

## JONAH: FIERY HARBINGER OF DOOM

Lesson Scripture: Jonah 3

Focus Scripture: Jonah 3

*Key Verse: "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it."*

*Jonah 3:10 (NRSV)*

### JONAH 3 (NRSV)

1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying,

2 "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you."

3 So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across.

4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

5 And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

6 When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

7 Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water.

8 Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands.

9 Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish."

10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

### JONAH 3 (KJV)

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.

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.

**KEY TERMS**

- **Fast** – Abstinence from food and/or drink as an element of private or public religious devotion.
- **Sackcloth** – A coarsely woven fabric, usually made of goat's hair; used to display a person's state of repentance or sorrow.

**INTRODUCTION**

Jonah is likely the most unique of all the prophets. Out of all the seers listed in the Bible, Jonah is the sole prophet to directly rebel against God. In his attempt to escape God's instructions to warn the people of Nineveh, he takes a boat in the opposite direction, to the city of Tarshish. The consequence of his disobedience was quite severe, with his trip cut short by a turbulent storm. In ancient times, a storm that arose during a voyage was a sign of God's displeasure. Jonah confessed that he was probably the cause of their dangerous situation, and he was quickly thrown overboard, and ultimately swallowed by a large fish. It would only be after this fateful outcome that Jonah obeys God, and makes the long journey to Nineveh.

In chapter 3, the reader finds Jonah receiving a second chance to carry out his mission. This time Jonah proceeds with a message to the Assyrians to repent or face God's wrath. Jonah's initial reluctance to complete his assignment may arise from at least two factors. First, the Assyrians

were a threat to God's people. Their idol worship easily influenced the Jewish people to dabble in forbidden religious practices, which may discourage Jonah from offering them redemption from God. Secondly, the Assyrians also commanded strong armies and were a threat to the continued survival of both Jewish nations. Jonah had hoped that the Assyrians would ignore the prophecy and be condemned by God. His doomsday message, however, did not fall on deaf ears. The King of Nineveh ordered a fast and a time of prayer. The people would be spared from God's wrath and were given a second chance.

**TELLING THE BIBLE STORY**

The book of Jonah is not written in the first person, but instead is authored by an observer or storyteller. Jonah is originally from the small Galilean village of Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14:25), which is near the town of Nazareth. He ministered during the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel, around 793-753 BCE. His story begins in the northern Jewish nation of Israel and continues on the Mediterranean Sea. He eventually is expelled from the fish and has to travel nearly a thousand miles to reach his divinely appointed destination.

The story of Jonah is a story of second chances. He did not start his ministry as a fiery prophet, boldly preaching for repentance. Instead, his stance against God's direction is unusual for the Bible, though it should be reconsidered as a

normal human response. He has no affection for the people of Nineveh, nor does he see the merit in God’s decision to offer repentance and salvation. The story, however, illustrates God’s mercy to everyone. Just as the people of Nineveh received a second chance, so did Jonah. His revolt against God could have resulted in his death, and God’s selection of another vessel to deliver this message. Instead, the arduous journey and near-death experience emboldened the young prophet to trust God and press forward with the message he was assigned to give. Initially the task to go to Nineveh was solely intended to awaken the Assyrian inhabitants from their sinful ways. However, the enhanced journey in the belly of a whale allowed Jonah to become a stronger prophet and proclaimer of God’s word. It is an example of how adversities enrich the experiences of God’s people to carry out the greater work that lies ahead.

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is found in many other similar wisdom phrases. The teacher must first receive and master the lesson being instructed. When someone attempts to teach and instruct others, without heeding the wisdom of their own words, they are open to being criticized for their hypocrisy or lack of authenticity. How can someone teach others on financial matters, when the teacher is unable to handle their own bank account? How can one criticize a parent for the behavior of a child, when their own child lacks discipline? How can one proclaim faith in God when he lacks hope for what the future holds? In Luke chapter four (v. 23), Jesus quotes a popular proverb by saying, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum’” (Luke 4:23). Jesus addressed his potential critics by recognizing their need to see a sign of the prophet’s power. Jonah received a harsh lesson from God to reinforce God’s power in his life. This was necessary, in order for him to be effective in his own ministry. He had to hear his own words and accept God’s power was far greater than his attempted escape

**SANKOFA**

*There are many preachers and teachers who don’t hear themselves. – African Proverb*

The lesson that this proverb espouses

from his responsibilities. The message applies to every teacher, preacher, and Christian as well. Anyone who proclaims the word of God and professes their faith in God, must demonstrate in their daily living that they hear the words that they speak.

