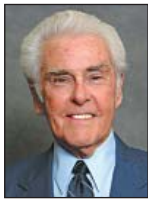


## God calls believers to share the gospel with others



**John Howell**

Two themes are prominent in this lesson from Jonah. One is the necessity of renewing one's commitment to God's will for life. The other is the need to take advantage of opportunities to share the gospel message with others in accord with God's intention for the world.

**God calls us to share his message (1:1-2).** As is true with other minor prophets, "the word of the Lord came to Jonah" with an accompanying assignment: "Go to Nineveh the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before me."

When we turn to the New Testament, we hear an assignment from Jesus: "And Jesus came up and spoke to them (His disciples), saying, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age'" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Jonah had a message to deliver and we, as followers of the Lord, also have a significant message to deliver in our own generation.

**Why do the called refuse to obey? (1:3).** Jonah resented obeying God's call because Nineveh was the capital of the Gentile world. In spite of being a Gentile city, word of its wickedness had come to Jehovah, the God of Israel, and he was concerned about them. Jonah's basic objection to going to Nineveh was to preach about a God who was "a compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness" (4:2). Why did Jonah not want the Gentiles to respond to such a God?

"[Because] he really grudged

salvation to the Gentiles, and feared lest their conversion to the loving God should impinge upon the privilege of Israel above the Gentile world, and put an end to its election as the nation of God," wrote C.F. Keil in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, "Jonah."

So Jonah fled to Joppa and got on a boat to Tarshish where he thought he could escape God's purpose.

Jonah had a reason for refusing God's call to Nineveh, but why do contemporary Christians refuse to become evangelists for God in their daily life? Scholars suggest many reasons. It may be fear of being misunderstood, not wanting to seem like radical religionists, not wanting to seem like persons who force their beliefs onto other people, fear that they will not be able to answer questions, etc. When deep trust in the Lord's presence is in your heart, sharing your faith becomes an act of joy.

In "Vision of His Glory, a devotional book on Revelation, Anne Graham Lotz, the daughter of Billy Graham, comments on this task for Christians: "While you and I rejoice in the love and sincerity and blessedness of belonging to the family of God, why are we so oblivious to the misery of others? ... Why don't we run to our loved one, our neighbor, our friend, our coworker, or our business associate and fling open the 'door,' extending to that person the Spirit and the bride's invitation to 'come!'"

How will you answer that question in light of Jesus' call to you?

**Finally Jonah did return to God and accept his call (3:1-5, 10).** God extended his call to Jonah a second time, so Jonah arose and went to Nineveh. "Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried and said, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.'"

## Bible Studies for Life

July 19, 2015

Scripture: Jonah 1:1-3; 3:1-5, 10

When the people of Nineveh heard Jonah's message from God, "they believed in God; and they called a fast from the greatest (including the king) to the least of them." If you were the evangelist, certainly you would rejoice at the people's response to your message, but here again Jonah's resentment against the Gentiles' conversion affected his response: "But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry" (4:1).

God rebuked Jonah: "And should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city?"

Keil emphasized God's compassion for the Gentiles: "The repentance of the Ninevites, even if it did not last, showed at any rate, a susceptibility on the part of the heathen for the Word of God, and their willingness to turn and forsake their evil and unjustly ways so that God, according to His compassion, could extend His grace to them in consequence."

Paul acknowledged God's grace to the Gentiles and led them to trust God. To the Ephesians, Paul wrote, "Therefore remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, ...were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who made both groups one" (2:11-14).

So in Christ, the gospel is shared with the whole world. We are witnesses to that gospel.

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