

People of Promise
Jonah
604 words

A Two-Part Promise

Jonah:
The Adult Who Acted Like a Child

Jonah 1:2; 4:11

When a parent gives instructions to a child, it's almost a given that the response will be, "Why?" The response may be verbal, it may be implied with a facial expression, or it may be shouted out by means of body language. Sometimes the "Why?" gets answered, sometimes it doesn't. A child's challenge is to learn to trust a parent's word without knowing "Why?"

It might be assumed that an Old Testament prophet would not act childishly when given instructions by God. Alas, a grown-up prophet named Jonah had a childish tantrum when he was given the first part of a two-part promise from God. In fact, he got so mad that he ran away from God. Jonah's problem as a prophet was that he pre-judged God's actions before he had heard the whole story. His failure can help us learn to take God at his word even when the child in us is tempted to stomp its foot and demands to know, "Why?"

Jonah was a Jewish prophet who knew that Israel was God's chosen nation: Theirs was the adoption as sons, the divine glory of God, the covenants, the law, the temple and its worship, multitudes of promises, and the patriarchal line which produced Jesus Christ (Rom. 9:4-5). Jonah's blind spot was not thinking that Israel was a bright light--she was. What he missed seeing was the reason God made Israel a light: They were to be a light to the Gentile nations of the world (Isa. 42:6; 49:6; Luke 2:31-32). Israel's role on earth was to be a conduit--a channel of blessing--revealing God's glory to everyone on earth. Jonah much preferred to bask in the "holy huddle" of Israel's privilege. When God called a play and sent him onto the field, he resisted--and quit the team.

The mightiest Gentile nation on earth in Jonah's day was Assyria, its capital Nineveh being so large that it took three days just to see it all (Jonah 3:3). When God commissioned Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach to the Assyrians (declare God's promise that judgment was coming), he reacted jealously. He knew that if he preached, and Nineveh repented, that God's mercy and grace would be extended to others besides Israel--and he didn't like that. So he boarded a ship and fled toward modern-day Spain. God eventually got Jonah to Nineveh where he reluctantly preached and saw the people respond just as he feared they would. Nineveh's king declared a fast, the entire city repented in sackcloth (even the animals!), and God postponed his judgement (Jonah 3:5-10). It was then that God revealed the second part of his promise to Jonah: "Nineveh is wicked, true enough. But it is because they are like children, not knowing their right from

their left. It is good for me to have compassion on them” (Jonah 4:11). Jonah shouldn’t have thrown a fit. He should have trusted that God’s reasons for his actions were good, and would be revealed to him in time.

The next time you feel like stomping your foot and demanding that God tell you, “Why?”--think of Jonah:

- Can you trust God with what he has chosen not to reveal to you?
- Have you ever known his instructions to be less than completely trustworthy?
- Have you considered any whose welfare depends on your obedience to God?

There may be occasions when God never reveals the second (or third or fourth) part of his promises or instructions. Since we don’t know his plans, it’s better to act like spiritual adults from the beginning: trusting his word in all things.