

Jonah

Scripture: Jonah 1-4

Time Period: During the Northern and Southern Kingdoms

The story of Jonah

Jonah was a prophet to the kingdom of Israel. One day, God spoke to Jonah. God said, "Go to the great city of Nineveh. They have been doing very evil things; tell them to stop."

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. The people who lived there were known for the evil things they did. When God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, Jonah ran the other way! Jonah got on a boat and headed to a faraway city.

He didn't want to go to Nineveh at all! But God wanted Jonah to go to Nineveh. When Jonah was on the boat, God sent a storm that tossed the boat up and down on the waves. The sailors on the boat were afraid! They cried out to their false gods for help. They threw overboard the things on the ship to make it lighter.

Wait, where was Jonah? Jonah was not on deck panicking like the sailors. He was below deck, and he was sleeping! The captain woke up Jonah. "What are you doing?" the captain asked. "Get up! Ask your god to save us so we will not die."

The sailors cast lots, like flipping coins or tossing dice, to figure out who had caused this trouble for them. The lot fell on Jonah. They asked Jonah, "Who are you? What are you doing here, and where did you come from?" Jonah replied, "I am a Hebrew. I worship the one true God who made everything."

The sailors were afraid! What had Jonah done to make God angry? The storm was getting worse, and the sailors said to Jonah, "Tell us what to do!"

"Throw me into the sea!" Jonah said. "This storm is my fault!" The sailors threw Jonah into the sea, and the storm stopped. From that moment on, the sailors worshiped the one true God. Jonah was in the ocean! Even if he was a good swimmer, he would eventually sink and drown! God did not let Jonah drown. He sent a big fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

From the belly of the fish, Jonah prayed to God. Jonah thanked God for sending the fish to save him. Then the fish vomited Jonah onto dry land. God said to Jonah, "Go to Nineveh and preach My message." So Jonah went to Nineveh. He walked around the city shouting God's message: "In 40 days Nineveh will be destroyed!"

The people of Nineveh heard Jonah's message and they turned from their evil ways right away. Everyone in Nineveh put on sackcloth and did not eat. Even the king of Nineveh repented. He



told everyone to repent; maybe God would decide not to destroy them.

God saw how quickly everyone in Nineveh stopped doing evil things. He decided not to destroy the city like He had planned.

Jonah was very angry! How could God be so kind to such evil people? "I knew it!" Jonah said.

"This is why I ran away in the first place. I know You are a gracious God. You show mercy to people. You are slow to anger, and You are loving. I knew You would decide to not destroy Nineveh. I am so mad; I just want to die!"

"Is it right for you to be angry?" God asked Jonah. Jonah left Nineveh and made a shelter where he could still see the city. He watched Nineveh; maybe God would change His mind and destroy Nineveh after all. God taught Jonah a lesson. He provided a plant to shade Jonah from the sun. Jonah was glad to have the plant. But the next day, God sent a worm. The worm attacked the plant, and the plant died. Then God sent a dry east wind. Jonah was so hot, he almost fainted. "I want to die," Jonah said.

God asked Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"

"Yes!" Jonah said. "It is right. I'm so angry I could die."

God said to Jonah, "You cared about the plant, but you did not take care of it or make it grow. It only lasted one day. But Nineveh is a big city with more than 120,000 people who do not know right from wrong and also have so much cattle. I created them and care about them. Aren't they more important than a plant?"