

Overtured by Grace

July 7-13

Jonah

Adult Lesson Book



Western Camp

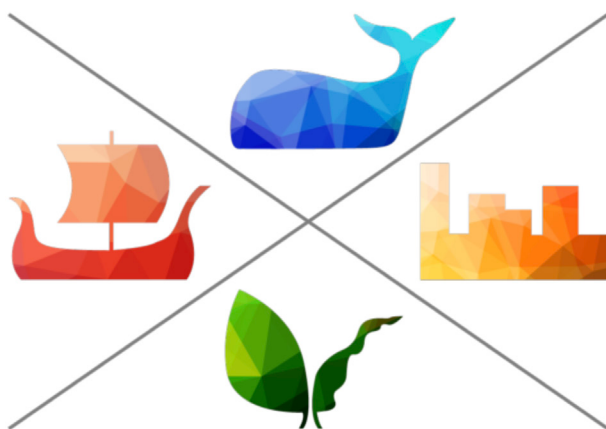
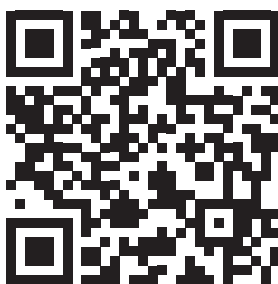
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Online Lesson Book



Introduction

Regardless of one's upbringing, almost all individuals are somewhat familiar with the book of Jonah. Whether it's a story they've been told from their children's Bible, or they've seen pop culture references, Jonah is one of the most recognized books of the Bible, and is definitely the best known of the minor prophets. While the book itself is only forty-eight verses, it has demanded a lot of attention. While most remember the story of the great fish, the work of our great God often gets overlooked.

The story of Jonah is a historical record of something that happened. He is the only prophet God sent to a foreign people. But there is far more to the book. Jonah is a satirical comedy. It tells the story of a prophet who fails in every single task given to him. God tells him to go east, and he heads west. God says go preach, and Jonah falls asleep. God saves lost people, and the prophet pouts in response.

Author

In 2 Kings 14:25, "Jonah son of Amittai" appears as someone prophesying during the reign of Jeroboam II (782-753 B.C.). Jonah's ministry as a prophet had already served Israel well, as his message allowed the nation to prosper.

Date

While the book contains no time stamp within the text, many scholars believe the events that take place in the book of Jonah occurred in the eighth century B.C. Many estimate the book of Jonah was written anywhere between the eighth century and the end of the third century. The book was most likely written between the sixth and fourth centuries based upon the language and descriptions used in the book.

Nineveh

Jonah's call was to head north and east, yet he attempted to head south and west. Jonah was called to go to Nineveh, in the heart of Assyria (modern day Iraq). Instead, he fled to Tarshish, a location potentially in Spain or in the Mediterranean near Italy—the opposite direction! At the peak of Nineveh's prosperity, it was surrounded by a wall nearly eight miles in length. The people of Nineveh were everything opposite of what God's people held dear. The Ninevites were known for their cruelty, killing men, raping women, ripping babies from wombs, and crushing children's heads against rocks. They often skinned their victims and impaled their bodies, leaving them to die. They often forced parents to watch their children get burned alive before murdering the parents. They also buried victims up to their necks in sand and left them to die of hunger, thirst, or wild animal attack. Entire cities would commit suicide rather than fall into the hands of the Ninevites.

Outline of Jonah

I. First Commissioning - Jonah at Sea (Chapters 1-2)

- a. Jonah's Initial Call (1:1-3)
- b. Jonah's Rebellion and Subsequent Consequences (1:4-16)
- c. Jonah's Deliverance (1:17-2:10)

II. Second Commissioning - Jonah at Nineveh (Chapters 3-4)

- a. Jonah's Second Call (3:1-3)
- b. The People of Nineveh's Response (3:4-10)
- c. The Angry Prophet's Response (4:1-10)



Major Themes Within Jonah

Grace & Mercy

God's grace and mercy is on full display in the book of Jonah. Within this book, God shows grace and mercy upon the pagan Ninevites, the pagan sailors, and the rebellious prophet Jonah.

Purpose of Jonah

God's grace is much bigger than we can comprehend, and much more expansive than what we are comfortable with.

Love of "Others"

What's remarkable about the book of Jonah is the great care for others that is on display.

It's clear from reading Jonah that God had an interest in expressing this love to others (Jonah 4:2), yet God's chosen instrument did not share in that sentiment. It appears he couldn't care less about the sailors in the boat or the citizens of Nineveh; he was far more concerned with his own comfort and preferences. Yet the sailors (1:14), their captain (1:6), and the king of Nineveh (3:9) expressed a deep concern, care, and love for others. This serves as a subtle rebuke toward those who know God; challenging them to think outside of themselves.

Mission

When grace, mercy, and love for the outsider meet, we find mission. While Jonah's heart appears small, unmerciful, and uninterested towards unbelievers, we find that God is the opposite! God breaks down walls and leads people out into the world with good news and forgiveness. The book of Jonah highlights the mission of God to reconcile people back to him.

