

The Prophet Who Went the Wrong Way

Jim Marshall is a retired NFL football player. He played almost 20 years for the Minnesota Vikings as a defensive end. During his career, he won 3 NFC championship games, a Super Bowl, recorded 127 quarterback sacks, was selected to 2 All-Star games, and played in 282 consecutive games. He was also one of 10 players to have played in all 4 of the Vikings Super Bowl appearances in the 1970s.

Sadly, instead of his significant accomplishments, Jim Marshall is most remembered for what many consider to be one of the most embarrassing moments in sports history. On October 25, 1964, in a game against the San Francisco 49ers, Marshall recovered a fumble on defense and ran 66 yards the wrong way to his own end zone! He thought he had scored a touchdown at the time, so he threw the ball in the back of the end zone to celebrate. Instead, he scored two points for the other team. Marshall is an example of a man who went the wrong way on accident. But the prophet Jonah was a man who went the wrong way on purpose!

God commanded Jonah to go and preach to the wicked city of Nineveh (Jonah 1:1-2). Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire. Since the Assyrians were enemies of the Israelites, Jonah did not want to preach to them. He did not want them to have the opportunity to repent. His desire was for the Lord to bring His judgment upon them.

To avoid obeying God, Jonah went the opposite direction of Nineveh to Joppa. There he found a ship going to Tarshish (maybe somewhere in Spain). God then caused a great storm to come upon the boat, and once the men on board discovered Jonah was the source of their troubles, they reluctantly threw him into the sea (Jonah 1:3-16). God then caused a great fish to swallow up Jonah (Jonah 1:17). Inside the belly of the fish, Jonah repented of his disobedience, and after three days, God caused the fish to vomit him out on dry land (Jonah 2:10). Jonah then obeyed God and preached the message of repentance to the people of Nineveh. The people repented and were spared God's judgment, at least for a time (Jonah 3:10).

- From these events, we learn that God is loving and wants all men to be saved (Jonah 4:1-2; John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:3-4). Jonah failed to realize that he was no different from the Assyrians because he, too, was a sinner (Romans 3:23). Since God is the great Creator, He has the right to love and save whomever He wishes.
- We also learn that God is just and holds men accountable for their actions. If the people of Nineveh did not repent in forty days, God would destroy them (Jonah 3:4). Are you harboring sin in your life? Do you need to repent and get right with God before it is too late? You may not have forty days to repent like the people of Nineveh (1 Thessalonians 5:2).
- We also learn that God is merciful and forgiving. God forgave Jonah from the belly of the fish and gave him a second chance (Jonah 2:10-3:2). God also forgave the people of Nineveh and did not punish them (Jonah 3:10). God will also forgive you when you repent (1 John 1:8-10). The only sin God will not forgive is the one we are unwilling to repent of.

Jonah was a prophet who went the wrong way for a time. Which way are you going (Matthew 7:13-14)?