

Come to Understanding

They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding,
and they that murmured shall learn doctrine. — Isaiah 29:24

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A Ship Going to Tarshish

Yahweh called a prophet named Jonah to leave Israel and go to Nineveh, the wicked capital of Assyria, and “cry against it:”

- 1 Now the word of Yahweh came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,
- 2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness has come up before me. -Jonah 1

However, Jonah resisted Yahweh’s call upon his life. Instead of obeying Him, Jonah tried to flee from the presence of Yahweh by boarding a ship to Tarshish, a place where great wealth could be found (see 2 Chronicles 9:21)!

- 3 But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh, 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 to Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh. -Jonah 1

A study of the prophecies of Amos and Isaiah help us to better understand this event concerning Jonah.

When Yahweh called Amos to prophesy to Israel, He found him “among the herdsman of Tekoa,” which was located in Judah. Amos prophesied while Uzziah was the king of Judah and the second Jeroboam was the king of Israel.

- 1 The words of Amos, who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. -Amos 1

This second Jeroboam continued steering Israel, whose capital was Samaria, along the sinful course that had been set by the first Jeroboam:”

- 23 In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria, *and reigned for forty and one years.*
- 24 And he did *that which* was evil in the sight of Yahweh: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. -2 Kings 14

Jonah, who was from a place in Israel called Gathhepher, also prophesied during the reign of the second Jeroboam. His prophecies concerning Israel were about the prosperity which they would enjoy under Jeroboam, as he expanded their borders by restoring “the coast of Israel:”

- 25 He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath to the sea of the plain, according to the word of Yahweh God of Israel, which he spoke by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher. -2 Kings 14

It was in the midst of this time of prosperity for Israel that Yahweh called upon Amos, while he was working as a “herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit,” to prophesy to the people of Israel:

- 14 Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was a herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit:
- 15 And Yahweh took me as I followed the flock, and Yahweh said to me, Go, prophesy to my people Israel. -Amos 7

According to Amos, there will be no judgment until Yahweh has sent His prophets to deliver His warning:

- 7 Surely the Lord Yahweh will do nothing, but he reveals his secret to his servants the prophets. -Amos 3

Led by Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, Israel utterly rejected the prophetic warnings that Amos gave to them:

- 10 Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words. -Amos 7

Since Israel continued in the sins of the first Jeroboam, Amaziah was likely one of the “priests of the high places” that led the worship of the golden calves in Bethel. There is strong evidence that these calves represented the goddess of Egypt (see “The Goddess and Her Golden Calf,” *Come to Understanding*, Vol. 7 No. 16, August 14, 2008):

- 32 And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that *is* in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. -1 Kings 12

In spite of Amaziah’s objections, Amos faithfully delivered the unpopular prophetic warning to Israel, which they hated and totally rejected. Amos said:

- 16 Now therefore hear you the word of Yahweh: You say, Prophecy not against Israel, and drop not *your word* against the house of Isaac.

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense,
and caused them to understand the reading. — Nehemiah 8:8

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17 Therefore thus says Yahweh; Your wife shall be a harlot in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be divided by line; and you shall die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth from his land. -Amos 7

He told Israel that an enemy would consume them:

11 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh; An adversary *there shall be* even round about the land; and he shall bring down your strength from you, and your palaces shall be spoiled. -Amos 3

Amos faithfully delivered to Israel the unpopular message of impending destruction. However, he also gave them hope. He said that if they would repent from their wickedness, then perhaps Yahweh would mercifully spare them from His judgment:

14 Seek good, and not evil, that you may live: and so Yahweh, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as you have spoken.

15 Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that Yahweh God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph. -Amos 5

Amos did not say which enemy was going to destroy Israel. However, Isaiah, who prophesied at roughly the same time as Amos and Jonah, said that it would be the king of Assyria:

4 For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria. -Isaiah 8

Yahweh had a plan for Assyria, which was to judge Israel. The problem was that Assyria, like Israel, was also full of wickedness. Consequently, in His righteousness, Yahweh had also pronounced judgment upon them! Therefore, Yahweh called upon Jonah to go to Nineveh. He had to warn them and also give them the opportunity to repent, or they would be destroyed before they judged Israel.

If we believe that Jonah knew the prophecies of Amos and Isaiah that Yahweh would send His judgment against Israel by the hand of the Assyrians, then we can better understand why he tried to flee from the presence of Yahweh aboard the ship to Tarshish. As he later explained in

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Institute for Biblical and Historical Studies
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Addison, Michigan 49220 U.S.A.
biblical@ibiblical.org

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his prayer to Yahweh, he did not want to warn Nineveh because he knew of His grace and mercy:

2 And he prayed unto Yahweh, and said, I pray you, O Yahweh, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before to Tarshish: for I knew that you *are* a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repent you of the evil. -Jonah 4

Jonah knew that if, because of his warning, Nineveh repented of their wickedness, then Yahweh would spare them from destruction. Therefore, Assyria would be able to fulfill the prophesy that they would destroy Israel.

Nevertheless, Yahweh did persuade Jonah to prophesy His warning to Nineveh. He brought him through a major trial that found him swallowed up by a “great fish,” spending three days and three nights in its belly, to convince him to answer his prophetic calling (see Jonah 1:4 to Jonah 3:3). Finally, Jonah entered into Nineveh and delivered a simple prophetic warning:

4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. -Jonah 3

Unlike Israel, the “people of Nineveh believed God” and their king led them in humble repentance.

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

6 For word came to the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered *himself* with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. -Jonah 3

Consequently, Yahweh spared them from destruction:

10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do to them; and he did *it* not. -Jonah 3

In spite of the warnings delivered to Israel through prophets, such as Amos, they refused to humble themselves and repent, as Nineveh did. Consequently, Yahweh used Assyria to judge the unrepentant kingdom of Israel:

5 Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it *for* three years.

6 In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor *by* the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. -2 Kings 17

Yahweh uses prophetic “watchmen” to deliver His warning. Prophets, in spite of their own preferences, must faithfully deliver His word. He told Ezekiel:

17 Son of man, I have made you a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. -Ezekiel 3

If Yahweh calls upon us to deliver an unpopular message of warning from Him to a wicked nation, will we deliver it faithfully as Amos did? Or will we, like Jonah, board a ship going to Tarshish?