

# JONAH

Jonah 1 - 4

## STRUCTURE

**Key-person:** Jonah

**Key-location:** Nineveh

### **Key-repetitions:**

- People turned to God: sailors (Jon 1:14-16); Jonah inside the fish (Jon 2:1-7); people of Nineveh (Jon 3:5); king of Nineveh (Jon 3:6, 10).
- Things/people that obeyed God: storm (Jon 1:4); sailors (Jon 1:11-16); fish (Jon 1:17; 2:10); Nineveh's residents (Jon 3:5-9); plant (Jon 4:6); worm (Jon 4:7); east wind (Jon 4:8).
- Jonah speaking with God (Jon 2:1-9; 4:2-4, 8-9).
- God speaking/sending (Jon 1:1, 4, 17; 2:10; 3:1; 4:4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10).
- Fear: sailors (Jon 1:5-10); Jonah (Jon 2:2-7); people of Nineveh (Jon 3:5-9).

### **Key-attitudes:**

- Jonah's reluctance to go to Nineveh.
- Sailors' fear of the storm.
- Jonah's helplessness when thrown overboard.
- Jonah's prejudice and hatred of the Ninevites.
- Jonah's anger with God.
- People of Nineveh's fear of God's punishment.
- Sailors and the Ninevites' awe of God.
- God's mercy and compassion for both Jonah and Nineveh.

### **Initial-situation:**

From 2 Kings 14:25, we learn that Jonah was a prophet in the Kingdom of Israel when Jeroboam II was king. After King Solomon's death, there was civil war among the Israelites. Ten tribes rejected Rehoboam, Solomon's son, as king. They chose Jeroboam as their king and formed a new kingdom called Israel. Jeroboam led Israel to idol worship.

Jeroboam II was the thirteenth king of Israel. His kingship was a time of prosperity and strong feelings of nationalism.

Assyria, Israel's great enemy, was notorious for their cruelty toward conquered nations. The capital city of Assyria was Nineveh.

### **Initial-problem:**

The Lord told Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, the greatest enemy of the nation of Israel.

**Final-situation:**

God expressed his concern for Nineveh to Jonah.

**BIBLE STORY****Jonah, the Disobedient Servant of God**

The Lord told Jonah, "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it. Its wickedness has caught my attention" (Jon 1:1-2). Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, the greatest enemy of the nation of Israel.

However, Jonah went down to the port of Joppa and found a ship bound for Tarshish. Tarshish was the opposite direction from Nineveh. Jonah wanted to get as far away from the Lord as possible (Jon 1:3).

However, the Lord created a violent storm. The ship was in danger of breaking apart and the sailors were terrified. Each sailor cried out to his own god. The sailors threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship.

Meanwhile, Jonah had gone below deck into the hold of the ship and he fell into a deep sleep. The captain found Jonah and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and pray to your god! Maybe your god will notice our desperate situation and rescue us."

The sailors asked one another, "Let's draw straws to find out who is the culprit on the ship responsible for this calamity." They drew straws and Jonah got the short straw.

The sailors interrogated Jonah, "Confess! Why are you responsible for our disaster?"

Jonah confessed that he was running away from the Lord. Johan said, "I'm a Hebrew. I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land."

Jonah's confession increased the sailors' terror! The sailors demanded, "What have you done? What should we do to you to get rid of this storm?"

Jonah replied, "Throw me overboard into the sea. Then the sea will become calm. Get rid of me and you'll get rid of the storm."

The men tried to row back to land but the sea grew even wilder. The sailors cried to the Lord, "O Lord, please don't let us die because of this man!" They took Jonah and threw him overboard. Immediately the raging sea grew calm. The sailors were in awe of the Lord. They offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him (Jon 1:4-16).

The Lord provided a large fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was inside the stomach of the fish for three days and three nights (Jon 1:17).

Jonah prayed to the Lord his God, "In my distress, I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From the mouth of the grave I cried, 'Help!' You heard my cry. You cast me into the ocean's depths. Currents swirled about me; ocean waves crashed over me. I said, 'I have been cast out from your sight. I will never again see your holy Temple.' Sea waters closed over me. Undercurrents pulled me to the depths of the ocean. Seaweed wrapped itself around my head. I sank down to the valley between sea mountains. I hit bottom! The gates of death were closing in on me. When my life was slipping away, I remembered you, Lord. I prayed to you, Lord, and you heard me in your holy Temple.

“People who worship worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But, I’ll worship you with a song of thanksgiving. I’ll sacrifice to you. I’ll do what I promised to do. Salvation comes from the Lord!” (Jon 2:1-9).

The Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out of its stomach onto dry land (Jon 2:10).

