy with the will of God. In Psalm 40, it says: "I delight to do Your will, O my God; and Your law is within my heart."

Among the other small books of the Bible of Minor Prophets is one called 'Nahum'. Nothing is known of Nahum apart from his book. His main message was that judgment would soon fall on Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and the entire nation. This was around 150 years after Jonah had visited Nineveh. God had used Assyria as His agent of judgment on the northern kingdom of Israel, which was destroyed in 722 BC. But over 100 years later, Nahum prophesied again pagan Assyria's destruction, and this was comforting for the Israelites.

In chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Nahum, Nahum describes in detail how that God's judgment on Nineveh was to be executed. Archaeology and historical evidence have since confirmed the accuracy of Nahum's prophecy. Although the greatest city of its time, Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BC by the Medes and Babylonians. It was located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, opposite modern-day Mosul on the western bank in northern Iraq. Long-time Assyrian residents still refer to the entire city of Mosul as Nineveh or 'Ninweh'.

Another minor prophet, Zephaniah, also predicted the complete destruction of Nineveh in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of his book, Zephaniah. He said that God would punish their mistreatment of His people, their pride and their worship of false gods. In His mercy, God called the people to turn from their sins and seek the Lord. But this time, not all the people of Nineveh repented as they'd done 150 years before.

What can we learn from the book of Jonah? Repentance isn't a mere sorrow for sin. Rather, it requires a turning away from evil conduct and doing what pleases God. We can't just repent and then routinely keep doing the same sins over and over again, expecting to be forgiven for them each time. In Chapter 3 of Jonah's book, it says that God saw the works of the people of Nineveh and that they had turned from their evil ways. And later, in Luke's Gospel, Chapter 13, the Lord Jesus told the people listening to Him that unless they repented, they would all perish too. Repentance is essential to salvation.

The Lord Jesus viewed Jonah's 3-day entombment in the great fish as a foreshadowing of His own resurrection from the grave. In Romans, Chapter 1, it says: "He [Jesus] was shown to be the Son of God when He was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord." Jesus also said that the sign of Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh that God had sent him. "What happens to the Son of Man [i.e. Jesus] will be a sign to these people that He was sent by God."

Meek people who have repented from their sins and received Jesus's salvation for their souls will be God's saved remnant and hidden in God's care during the day of God's great anger against sin in the world. In 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, Chapter 5 verse 9, it says: "For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out His anger on us. Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when He returns, we can live with Him forever."

*The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.*

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