The Sovereignty of God

Throughout the book of Jonah, God's supreme authority and control are on display. In Jonah, we see God control the storms (1:4), the lot (1:7), the great fish (1:17), the plant (4:6), the worm (4:7), and the winds (4:8).

Jonah Chapter 1

Into The Storm

Introduction

Jonah is often spoken of as if he was a “hero” in the Bible. But as we will read and study in the coming weeks, Jonah doesn’t actually have many qualities that we would want to emulate. In Chapter 1, we see God call Jonah to go to Nineveh and warn them of coming wrath of God. Instead of fulfilling his calling, Jonah runs in rebellion, causing grave consequences not only for himself, but also for others in his presence.

Main Idea: It is impossible to run from God.

Conversation Starter

Q. Can you think of a time when God has prompted you to do something difficult or inconvenient? How did you respond?

Q. What do God’s initial call and Jonah’s response tell us about Jonah? What do they tell us about God? Follow Up: Is there someone in your life that incites the same feeling that Jonah had? If they were to show up at church this Sunday, would their presence make you want to flee? Follow Up: What do we reveal about ourselves when we fail to love the “unlovable” in the way God has loved us?

Q. In the midst of the storm, the men on the boat cried out to their “gods.” Instead of calling out to the true and living God, Jonah was fast asleep. When storms hit in your life, do you cry out to God, or attempt to rely on something else? Follow Up: Jonah is surrounded by pagans seeking deliverance while he is asleep at the bottom of the boat. Do you see any correlation between Jonah’s actions and yours as you interact with unbelievers on a day-to-day basis?

Q. In verse 9, Jonah describes God as the one who “made the sea and the dry land.” In light of that, his attempt to flee seems quite foolish. Can you think of a time when you acted in a way that now seems foolish, considering what you know about God?

Jonah Chapter 1

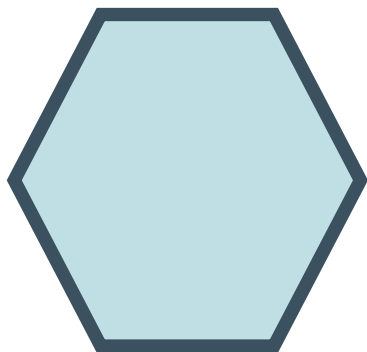
Into The Storm

Q. Verse 13 is a key verse in this passage. Amid the storm, the sailors reached a point where they realized they could not save themselves, and turned to the Lord in verse 14. What storms are you facing? What is God breaking apart to wake you up spiritually? Where do you need to cease from trying to save yourself?

Personal Reflection and Application

Q. Do you picture God as a God of the nations, or just your own little world? Is God's grace limited to only good people?

Q. How does the reality of who God is, challenge some of your assumptions about how He works?



Jonah Chapter 2

Divine Interruption: God Speaks to a Fish

Introduction

Jonah's rebellion has finally caught up to him and he's starting to realize it. In this passage, Jonah cried out to God from the belly of a great fish. Here we aren't simply reading a newspaper article reporting what happened, we get a glimpse into the human experience and personal struggle.

Main Idea: We are never far from the presence of God. He always hears the prayers of His people.

Conversation Starter

Q. Can you think of an unpleasant time in your life where God used it to refocus your attention back to him?

Q. According to verse 2, how does God respond to Jonah's prayer of desperation?

Q. Why is it so important that we understand both our need for forgiveness (i.e., due to our sinfulness) and the immense breadth of God's love (salvation comes from the Lord)? What happens if you neglect to acknowledge either of these?

Q. Verse 9 can be viewed as a theme of the entire Bible. Jonah declares, "Salvation belongs to the Lord." What do you think he means by this?

Q. In this passage, God saves Jonah from an inward struggle before delivering him from external difficulties.

Q. What do you make of this? Have you experienced something like this before? What does this teach us about God?

Jonah Chapter 2

Divine Interruption: God Speaks to a Fish

Personal Reflection and Application

Q. Prayer is not simply receiving things that we want from God. Prayer is more about aligning our hearts, minds, and wills with who God is.

Q. What helps you connect with God in your prayer life?

Challenge

Jonah's prayer in this chapter is a psalm of thanksgiving. Jonah thanks God for using the fish to save him from drowning. Take some time this week to compose your own psalm of thanksgiving. This could be about a time God delivered you from trouble, brought you to Jesus, or some other miraculous thing He has done for you.

Other examples you can look at: Psalms 30, 34, 66, 73, 105-106, 111-118.



"Some men are brought to God by gentle means—they are drawn by soft but mighty bonds. Still, a much larger class of persons remains. They must not be handled softly but must be dealt with heavily. The picklock will never open their hearts there must be the crowbar, or even the battering ram. Some hearts can never be captured for God and for truth except by storm."
- Charles Spurgeon

Jonah Chapter 3

Our God is a God of Second Chances

Introduction

What's the worst sermon you've ever heard preached? My guess is that it's probably not even close to being as bad as the one Jonah preached to Nineveh. After being vomited ashore, Jonah marches to Nineveh to proclaim the message he has been sent to preach: repent or be destroyed. Yet it wasn't the quality of Jonah's message, but the quality of his God that turned the city back to Him. The biggest miracle in the story of Jonah isn't that he survived in a fish, but that an entire city repents! Here we see a city – a people who were far from God – repent of their sins. God relented from destroying them.

