

SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON
WEEK 31

God shows mercy to Jonah and Nineveh

Jonah 1:1-4:11



DAY 1

God called Jonah to preach to Gentiles • Jonah 1:1-17

READ 

Jonah 1:1-17

EXPLAIN 

The truth of Jonah 1:1-17

Who is in charge of saving? When you treat others as less than yourself, you are acting like it somehow depends on you. That's what Jonah did. Jonah refused to preach to Nineveh because Nineveh was a Gentile city and belonged to Israel's enemy, the Assyrians. Jonah preferred his comfortable life in Israel, which was peaceful and prosperous at that time (2 Kgs 14:25). But even though Jonah fled from God's presence (Jonah 1:3), God was still present (Ps 139:7-10) and still in control of salvation. As the ruler over nature (Ps 29:10), God hurled a violent storm at the ship (Jonah 1:4). As the ruler over chance, He controlled the lot to identify Jonah (1:7; Prov 16:33). Jonah was oblivious to God's intervention (Jonah 1:5), his profession contradicted his actions (1:9), and he preferred death over repentance (1:12). But God still saved. Jonah had fled from preaching to the Gentiles, non-Jews, but now God used him to convert Gentile sailors (1:16)! Jonah had run from God's command, but now by God's command a fish saved Jonah's life. Truly, salvation belongs to God, not to you or anyone else.

ASK 

1. Where did God tell Jonah to go? *Nineveh.*
2. Why didn't Jonah want to go to Nineveh? *The Ninevites were Gentiles and enemies of Israel. Jonah did not want them to be saved.*
3. Is it possible to run away from God? *No, because God is everywhere.*
4. How did God use Jonah to save the Gentile sailors? *God sent a storm, guided the lots, and used Jonah's confession to reveal Himself to the sailors.*

DISCUSS 

1. Have you ever refused to obey God or your parents because it made you feel uncomfortable?
2. God is present everywhere (Ps 139:7-10). Does this encourage you or scare you?

DAY 2

God saved Jonah, and Jonah gave thanks • Jonah 2:1–10

READ

Jonah 2:1–10

EXPLAIN

The truth of Jonah 2:1–10

Do you ever act like you have done something to earn God's salvation? Do you look down on others, as if you are a Christian because you are better than them? Jonah did this in chapter 1, acting like he could decide who deserved salvation. But he was soon very thankful that salvation depends on God! As he sank deeper into the water, he could not save himself. He praised and trusted God as the One who is sovereign and in control. He was on the verge of death, so he cried out to God from the depths of the sea (2:1–6a). Despite Jonah's disobedience, God was still gracious. God heard his cry and sent a large fish to rescue him (1:17). At this point, Jonah believed that salvation belongs to God, at least when he was the one being saved (2:9). You also face death, eternal death (Rom 6:23). Do you look to God alone to save you, or do you think you can still somehow save yourself?

ASK

1. Why did the fish swallow Jonah?
God commanded it to.
2. What did Jonah do in the belly of the fish?
He praised God for hearing his prayer.
3. How was Jonah's heart humbled in the belly of the fish?
He acknowledged God's sovereignty (Jonah 2:1–3), submitted to it (2:4–9), cried out to God from the depths of the sea (2:1–6a), and admitted that salvation belongs to God (2:9).
4. Why did the fish spit Jonah out on dry land?
God commanded it to.

DISCUSS

1. God sent the fish not to punish Jonah, but to rescue him. What would have happened to Jonah had God not sent the fish?
2. Have your parents ever helped you when your own disobedience got you in trouble? Has God shown you mercy when you were disobedient (Rom 5:8)?

DAY 3

God called Jonah to Preach to Gentiles again • Jonah 3:1–10

READ

Jonah 3:1–10

EXPLAIN

The truth of Jonah 3:1–10

God's mercy is very great! God again commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh, but this time, God called Nineveh (literally) "a great city to God," hinting at God's great compassion for the people there (Jonah 4:11). But Jonah still didn't value God's compassion for others. Even though Jonah obeyed (3:1–3), his heart was not in it (cf. 4:1–3). He preached only one day, and his message was brief and incomplete (3:3–4).

Jonah hoped for destruction, but salvation belongs to God. God proved this by using Jonah's reluctant message to bring all the Ninevites to true repentance. Imagine the noise created by a city full of hungry children and livestock! The Ninevites turned from their evil ways and entrusted themselves completely to God (3:8–9). So God saved them, because God abundantly pardons all who repent (Isa 55:6–7). Just as God saved the Gentile sailors, so now He saved the Gentile Ninevites. Does God's mercy upset you, as it did Jonah? Or, like the Ninevites, do you realize the greatness of your sin, repent, and run to Him for mercy?

