

THE MAN WHO PRAYED INSIDE A WHALE

[BIBLE TEXT](#) : Jonah 1:1-17; 2:1-10; 3:1-10; 4:1-11.

LESSON 320 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD" (Jonah 2:9).

[BIBLE TEXT in King James Version](#)

Jonah 1:1-17

- ¹ Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,
- ² Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.
- ³ But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.
- ⁴ But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.
- ⁵ Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that *were* in the ship into the sea, to lighten *it* of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.
- ⁶ So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.
- ⁷ And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil *is* upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.
- ⁸ Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil *is* upon us; What *is* thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what *is* thy country? and of what people *art* thou?
- ⁹ And he said unto them, I *am* an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry *land*.
- ¹⁰ Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.
- ¹¹ Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.
- ¹² And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest *is* upon you.
- ¹³ Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring *it* to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

[BIBLE REFERENCES:](#)

[NOTES:](#)

The Prophet's Call

Back in Israel's history lived a prophet by the name of Jonah, who was ordained of God to tell the Chosen People things that were to happen to them in the future. We are not told much about his work in Israel, nor what he spoke concerning the Israelites (**2 Kings 14:25** ²⁵ **He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher**), but an unusual incident occurred in his life to which a whole book of the Bible is devoted.

God called Jonah to go to preach to a heathen city. It was a large city, and the people were very wicked. God saw their wickedness, and decided it was time to send judgment if the people would not repent. God, in His mercy, wanted to give them one more chance.

Whosoever Will

Jonah may have thought it a waste of time to go to Nineveh. They were not God's Chosen People, so why should he bother to preach to them? Or he may not even have wanted them to repent and be saved. He may have wanted the blessings of God to come upon Israel only.

There are people today who think that only a chosen few are going to be saved, and no one else is good enough. But we are happy for the words of Jesus: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). And the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah cried out: "Ho, **every one** that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat" (Isaiah 55:1). Those words offer salvation to everyone. Whosoever will may come and be saved.

A Foreign Missionary

Here was an opportunity for Jonah to be a foreign missionary, but he refused to take it. He turned and ran from the call of God. At Joppa he found a ship that was sailing for Tarshish, so he took passage in order to get as far away from Nineveh as he could, and to try to hide from God. But he could not run from God. God is everywhere, and He saw Jonah get on the ship and start sailing out to sea. May we ever remember that nothing we do is hidden from God.

God had given Jonah a work to do, and that call stood. Things were going to happen to Jonah that would make him willing to go to Nineveh.

Jonah was sure that no one knew where he was, and he went down into the bottom of the ship and went to sleep.

¹⁴ Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.

¹⁵ So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

¹⁶ Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.

¹⁷ Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah 2:1-10

¹ Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly,

² And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, *and* thou heardest my voice.

³ For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.

⁴ Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.

⁵ The waters compassed me about, *even* to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.

⁶ I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars *was* about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.

⁷ When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.

⁸ They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.

⁹ But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay *that* that I have vowed. Salvation *is* of the LORD.

¹⁰ And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry *land*.

Jonah 3:1-10

¹ And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

² Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

³ So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

⁴ And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

⁵ So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

What a relief it was that he was not going to Nineveh! But his rest was to be very short. Soon a fierce storm arose, and there was great commotion on the ship. The seamen were hurrying about, throwing things overboard in order to lighten the ship so it would not break in pieces. As they worked they were crying to their heathen gods to save them from death. Still Jonah slept!

Spiritual Slumber

How like people who have backslidden from God was Jonah! They go on in their sins, thinking they are having a good time. Satan has soothed them to sleep, spiritually, and they are not alarmed by the sin and threatening judgment all around them. If they do not waken in time, judgment will overtake them and they will be lost forever.

The shipmaster, a sinner, had to come to waken Jonah to spare him from death. He told him to pray to his God, the God of Israel, and ask for His mercy so that they would not all drown.

Living for Others

God had sent this storm to punish Jonah, and all the people on the ship had to suffer with him. No person lives only to himself. One who lives a godly life brings blessings to others just by being good. And likewise, an evil person makes others unhappy because of the kind of person he is. Just think of all the trouble that Jonah brought to the mariners of the ship on the way to Tarshish because of his disobedience.

The storm was so unusual that the seamen thought there must be someone to blame. They cast lots to find out who it was. God let the lot fall to Jonah. When Jonah was found out, he told the men all about God's call for him to go to Nineveh and that he was running from it.

There was still some good in Jonah. He asked the seamen to throw him overboard so that the storm might stop and the rest of the men be spared. Of course they did not want him to drown, and they rowed hard to try to ride out the storm; but finally they had to give up — and overboard did Jonah go. Immediately the storm ceased.

But that was not the end of the story. Jonah did not drown, as one would have supposed. There were still more than 120,000 Ninevites who needed to hear the Word of God, and God still meant that Jonah should go to preach to them.

