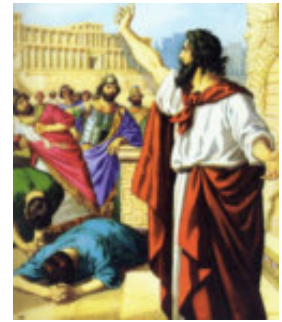




Church of God Sunday School

JONAH

Jonah 1-4



The ancient city of Nineveh (NIN-uh-vuh) was in the empire of Assyria (uh-SIHR-ee-uh). The people of Nineveh were enemies of God and God's people; they worshiped Nebo, an idol. God was angry with the people for their sinful, wicked ways. He chose Jonah (JOH-nuh) to be the prophet who would go and preach to those people. The Lord told Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me."

But Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh, though he knew he *should* obey God. Jonah knew that God was compassionate and would give the people of Nineveh a chance to repent, and that was not how Jonah felt they should be dealt with.

Jonah decided to run and hide from the Lord. How foolish for Jonah to think he could hide from God. The Spirit of God is everywhere, and He sees everything. Nevertheless, instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah went to Joppa (JOP-uh). There he found a ship that was leaving for Tarshish (TAHR-shish)! Tarshish was a city of trade that was 600 miles from Nineveh—in the opposite di-



rection! God was not pleased with Jonah's disobedience. God loves obedience from His people.

The ship soon set sail for Tarshish. It had not been on the sea very long before God sent a terrible storm on the water. The sailors rowed hard and tried to manage the ship in the thrashing waves. It seemed the ship would soon break apart! The men began praying to their gods. Any cargo that was unnecessary, they cast overboard, to lighten the load on the ship.

Where was Jonah during this raging storm? Jonah was still asleep! The captain came to him, asking him what he meant by sleeping when he should be calling on his God. But Jonah knew he could not ask God to help them; he was the cause of their trouble!

The poor sailors kept trying to save the ship. They knew that storm was not an ordinary storm, because they said, "Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us."

One way to "cast lots" was for each person to pick a piece of straw, with there being only one short straw in the bunch. Whoever got the short straw was the one the "lot" fell on. In this situation, the person who drew the short straw would be the one responsible for the storm. So, when they had all cast their lots, the "lot" fell upon Jonah!

The men said to Jonah: "Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?"

Jonah said, "I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land."

Hearing that Jonah feared the God who had made the sea and the dry land was frightening to the sailors. When Jonah told the sailors he was trying to flee from his God, they really became afraid! The men wanted to know what they could do to Jonah to please the Lord.

They wanted the sea to be calm again. Jonah told them to throw him into the raging water, then all would be calm; but the men did not want to do that.

The storm grew worse, and the terrified sailors tried to row harder to reach land. Finally, they prayed that the Lord would not charge them with causing Jonah's death, and they picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging waves! Immediately, the storm stopped! It was amazing! Then, the sailors really feared the power of God! They offered a sacrifice to Him and made some vows.

But what happened to Jonah? God did not let him drown. He prepared a fish especially for Jonah. The fish was there when Jonah was thrown overboard into

the water. It swallowed him whole! Inside the belly of that fish, God kept Jonah alive for three days and three nights—and for three days and three nights, Jonah prayed!

Think of what it would be like just to be in a fish's belly! Think how terribly awful it would be to be tangled about with seaweed and whatever else the fish might have swallowed.

Inside that fish's belly, Jonah quickly realized his hopelessness. He repented of his disobedience to God and promised to do what God had asked him to do. God heard Jonah's prayer of repentance. God spoke to the fish. The fish swam to dry land; there it vomited Jonah onto the shore.

When Jonah had recovered from his horrible experience of being in the fish's belly, God gave him a second chance. He said, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." Jonah did not run from doing God's will that time! He went straight to Nineveh.

Nineveh was such a large city that it took three days to get through it. Jonah traveled about a day's journey into the city, then he began preaching: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

Forty days! Jonah may have thought to himself, "Just as I suspected; God is going to give the people a chance to repent." Even so, Jonah went everywhere, up one street and down another, through the city, telling everyone of the coming destruction. The people did not ignore Jonah's message either. They listened. After they understood the importance of the message, they *all* put on sackcloth and began to fast, from the least to the greatest of them.

When the king was told of the strange prophet who was proclaiming Nineveh's downfall, he took the warning seriously too. He rose from his throne and took off his kingly robe. He put on sackcloth and sat in ashes to show his own repentance.

The king also proclaimed a fast for the people and for the animals. The animals could not be fed or watered. The people could not eat or drink. They had to sit in ashes and cry out to the Lord and repent of their sinful ways. The king said, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"

When God looked down on the hearts of all those people, He saw they had repented of their sins. His

great compassion and forgiveness did cause Him to turn from what He was going to do to the city of Nineveh, and He decided not to destroy it.

Was Jonah glad? No! God's mercy on the city of Nineveh made Jonah very angry. Jonah just wanted to die! He did not want to look foolish before those people. Jonah told God that he had known before he came to Nineveh that God would spare the city and that was the reason he had fled to Tarshish.

God tried to get Jonah to think if he was doing right by being angry. But Jonah went outside the city to wait and see what would happen to it. He made himself a little booth of tree branches to sit in while he waited.

God watched what Jonah did, then He did something. God wanted Jonah to learn an important lesson, so He prepared a gourd to grow up around Jonah. It gave him some shade from the heat. Oh, Jonah was really glad that gourd was there! But then, God prepared a worm to kill the gourd. When the next morning came, the worm attacked the gourd, and the plant died.



When the sun was high in the sky, God let a strong east wind blow hard upon Jonah. The sun beat down on his head. Jonah suffered so miserably that he wished to die. He was very, very upset that God had allowed the worm to attack the gourd! God asked Jonah if it was right for him to feel angry because

the worm had smitten the gourd.

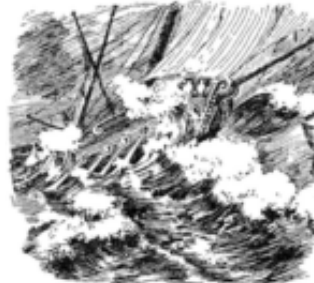
Jonah felt that it was right for him to feel angry. He said, "I do well to be angry, even unto death." In his human thinking, Jonah felt God had been unfair to allow the death of the gourd.

So God reasoned with Jonah. God said if Jonah had that much concern and pity for a gourd plant, which he had not made or grown; then shouldn't the Maker of the universe, have much more concern and pity for His own creatures? Shouldn't He show them mercy, especially when they repent? In this case, God was speaking of the 120,000 people in the city of Nineveh, who did not know what was right from wrong, besides the many animals.

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**MEMORY VERSE:**

*"I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD."*  
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—Jonah 2:9

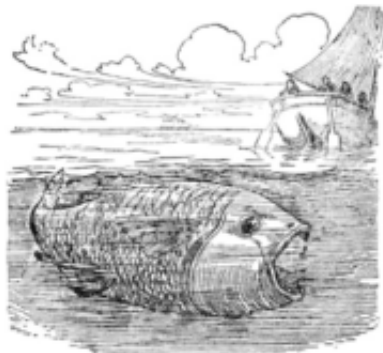
Match the Pictures With the Correct Words



Jonah is asleep in the ship
 Jonah sits under a gourd
 Jonah preaches to Nineveh
 God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh
 There is a terrible storm
 A great fish swallows Jonah



The sea is calm
 The cargo is thrown overboard
 Jonah is on dry ground
 Jonah is thrown overboard
 Jonah boards a ship





Jonah Promises to Go to Nineveh