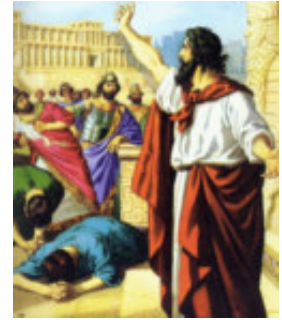




Church of God Sunday School

JONAH

Jonah 1:1 — 4:11



Nineveh (NIN-uh-vuh) was the capital city of the empire of Assyria (uh-SIHR-ee-uh). It was a massive city! Some historians believe it covered at least 1800 acres and that it was the largest city in the world at that time.

All of Assyria, including Nineveh, was Israel's enemy. There was much wickedness and idol worship in that country. Any true Israelite would have been glad to hear that Nineveh's "wickedness is come up before" God. That sounds like God was about to send destruction upon Nineveh.

So, when God told Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it," why didn't he want to go? Jonah knew God was "a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness." God might be planning to give Nineveh another chance if they repented. Jonah did not want to see that happen.

Jonah decided to flee "from the presence of the LORD." By traveling out of the land of Israel, Jonah was removing himself from where God's presence dwelled at that time (in the temple). (Some Jews believed that a prophet only had the gift of prophecy while he was in the land of Israel.)

Jonah went to the seaport city of Joppa (JOP-uh) and bought fare on a ship that was leaving for Tarshish (TAHR-shish). Tarshish was a city of trade that was in the opposite direction of Nineveh.

But God had other plans for Jonah. While the ship was sailing to Tarshish, God sent a terrible storm. It seemed like the ship would be broken by the mighty waves!

The sailors were frightened, and each one began praying to his gods. Any unnecessary cargo was cast overboard, to lighten the load on the ship.

Where was Jonah during this raging storm? He was sound 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 sailors believed someone in the ship had done a terrible wrong, causing God to send this great storm. They decided to "cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us." The "lot" fell upon Jonah!

Jonah was a stranger to the sailors. They asked him where he came from, who his people were, and what his occupation was? 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 had "fled from the presence of the LORD" brought great fear upon the sailors. They wanted to know what they should do to Jonah to calm down the sea. Jonah told them to throw him into the raging water; then all would be calm.

The terrified sailors rowed hard, trying to reach land without success. Finally, they prayed that the Lord would not charge them with causing Jonah's death. They picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea! Immediately, the storm stopped! Then, the sailors "feared the LORD exceedingly." They made vows and offered a sacrifice to the Lord.

But what happened to Jonah? God did not let him drown. He prepared a fish especially for Jonah. 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.

Think of what it must have been like to be in a fish's belly!

It would have been dark, wet, and smelly. Whatever the fish might have swallowed would have been floating around.

Inside that fish's belly, Jonah had plenty of time to think. "Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly." He knew only God could save him



now. God heard Jonah's prayer, and He spoke to the fish. The fish swam to dry land, and there it vomited Jonah onto the shore.

God told Jonah a second time, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." This time Jonah obeyed God.

Nineveh was so large that it took three days to get through it all (walled city and surrounding area). On the first day Jonah entered into the city and cried, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

Jonah went everywhere, up one street and down another, throughout the city, telling everyone of the coming destruction. The people did not ignore Jonah's message. They listened and believed that Jonah was telling the truth. They *all* put on sackcloth and began to fast, from the oldest to the youngest.

When word of Jonah's message came to the king, he took off his royal robe, put on sackcloth, "and sat in ashes" (a sign of deep mourning). The king also proclaimed a fast: the people and all their animals were not to eat or drink. They had to be covered with sackcloth. The people were to 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?"

God saw that the people had "turned from their evil way." His great compassion and forgiveness caused Him to have mercy on the city of Nineveh. He decided not to destroy it.

Did this make Jonah glad? No! Jonah was very angry. In so many words, Jonah told God: "Didn't I say that this would happen before I ever left my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish. I knew You would be merciful!" Jonah wanted to die! God asked Jonah if it was good that he was so angry.

Jonah went outside the city to wait and see what would happen. He made himself a little shelter of tree branches to sit under while he waited and watched.

God caused a gourd (a tall, quick-growing plant) to grow up around Jonah. It gave him some shade from the heat. How glad Jonah was for that gourd! But then, "God prepared a worm," which killed the gourd.

When the sun was high in the sky, God sent a strong east wind to blow hard upon Jonah. The sun beat down on his head. Jonah suffered so miserably that he fainted!

Again, Jonah wished to die. He was very, very angry that God had allowed the worm to attack the gourd! God asked Jonah if it was right for him to feel angry about what had happened to 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.

In so many words, God said to Jonah, "You wanted to see the gourd spared—although you didn't plant it, take care of it, or cause it to grow—but you don't want Me to spare the people of Nineveh?" How was the gourd more deserving of mercy than the people of Nineveh? Shouldn't God show them mercy, especially when they had repented?

God was showing Jonah that all people—Israelites and Gentiles—are precious to Him. He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

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**MEMORY VERSE:**

*"The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*

—2 Peter 3:9  
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Fill in the Blanks:

Nineveh covered at least _____ acres.

Nineveh was the capital of _____.

There was _____ worship in Nineveh.

Nineveh was the largest _____ in the world at this time.

_____ was in the opposite direction of Nineveh.

Word Bank

Tarshish 1800 idol city Assyria