The Prepared Fish

God had prepared a fish to swallow Jonah so that he would not drown. Many people do not like to believe that a whale could swallow a man, and that the man could remain alive inside it. Jesus confirmed that it happened (**Matthew 12:40** ⁴⁰ **For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth**). Besides that, there are records in modern days of a man having been swallowed by a whale and the whale captured and the man removed alive. It is possible for a whale to swallow a man, and the man live. But in Jonah's case, it was a specially prepared fish that God had waiting to receive Jonah when he was thrown from the ship. Inside that fish Jonah prayed.

Jonah's Prayer

Let us observe Jonah's prayer. He prayed as a lost sinner

⁶ For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered *him* with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

⁷ And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:

⁸ But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that *is* in their hands.

⁹ Who can tell *if* God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

¹⁰ And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it* not.

Jonah 4:1-11

¹ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

² And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, *was* not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou *art* a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

³ Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for *it is* better for me to die than to live.

⁴ Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

⁵ So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

⁶ And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made *it* to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

⁷ But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

⁸ And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, *It is* better for me to die than to live.

⁹ And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, *even* unto death.

¹⁰ Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

¹¹ And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city,

who is in trouble, and God heard him. His prayer sounds very much like that of David, which perhaps Jonah had read: "This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Psalm 34:6). Think of the mercy of God! Even when we have caused our own troubles, if we repent and call upon God, He will hear us and deliver us from them.

Now Jonah was willing to do anything God wanted him to do. And it was not yet too late. Out of the belly of the fish he prayed, and far up in Heaven God heard. No matter where we are, we are never too far from God for Him to hear our cry. But we must be honest. We must mean what we say when we promise to follow Him wherever He leads us.

And did you notice that Jonah brought thanksgiving into his prayer? The Apostle wrote: "With thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6). Jonah was desperately in earnest, and had to have an answer to his prayers; so he was grateful for God's mercy, and he was willing to pay his vows. Again we notice how his prayer was like that of the Psalmist, who prayed: "Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: and call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Psalm 50:14, 15). First, we thank God for His mercies and His past blessings, then we pay the things we have promised to God; then we get the blessing.

To the Work

Jonah had prayed and God had heard him and caused the fish to vomit him upon the land. Can you imagine how Jonah felt when he saw the land and sky, the trees and grass? For three days and nights he had been in pitch-darkness inside the fish, with seaweeds wrapped around his head, and now he could see again. He had no time to rest nor even to think about it, for immediately the call came again: "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." God's message had not changed. Jonah had had some strong discipline to fit him for the task, but the work of God was still the same.

Jonah got right up this time, and started for Nineveh. He preached exactly what God told him to preach: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

The Revival

The result of that sermon was such as every evangelist hopes for. The whole city repented. When the king heard Jonah's message, he took off his royal robes and put on sackcloth. He sent word into all his realm that everyone should humble himself and pray and fast. No one, not even the animals, was to eat any food nor drink water while they called upon God to forgive them. He told them they were to cry mightily unto God. They were to pray until they received an answer. They were to pray in such a way as to show God they meant what they said. That was true repentance, which brings salvation.

They were not only to repent of past sins, but they were not to sin any more. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7). This heathen king of Nineveh knew that it was necessary to forsake one's sins in

wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and *also* much cattle?

order to be saved.

How happy Jonah should have been that all the inhabitants of that great city turned to God! Think how happy we are when we see one soul pray through to victory. How great must have been the rejoicing when 120,000 people gave their hearts to God! What a miracle – a much greater miracle to see that many people repent at once than the fact that Jonah came out of the fish after three days!

But Jonah wasn't happy. He had preached that the city would be destroyed in 40 days, and now it was not going to happen after all. So Jonah pouted. He went out of the city and made himself a little booth and sat down and wanted to die. Then God showed Jonah an object lesson. He caused a gourd to grow in the night to give shade to Jonah as he sat in his booth. Jonah was happy for it. But the next night a worm ate through the stem and the plant died. Again Jonah was left sitting in the sun, and it made him angry.

God asked Jonah to be reasonable. Jonah had had nothing to do with making the plant grow. Why should he be so concerned when it died? How did that plant compare with the people of Nineveh? Should not God show mercy to those many people who in their ignorance had been sinners?

QUESTIONS

1. What kind of people were the Ninevites?
2. What was the message Jonah was to preach to them?
3. What did Jonah do instead of going to Nineveh? Why?
4. What evil did God bring upon Jonah and the people with him?
5. How was the trouble stopped?
6. What did Jonah do in the fish?
7. Where did Jonah go as soon as he was out of the fish?
8. What did the people do when they heard Jonah preach?
9. How did Jonah feel about the results of his preaching?
10. What is the greatest miracle of this lesson?