

Making The Bible Come Alive

JONAH
THE PROPHET

YOU'RE PREPARED

- Jonah was a Hebrew prophet, the son of Amattai. As a prophet, he was obligated to obey God's instructions to take messages to people.
- Jonah served as a prophet to Israel and Assyria from 793 to 753 B.C.
- Jonah was given an assignment by God to take a message to the people of Nineveh, a city of more than 120,000 people. Nineveh was the most important city in Assyria and would soon become the capital for the entire Assyrian empire. Nineveh was a well-off and very wicked city.
- Jonah acted with disobedience the first time God asked him to deliver a message to the people of Nineveh, warning the Assyrians that they were going to receive judgment if they did not repent of their sinful ways (Jonah 1:1-3). Jonah hated the powerful and wicked Assyrian people.
- The second time God asked Jonah to go to Nineveh to deliver the message, He was obedient. He preached and the city repented and God withheld His judgment. (Jonah 3)

- Jonah is known for have been swallowed by a huge fish that the Lord provided to swallow him up. Jonah remained in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights (Jonah 1:17). But, he did not die there. In fact, it was told that he was praying from inside the fish. His prayer is recorded in Jonah 2:1-9. We are never told in Scripture exactly what type of “huge fish” it was, but that does not really matter as it’s not what’s important to the story. The fact is ... it was a BIG fish, VERY BIG, even HUGE! It was an extremely large aquatic creature that the Lord had sent to swallow Jonah; not eat him alive, just swallow him up! The important detail in Jonah 1:17 is that “... *the Lord PROVIDED a huge fish...*” This wasn’t a surprise occurrence that was unplanned by God. It was a shock to Jonah when he was swallowed up, but not to God. God did what He needed to do to get Jonah’s attention. He provided the fish, at just the right time.
- Even before being swallowed, Jonah showed a lack of care for the sailors on the boat. When a violent storm came up and the seas started to roll, where was Jonah? He was sleeping, in the bottom





of the boat! The sailors had to go and wake him, and ask him to call on his god to save all of them. The sailors wondered who was responsible for the terrible storm that rose up so quickly. Jonah admitted that he was a Hebrew who worships the Lord, the God of Heaven, who made the sea and the dry land. Jonah said, *"I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."* He told them to throw him overboard and that the sea would become calm again. But instead, the sailors tried rowing as hard as they could to get to shore, but the wild seas kept them from being successful. They prayed to the Lord, and then threw Jonah overboard. (Jonah 1:4-16)

- Jonah was a man who dealt with anger issues. He expressed his anger in Jonah 4:1-2 when the Ninevites repented and God showed His mercy on them. God asked Jonah, "Have you any right to be angry?" (verse 4). In Jonah 4:5-9 Jonah wishes to die when God removes his shade and causes the sun to blaze on him.
- Jonah was self-centered in his ways, and lacked compassion. He was more concerned about his own feelings, then he was for the people of Nineveh whom God wanted him to take a prophetic message to. He got angry when the vine that was giving him shade withered up and died (verses 7-9). He got so angry that he wanted to die! God confronted Jonah about these concerning character qualities in chapter 4, verse 11 where He said, *"But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"*

Why do you think this person has been included in God's story?

- **God does not want anyone to perish.** The book of Jonah shows the people of Israel that God does not want to punish people if they are sorry for their wrongful ways. God wants people to repent—the Ninevites and also Jonah. There is really only one verse in the book of Jonah that tells of the message God wanted Jonah to take to the people in this important city of Nineveh, a city of 120,000 people—Jonah 3:4 tells us that Jonah proclaimed for three days in that great city, *"Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."* When the Ninevites heard the message, they repented immediately.

- **We must express our thanks to God when He protects us or spares our life.** Jonah prayed to God in chapter 2, thanking God for delivering him from death in the sea. He knew that he deserved to die because of his disobedient ways. He was grateful. He praised God *“with shouts of grateful praise”* (Jonah 2:9). He vowed to make good on what God was asking of him.
- **God forgives, and sometimes even gives people a second chance.** The story of Jonah show us how God’s heart is for all people and how He chose to forgive Jonah for his disobedient ways and gave him a second chance. God also forgave the people of Nineveh for their sinfulness and chose to not send judgment on them. God does not want to punish people, but wants everyone to come to a place of repentance (Jonah 3). God forgives. He wants to. But, sometimes we make it difficult when we don’t want to change our sinful ways. Or, we run the other way, as Jonah did. (Jonah 1)
- **God loves all people, no matter where they are from.** The story of Jonah shows us that God loves the foreign people who lived in Nineveh (the Assyrians) just as much as his own people, the Hebrews.
- **We are to care about even those people whom we do not know.** When God wants us to tell someone about His love for them, it doesn’t matter if we know them or not. God wants us to care about people everywhere. It doesn’t matter if they are of a different race, or a different age group or from a different country. God wants us to share the love of Jesus with people who are different than us, because we can ... and because they need to know Him and be in relationship with Him, too! (Jonah 4)
- **God has complete control and power over any situation.** He is sovereign. He will see that His plans get carried out, even if it means someone needs to be punished for their disobedience when they choose to not listen or follow God’s instructions or His ways.

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

Pose the following two questions to your children, one at a time. Allow for interaction and discussion, letting them share their thoughts while you guide the conversation.

- What life lessons can I learn from this Bible character about how I should and should not live?
- Based on what I have learned from this Bible character, how can I live in a way that is pleasing to God.



MORE IN GOD'S WORD



Look on a modern-day map. Can you find where Nineveh would have been? Nineveh was the oldest and most-populated city of the ancient Assyrian empire. It was located on the east bank of the Tigris River and encircled by the modern day city of Mosul, Iraq. Can you put your finger on Mosul on the map?

Nineveh was in the middle of trade routes that ran north and south, and also east and west. It was close to the Tigris River and the Khawsar River which meant that it was known for its fertile land and pastures, and good transportation on the rivers by boat.

Now, can you locate where Tarshish would have been? But first, find Joppa. Joppa was one of the oldest seaport cities in Israel. Today, it is known as Jaffa (the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem). Joppa sits high on a cliff that overlooks the Mediterranean Sea. The seaport, of course, would have been at the base of the cliff, on the water's edge. Having the city on the top of the cliff would allow for a pretty view of the Sea as you looked westward across the Mediterranean and to see who would be coming in and out of the harbour port area.