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. Did Jonah's heart fully belong to God?
No. He preached only one day, and his message was brief and incomplete.
2. Why did God save the Ninevites?
God saved them because He always planned to save Gentiles (Gen 12:3), and because He is full of compassion.
3. What did the Ninevites do in order to be saved?
They repented and trusted. They did not think they could earn salvation. Instead, they turned to God and hoped He would save them.

DISCUSS 

1. The Ninevites were a wicked people, but God still saved them. What does this reveal about God's mercy?
2. The Ninevites did nothing to earn salvation, but God still saved them. What does this reveal about God's grace?

DAY 4*God confronted Jonah's selfish anger • Jonah 4:1–11***READ** 

Jonah 4:1–11

EXPLAIN **The truth of Jonah 4:1–11**

When someone gets a gift they didn't deserve, are you happy for them or angry? Jonah was angry. He did not want the Ninevites to get the gift of God's grace, mercy, patience, and love (4:1–4). He wanted God's **mercy** for himself when he was drowning, but he didn't think the Ninevites were worthy of God's underserved kindness. Jonah wanted to decide who was and who wasn't worthy of grace. So God gave Jonah an object lesson (4:5–7). If Jonah cared so much about a plant (4:8–9), why shouldn't God care about a very large city, especially one containing 120,000 children (4:10–11)? Jonah was totally unreasonable: if he cared about a plant, he should at least care for Nineveh's animals (4:11)! Jonah needed to realize that salvation belongs to God. Is that your great hope? When you see your sin and repeated failure, do you remember that God "is my rock and my salvation, my fortress...on God rests my salvation and my glory" (Ps 62:6–7). Do you trust entirely in God's overflowing compassion (Ps 119:156) and power to save (Zeph 3:17)?

ASK 

1. Was Jonah right to be angry?
No. Since he was happy for God to show mercy to him, he should have been happy for God to show mercy to Nineveh too.
2. What object lesson did God give Jonah?
A plant that grew up over Jonah's head and provided him with shade. The next day God caused a worm to attack the plant.
3. Why was God right to spare the Ninevites?
Salvation belongs to God, so He can save whomever He wants. He has always planned to save Gentiles, and He promises to save those who repent and trust in Him.

DISCUSS 

1. Are you ever discouraged by your own sin and failure? How does the truth that salvation belongs to God encourage you (Ps 62:6–7)?
2. Do you show grace to those who offend you (Matt 18:21–35)?

DAY 5

The sign of Jonah • Matthew 12:38–42

READ

Matthew 12:38–42

EXPLAIN

The truth of Matthew 12:38–42

Despite Jonah's rebellion and anger, in some important ways he prefigured Christ. When the unrepentant Jewish Pharisees asked for a sign to confirm Christ's message, Jesus gave them the sign of Jonah (Matt 12:39; 16:4). Like Jonah's miraculous survival in a fish, Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection would confirm His message (12:40). Jonah preached this message only half-heartedly, but the Ninevites believed his words, repented, and received salvation in a massive spiritual revival (12:41). Unlike Jonah, Jesus preached whole-heartedly. But the Jews of His day refused to repent and believe. So Jesus declared that the Ninevites would rise up at the judgment and condemn them. The Ninevites proved to the unrepentant Jews that salvation belongs not to the self-righteous but to those who respond to God's message and seek His compassion (12:41). The queen of the South will rise up too (1 Kgs 10:1–13), for she came to see Solomon's glory while the hard-hearted Jewish leaders despised the glory of God (Matt 12:42). So be warned: don't depend on your own goodness, but only on the mercy of God.

ASK

1. What is the sign of Jonah?
Jesus would be in the ground three days and nights like Jonah in the fish.
2. Why did Jesus give the Pharisees the sign of Jonah?
They refused to believe and thought they were better than the Gentiles. The sign of Jonah showed they needed to repent and believe like the Gentile Ninevites.
3. Who will condemn the unrepentant Jews at the judgment?
The repentant Ninevites and the queen of Sheba, for they responded to God's message while the Pharisees did not.

DISCUSS

1. Do you think you are going to heaven? If so, why? What are you depending on to get you there (Luke 18:10–14)?
2. Why is it wrong to seek miraculous signs when the Bible clearly presents the truth about God, man, and salvation (Matt 12:39)? How often have you heard God's truth?

NEXT WEEK

God uses Esther to protect His people

Esther 1:1–10:3

