**Lesson 18**

**14-15 February 2022**

**Genesis 38-41**

***Another Perspective*: Jonah**

**Timeline and Map –** Jonah is #2 on the timeline, which means he ministered at the same time that Amos did. So you can write his name on blank number two, as well as the date, 760 B.C. But while the two prophets spoke at the same *time*, they had completely different *audiences*. Amos spoke to his fellow Israelites, but God sent Jonah to Israel’s strong enemy, the Assyrians. Nineveh was a large, important city in Assyria, so we need a new map to locate where Jonah was sent to speak. First find the city of Nineveh on the map and circle it. Then draw a “talking head” somewhere near Nineveh in Assyria and label it with Jonah’s name.

**Differences Between Jonah and Amos –** Because the two men addressed two different audiences, they had *separate messages* to share from the Lord. Amos was warning his complacent, self-satisfied countrymen not to gloat over the fate of their enemies because judgment would fall on them, too. But Jonah was sent directly to one set of those enemies to warn them that God’s wrath would fall on them in just forty *days* if they did not repent of their evil, vicious ways. And *the result* of the two prophets’ preaching was vastly different. Amos’ prediction that God would judge Israel came to pass only forty years after he started preaching, while Jonah’s prophecy that Nineveh would be overthrown in a mere forty days did NOT happen—but for a very good reason. The people of Nineveh believed Jonah’s message, and everyone from the king on down repented of their sin. God saw their repentance and spared them from disaster.

**Jonah’s Attitude and Life Lesson –** Perhaps the biggest difference between these two prophets is their *attitude*. Amos was a man of low standing when the Lord called him to preach, but he did not hesitate to obey. In Amos 7:14-16 he says, “I was no prophet, nor a prophet’s son, but…a herdsman…But the Lord took me from following the flock, and…said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’ Now therefore hear the word of the Lord.” There is no hesitation at all: “The Lord told me to speak, so listen up!”

Jonah, however, tried to run away from the Lord when he first heard what God wanted him to do. Look at the new map. God had told him to go to Nineveh, but instead he took a boat bound for a place called “Tarshish”. Tarshish was apparently located somewhere along the western shores of the Mediterranean Sea. As you can see, that would be directly opposite to where God had told him to go. God used a rather unique means of persuading Jonah to change his mind and go to Nineveh [being swallowed by a huge fish for three days], but his attitude was still wrong. Instead of being happy that the Ninevites believed his message and repented, he was just mad that they weren’t going to be destroyed. So God had to gently teach him a lesson about compassion and mercy. **In fact, it may well be that God’s greatest purpose in sending Jonah to Nineveh was to help Jonah himself to grow in spiritual understanding and maturity.** Jonah knew “doctrine”. He himself described God as “gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” Sadly, Jonah was glad when God extended that compassion to him when he disobeyed, but mad when God extended that same compassion to other people that had not been following God. He, like all of us who call ourselves believers, needed to grow in **grace** as well as godliness.



***Bible Study Fellowship’s Perspective:*** The following comments were taken from Lessons 23-25 of the BSF course on Genesis.

**A “Guilt Trigger”: Our Words –** As she was being brought out to die, Tamar sent a message to Judah. The words she spoke, “See if you can recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are,” sound very much like the words Judah and his brothers spoke to Jacob when they asked him to identify Joseph’s blood-stained coat. Judah was clearly identified as the child’s father. Like David when confronted by Nathan about his adulterous sin, Judah was convicted and admitted he was guilty of the sin for which he severely judged Tamar. Lesson 23, page 4

**Joseph and Potiphar –** Potiphar’s *name* meant “the one whom Ra [the Egyptian sun god] has given.” His *title,* “captain of the guard”, meant he served as the king’s bodyguard. **Joseph’s training under Potiphar prepared him for his future role as prime minister.** He learned Egyptian customs and gained experience in successful business administration. He learned important lessons in these humiliating circumstances. These lessons made Joseph a stronger leader later in his life. Lesson 24, page 2

**Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife –** Already tested by harsh circumstances, Joseph now faced a relentless invitation to sin. Joseph’s clear response revealed his integrity. [However] Joseph’s persistent resistance did not deter Potiphar’s wife. She relentlessly hounded him day after day. Again, Joseph’s integrity shines through. **Wisdom, not cowardice, leads discerning people to avoid volatile and tempting situations. In a world that likes to push the boundaries as far as possible, seeking safe distance from evil shows sound judgment.** A healthy understanding of human weakness actually reveals strength. Lesson 24, page 2

**Potiphar’s Response –** Potiphar was furious. However, Scripture does not state he directed his anger entirely against Joseph. Had this been the case, Joseph would have been executed. The punishment for adultery was extreme. A slave could expect no mercy. **Why was Joseph spared? Possibly because Potiphar was skeptical about his wife’s story.**

Potiphar had no way to disprove his wife’s statements. Potiphar could not simply take the word of a slave against that of his wife. His wife raised the stakes by making the matter public and involving the other household servants…**His high-profile position and her report forced him to act.** Potiphar immediately disgraced Joseph and sent him to jail. At the same time, he lost perhaps the most efficient business manager he had ever owned. Lesson 24, page 3

**God and “Success” –** The omnipresent God went to prison with Joseph…God granted Joseph “favor” and “success” in Potiphar’s house and again in prison. We must not equate God’s definition of success with physical prosperity and easy living. God promises “success” to the person who delights himself in God and meditates on His law, day and night (see Psalm 1). **God caused Joseph to succeed in every task he undertook.** Undoubtedly, Joseph learned much from the king’s prisoners about the king’s household, which he would one day rule. Suffering entrusted to God’s higher purpose is not wasted. God can be trusted. **The presence of God graciously carries believers through even the longest and most painful suffering in life**. Lesson 24, page 4

**Suffering and Faith – Temporary disappointments do not define your ultimate destiny…**When people fail you, remember God cannot. How is your current suffering stripping you of every option but trusting God? Can you trust God, even when the answers are few, the pain is deep, and the solutions invisible? Psalm 27:14 says, “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”

Even for believers, faith falters…God is not shocked by our faltering faith…**Faith is not denying the hardship, but trusting God in the midst of it.** Lesson 24, pages 5-6

**Joseph the Leader –**Until this moment, those around Joseph saw him as a mere Hebrew slave, though an extremely capable one. Now, the idolatrous ruler of the most powerful kingdom on earth recognized that Joseph’s wisdom came from God Almighty…God and His plan catapulted Joseph into leadership over all of Egypt. God used years of suffering to teach Joseph to depend on Him and experience His presence. Joseph’s own trials created sensitivity to suffering and a desire to alleviate the suffering of others. He learned to simply and boldly deliver God’s message. Joseph spoke what God revealed—whether positive or negative, whether about the fate of an individual or the fate of a nation. He showed integrity as a slave, a prisoner and a ruler. **God had greater plans in mind for Joseph than Joseph had in mind for himself. God developed a great leader in the dungeon, elevated him to the palace and through him, impacted his family, Egypt and eventually the world.** Lesson 25, page 3