### **Jonah, the Reluctant Servant of God**

The Lord spoke to Jonah a second time, “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim the message I give you” (Jon 3:1-2).

This time, Jonah went to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Nineveh was a very large city. It took a person three days to walk across it. The first day that Jonah entered into the city, he proclaimed, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed!”

The Ninevites believed God. They declared a citywide fast. Everyone of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth (Jon 3:3-5).

The king of Nineveh issued a public proclamation, “Don’t drink one drop of water. Don’t eat one bite of food. This is an order for all men, women, and animals. Every person and every animal must be clothed with sackcloth. Let everyone cry out to God. Everyone must turn around, stop doing evil and stop doing violence. Maybe God will change his mind, show compassion, and let us live” (Jon 3:6-9).

God saw that they turned from their evil ways. So God changed his mind about destroying them. He showed compassion by not bringing upon them the threatened destruction (Jon 3:10).

Jonah was furious and he yelled to God, “O Lord, this is what I said would happen when I was back home! That is why I ran off to Tarshish. I knew that you are a kind God who shows mercy. You aren’t easily angered. You are rich in love. You would rather change your plans for calamity into a program of forgiveness! Lord, if you won’t kill them, kill me! I’m better off dead!”

The Lord replied, “Do you have the right to be angry?” (Jon 4:1-4).

Jonah went to a hillside outside of the city and made himself a shelter of leafy branches. He sat in its shade waiting to see what would happen to the city. Then the Lord God made a broad-leaf vine grow up over Jonah’s shelter to give shade for his head. Jonah was happy with the vine’s shade. Then the Lord sent a worm that chewed the vine and it withered. The sun rose and the Lord sent a scorching east wind. The sun beat down on Jonah’s head and he felt dizzy. Jonah prayed to die, “It would be better for me to die than to live!”

But God asked, “Jonah, do you have a right to be angry about the vine?”

Jonah replied, “I do. It is right for me to be angry enough to die.”

The Lord said, “You’re concerned for this vine. You did nothing for the vine. You neither planted it nor cultivated it. It sprang up one night and it died the next night. But, Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand childlike people who can’t tell their

right hand from their left. There are also many animals in the city. Shouldn't I be concerned about this great city?" (Jon 4:5-11).

### GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

### SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did the sailors suffer as a result of Jonah's running from God?
2. Who would suffer if you were to run from God?
3. How did God get Jonah to obey him and go to Nineveh?
4. How did the people of Nineveh react when they heard Jonah's message?
5. Why was Jonah angry at God?
6. Why do people today get angry at God?
7. How can we help someone who is angry at God?

### LIFE-LESSONS

1. **God speaks to people.** The book of Jonah begins and finishes with the Lord speaking to Jonah. God used Jonah to communicate his message to Nineveh.
2. **There is hope for a people group who deserves divine punishment when God acts in their favor.** God wanted to save the wicked city of Nineveh. He acted to liberate Nineveh from destruction:
  - He saw the city (Jon 1:2; 3:10).
  - He sent his prophet to the city (Jon 1:2).
  - He gave his prophet a message to proclaim to the city (Jon 3:2).
  - He disciplined the unwilling prophet in order to get him to Nineveh (Jon 1:4-2:10).
  - When the people turned from their evil ways, God saved the city from destruction (Jon 3:10).
3. **God's salvation plans include everyone.** Everyone in Nineveh, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth (Jon 3:3-5). The king of Nineveh called for everyone in the city to cry out to God, to turn around, to stop doing evil and stop doing violence (Jon 3:6-9).
4. **God is omnipotent and is in charge of the whole world: the sky, the sea, the earth, the animals, the plants and the human beings.** God ordered the storm and he calmed the sea (Jon 1:15). God prepared a large fish to swallow Jonah (Jon

1:17). He made a vine grow (Jon 4:6). He caused a worm to attack the plant (Jon 4:7), and he sent a scorching east wind (Jon 4:8).

5. **God offers everyone salvation from destruction; however, only those who hear the offer, believe in God and repent from their sins are liberated from divine punishment.** Nineveh's residents heard God's message (Jon 3:4). They believed in God (Jon 3:5). They repented of their wicked behavior (Jon 3:5) and they turned away from an evil life and violence (Jon 3:8).
6. **The one who proclaims God's message should expect the lives of his listeners to be transformed.** When Jonah announced God's message, lives were changed, people believed in God, and they turned away from evil and violence (Jon 3:1-9).

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### Interactive Sharing:

The sailors suffered the terror of the storm and financial loss as a result of Jonah's running from God.

- Invite listeners to share experiences when they ran from God and brought suffering to others.
- Invite listeners to share experiences where they suffered because someone else was running from God.