

JONAH'S GOURD (Castor Bean)

The Lesson of Jonah

It often happens that we do not want to do what the LORD wants us to do. He indicates one thing, and we proceed to do exactly the opposite. This was the case with Jonah. The LORD told him to go to the city of Ninevah and announce the destruction that was coming to them because of their wickedness. Yet Jonah was afraid and did not want to be the one to bring the people such news. He ran away from God and boarded a ship bound for Tarshish in the other direction.

To remind Jonah where he was supposed to be, the LORD sent such a violent storm that it appeared the boat was going to break up. Jonah realized what was happening and he told the others, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea . . . and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."

They threw Jonah overboard and he was swallowed by a great fish. Three days later, the fish vomited him up on dry land— and Jonah, having learned his lesson, went to Ninevah.



Topical Study

What do you think of the way the Ninevites reacted when confronted with their sins? What do the Scriptures say about sackcloth and fasting?

1 Kgs 21:27; Neh 9:1-3;
Zech 7:4-10; Mt 6:16-18

When he arrived, he preached. He said, "Forty more days and Ninevah will be overturned." The people believed what God was saying to them through the prophet and they repented. The king declared a fast, and all of them from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth to show their sorrow over sin. "When God saw what they did and how they had turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened."

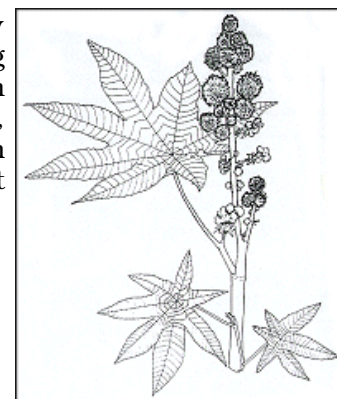
The Plant of Jonah

Unfortunately, Jonah was disgusted at the way the LORD handled the situation with the Ninevites. He became angry at God's mercy and wanted to see the city destroyed even though the people had repented. By using a viny plant, God gave Jonah a lesson in compassion.

- ! Read Jonah 4
- ! What is the lesson of Jonah's plant (vv 10-11)?
- ! How great is God's mercy? (Ps 103)
- ! Do we ever get angry at God's mercy toward others? How?
- ! The lesson God made clear to Jonah might remind you of a parable Jesus once told (Mt 20:1-16).
- ! How is the lesson about the feast at Matthew's house related to the lesson of Jonah and his plant (Mt 9:9-13)?

Most Biblical botanists feel that the plant of Jonah was the castor bean (*Ricinus communis*).

Appearance— The castor bean is a very fast growing plant that can, depending on the variety and climate, reach heights of up to 40 feet. The stems, stalks, and leaves are reddish-purple in color. It is grown as an ornamental plant in gardens or as a house plant.





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Location — The castor bean is a very hardy plant and will grow nearly anywhere in the world. It can be grown successfully and easily throughout North America.

Seeds — The seeds are in a seedpod that explodes when it is ripe. The seeds are very poisonous to people, animals and insects; just one milligram of ricin (one of the main toxic proteins in the plant) can kill an adult. The seeds are dangerous if the outer shell is broken or chewed open.

Uses — Castor bean is cultivated for the seeds which yield a fast-drying, non-yellowing oil, used mainly in

industry and medicines. The oil is used in coating fabrics and other protective coverings, in the manufacture of high-grade lubricants, and printing inks. Dehydrated oil is an excellent drying agent which compares favorably with tung oil and is used in paints and varnishes. Hydrogenated oil is utilized in the manufacture of waxes, polishes, carbon paper, candles and crayons. (Commercially prepared castor oil contains none of the toxin.)

The oil and seed have been used as folk remedies for warts and corns. Castor oil is also known to have labor-inducing properties. The oil is used externally for dermatitis and eye ailments. Seeds, which yield 45–50% of a fixed oil, are considered a purgative and can be used in cases of scorpion sting and fish poison. Leaves are applied to the head to relieve headache and as a poultice for boils.

Murder — In 1978, ricin was used to assassinate Georgi Markov in 1978, a Bulgarian journalist who spoke out against the Bulgarian government. He was stabbed with the point of an umbrella while waiting at a bus stop near Waterloo Station in London. They found a perforated metallic pellet embedded in his leg that had presumably contained the ricin toxin.



Conclusion

While the castor bean finds many uses in the world today, do not forget how God used it with Jonah and the lesson Jonah learned from it. This plant reminds us of the abundant compassion and mercy of our God— such compassion He has that He even sent His Son Jesus Christ to be our Savior while we were yet sinners. May we always see His great love, repent of our sins, and come to Jesus for forgiveness, life, and salvation.



For Further Study

The account of Jonah and the city of Ninevah talks a lot about repentance. Using a concordance or topical Bible, study how repentance comes about and also its relationship to Christian faith.

Resources

Bible Plants for American Gardens, by Eleanor Anthony King
<http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants/index.html>
<http://www.dulley.com/plant/annual.shtml>
http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/indices/index_ab.html
<http://www.tropilab.com/seedlist.html>
<http://floridata.com>