Main Idea: God is one of second chances. He forgives the repentant.

Conversation Starter

Q. Have you ever received a second chance to do something that you had previously failed at? How did that feel? Did you do anything differently the second time around?

Q. How does the structure of Jonah 3:1–3 parallel 1:1–3? What are the similarities? What are the differences?

Q. Why do you think the Ninevites responded in the way they did? What did they recognize about themselves?

Q. The Hebrew word for “repentance” occurs four times in Jonah. All four of them are within the verse of 8-10, which signals the emergence of a new and important theme. What do you think that is?

Q. How does God respond to the repentance of the Ninevites (3:10)?

Q. What does God's response teach us about His character?

Jonah Chapter 3

Our God is a God of Second Chances

Personal Reflection and Application

Q. Is God calling you into repentance today? What, if anything, is holding you back?

Challenge

As believers, God has called us to join Him on a mission in making disciples. Take some time to think of people in your life who don't know Jesus. Pray for them. Where might you see an opportunity to connect with them?



Jonah Chapter 4

A Matter of the Heart

Introduction

Imagine an entire community or city turning to God, and suddenly filling the church. How would you respond? One would hope that we would rejoice. Yet, in Chapter 4, Jonah provides a snapshot of a propensity in all of us. It would be inconvenient for us. We wouldn't be able to claim our usual seat. We'd have to open our homes to make room for the newcomers. We might not be served and catered to in the way we would prefer. We might have to sit with people who hurt us.

In this chapter, we get to see God's desire for our hearts and His patience towards us.

Main Idea: God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love.

Conversation Starter

Q. When you were a little kid (or when you still act like one), how did you (or, how do you) usually express your anger?

Q. According to Jonah 4:2, why did Jonah flee to Tarshish (1:3)?

Q. According to 4:2, what is God like? And why do you think Jonah has a problem with this?

Q. Think back to week one of this series, where we read about Jonah's experience on the ship. How does Jonah's attitude towards the Ninevites compare to the sailor's attitude to him? How does God's compassion compare to Jonah's? Follow Up: Does this challenge the attitudes you have toward people?

Q. What does the interaction between Jonah and God in verses 3-4 teach us about our relationship with God?

Jonah Chapter 4

A Matter of the Heart

Q. What do you think Jonah was waiting to see in verse 5?

Q. In the closing verses of this chapter, we see God continually provide for His obstinate prophet. Follow Up: In your most stubborn times, how has God expressed grace and mercy in your life?

Q. What do verses 10-11 teach us about God?

Personal Reflection and Application

Q. We are much like Jonah. We want to receive God's forgiveness, but we are not always willing to extend it to others. Who is it that you might need to extend forgiveness to?

Q. How is God calling you to grow in compassion for the lost?

Challenge

When God gave us grace, we received something we did not deserve. Think of someone in your life who does not deserve grace and be intentional about showing it to them over the coming week. This can be a family member, co-worker, neighbor, or even someone in your group!



Jonah

“Overturned by Grace – A Transformation of Heart”

A study in Jonah through the lens of God’s sovereign grace and our call to rejoice in His mercy.

Main Idea: God’s grace is not merely a second chance—it is an act of divine mercy that disrupts our expectations and leads us into deeper trust in Him. Jonah resisted God’s grace, while the Ninevites embraced it. We are invited to rejoice in God’s sovereign mercy rather than resist it.

Key Scripture Passages

Jonah 3:4-10 – Nineveh repents, and God relents.

Jonah 4:2 – Jonah struggles with God’s mercy, revealing a heart resistant to God’s expansive grace.

Jonah 4:10-11 – God’s ultimate lesson on compassion and sovereignty.

Theological Perspective

God’s grace is meant to transform the affections of our hearts. In Jonah, we see two responses to grace:

The Ninevites’ Response – Humble repentance and acceptance of mercy.

Jonah’s Response – Anger and frustration at God’s expansive grace.

True repentance isn’t just about escaping judgment but embracing new life in God. Grace is meant to move us toward joy, yet Jonah struggled because he had his own ideas of who deserved it.

Q. The Purpose of Grace – Jonah resisted God’s mercy to Nineveh.

Are there times when we resent God’s grace toward others? What does that reveal about our own hearts?

Jonah

“Overturned by Grace – A Transformation of Heart”

Q. Rejoicing in Mercy – Grace is meant to bring joy, not just relief. How does Jonah’s attitude contrast with true joy in God’s mercy?

Q. The Ninevites vs. Jonah – Why did the Ninevites rejoice while Jonah complained? What does that teach us about how humans tend to respond to God’s grace?

Q. God’s Perspective vs. Ours – In Jonah 4:10-11, God shows that His heart is for people. How does this challenge us to view others differently?

Personal Reflection and Application

Have there been times in your life when you struggled with the idea of God showing grace to someone you felt didn’t deserve it? How can we learn to celebrate God’s sovereign grace rather than resist it?

Lesson outline adapted from Jonah Study Guide
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