



JONAH
Lesson 10
Jonah 1-4; 2 Kings 14:23-27

What happened before?

God's great prophet Elisha had recently died. He had worked many miracles to show that God was still active in dealing with the people of Israel.

Jehu, a king of the North, destroyed the altars of Baal in Israel, but did not destroy the golden calves in Dan and Bethel. In the south, King Joash had repaired the great temple in Jerusalem.

BIBLE STORY:

Various kings ruled in Judah and Israel; most were bad. These times were not peaceful in Israel or Judah. Though the Northern Kingdom of Israel was growing in power, the Assyrians were also growing in power and would soon take Israel captive.

Jonah was a prophet of God who lived during this period of time, which was about 800 years before Christ. He was from the city of Gath Hopher, which was located in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Jonah was recognized as an important prophet in Israel. Most of the prophets spoke doom upon the people of Israel, but Jonah prophesied victory and told them that Israel's territory would expand. Just as the people hated the prophets who spoke bad things that were going to happen, they must have loved Jonah who spoke of good things.

God told Jonah to go into Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire to tell them that if they did not stop living such wicked lives, He would destroy them. Jonah did not like Nineveh. The people of Nineveh were enemies of God's people. So, instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah fled in the opposite direction. That way, the people in Nineveh would not be warned about how angry God was with them and they would all be destroyed.

Thinking he could get away from God, he took a boat for Tarshish. That was foolish. No one can get away from God. Once he was on board, Jonah went to sleep. God caused a great wind to blow and the ship was rocked by the huge waves. The sailors (evidently, all Gentiles) all called out to the gods they worshipped. The captain was frightened and woke Jonah. "How can you sleep when we are in danger of being shipwrecked? You must pray to your God to save us all from drowning.

Finally, they concluded that some god must be angry with somebody on board the ship. They cast lots to find out who it was. The lot fell upon Jonah. They asked Jonah who he was and where he was

from. He told them he was a Hebrew and that he feared the Lord God of heaven and he was running from the presence of the Lord. Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?" And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me."

The sailors did not want to throw him into the sea, so they rowed as hard as they could to get back to land, but could not because of the storm. They then prayed to Jonah's God—Jehovah—not to bring innocent blood upon them; they then cast Jonah into the sea. As the storm settled, the Gentile sailors offered a sacrifice to the true God and made vows. It is interesting that Jonah did not want to preach to Gentiles, yet these Gentiles on the ship learned about the true God through Jonah.

God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah must have been surprised to find himself alive in the belly of the fish. While he was in the fish, the prophet prayed to God. He believed that the same God who had saved him from drowning in the sea would also save him from dying in the belly of the great fish. He repented while in the fish and wanted another chance to do God's will. At the command of God, the fish vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

God renewed the command to Jonah to go to Nineveh, and Jonah immediately obeyed. The prophet marched through the streets of the great city and cried, "In 40 days, Nineveh shall be overthrown!" He told the people what God had told him to say. In the past, God had destroyed cities like Sodom and Gomorrah because of the people's sins; Nineveh would also be destroyed if they did not repent.

The people of Nineveh believed the word of God that Jonah preached. Because they believed, they repented of their sins. The entire city showed their repentance by fasting and prayer. So powerful was the preaching of Jonah, that even the king of Nineveh repented of the evil he had done. The people even took their animals and clothed them in sackcloth. When the people repented, God forgave them of their sins and did not destroy the city. God does not enjoy destroying wicked people. He had much rather they repent.

Jonah was extremely successful in his preaching. He had reason to be happy, but he wasn't. Jonah was angry and pouted over the fact that God had spared the people. Jonah made a loud and bitter complaint against God. He would rather die than see the Ninevites spared. Jonah decided to camp near the East Side of the city; perhaps he hoped God would change His mind and decide to destroy Nineveh.

The Lord made a plant—a gourd vine—to come up overnight and it provided shelter for Jonah. Jonah was very grateful for the plant as it

sheltered him from the hot sun. But, the next day, when Jonah awoke he saw that a worm had damaged the plant and it withered. The hot sun beat down on Jonah; he was angry that the plant had been destroyed.

God was using the plant to teach the prophet a great lesson. This was only a simple plant, yet it had a lot of value in the eyes of Jonah. Jonah had pity on the plant. Surely Jonah could understand that God would have pity on the one hundred and twenty thousand people who lived in the city of Nineveh. These people were dearer to the God of heaven than Jonah's protecting vine could possibly be to him. Jonah had his priorities wrong. To him, a plant was more important than people were! God had taught him an important lesson. All people are important to God and He wants all people to live right.