### CASE STUDY

By 1900, the unwritten color line barring black players from white teams in professional baseball was strictly enforced. Jackie Robinson, a sharecropper's son from Georgia, joined the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro American League in 1945. After a stint in the U.S. Army, he earned an honorable discharge, but not without facing a court-martial for refusing to move to the back of a segregated bus. His play caught the attention of Branch Rickey, general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Rickey was considering challenging segregation laws and practices and bringing an end to segregation in baseball. Rickey signed Robinson to a Dodgers farm team that same year and two years later moved him up, making Robinson the

first African American player to play on a major league team.

Robinson played his first game with the Dodgers on April 15, 1947. He led the National League in stolen bases that season, earning him the title of Rookie of the Year. Over the next nine years, Robinson compiled a .311 batting average and led the Dodgers to six league championships and one World

Series victory. Despite his success on the field, however, he encountered hostility from both fans and other players. Members of the St. Louis Cardinals even threatened to strike if Robinson played. Baseball Commissioner Ford Frick settled the question by threatening to suspend any player who went on strike.

After Robinson's historic breakthrough, baseball was steadily integrated. Professional basketball and tennis followed suit in 1950. His groundbreaking

**His (Jackie Robinson) groundbreaking achievement transcended sports, launching him as one of the most visible African Americans in the country, and a figure that black people could look to as a source of pride, inspiration, and hope.**

achievement transcended sports, launching him as one of the most visible African Americans in the country, and a figure that black people could look to as

a source of pride, inspiration, and hope. As his success and fame grew, Robinson began speaking out publicly for black equality. In 1949, he testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee to discuss the appeal of Communism to black Americans, surprising them with a ferocious condemnation of the racial discrimination embodied by the Jim Crow segregation laws of the south. In Robinson's own words, "The white public should start toward real understanding by appreciating that every single Negro who is worth his salt is going to resent any kind of slurs and discrimination because of his race, and he's going to use every bit of intelligence...to stop it..."

### LIFE APPLICATION

There are times when each individual person will wonder whether they are making the right choice. Whether the decision is regarding one's vocation, education, relationship, or finances, everyone will ponder the choices that are made. Those decisions become more complex when they impact other people. Jonah was tasked with notifying the Ninevites of God's wrath upon them, if they did not repent from their sins. However, because of his lack of allegiance to these people,

he ignored the assignment and retreated in another direction. Christians may also be positioned by God to minister in uncomfortable and unfamiliar settings. The call to preach or minister to the poor is not intended to be limited to an exclusive group of people. Instead, God expects each believer to be willing to shift to new frontiers. Otherwise, the gospel message is not authentic and believers become hypocrites in their profession of faith. Each of us must be willing to make sacrifices in order that all may hear the word of God. The journey may be difficult.

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### QUESTIONS

1. When has God directed you or your local church to evangelize and reach people outside of your culture or community?
2. What are some ways you can expand ministry to reach people of other ethnicities?
3. When have you seen God change the hearts of unsaved people who would appear grounded in worldly and sinful lifestyles?
4. What are some signs that God may be launching messengers of hope from your local congregation?

**CLOSING DEVOTIONS**

**Closing Hymn or Song of Praise:** "Take My Life, and Let It Be" – AME Hymn #292

**Closing Prayer:** All the way my Savior leads me, what have I to ask beside? Can I doubt his tender mercy? Who through life has been my guide? Heavenly peace, divinest comfort, here by faith in him to dwell! For I know what e'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well. Precious Lord, I am so grateful that you insured that I was informed of your great gospel message. I give thanks unto you for your mercy that saved me. Now Lord, I realize that as a disciple, I must also be willing to tell others about your great love for us. I need no title to state that Jesus is Lord. I don't need an office in the church

to proclaim, "Jesus saves!" Dear Lord, let my heart be joined to yours and be as bold as these prophets we have studied. Let us all be steadfast missionaries, evangelists, exhorters, and disciples that are not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thank you, Lord, for the opportunity to give good news, when all other news seems bad. We pray together in this local faith community, that many souls will repent and turn to you as we have seen throughout the biblical lessons. Your calling is still clear. Let every soul be saved, in Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Written by Rev. Dr. D. Melynda Clarke

Adapted from "All the Way My Savior Leads Me" – AME Hymn #293

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

**May 24-May 30**

<b>Monday</b>	Matthew 12:38-42 (Jonah's Experience Foreshadows Christ's)
<b>Tuesday</b>	Luke 11:29-32 (Nineveh's Repentance; A Lasting Message)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Jonah 1:1-12 (Jonah Turns Away from God's Call)
<b>Thursday</b>	Jonah 1:13-16 (Sailors Make Vows to the Lord)
<b>Friday</b>	Jonah 4:1-5 (Jonah Resents God's Grace Toward Others)
<b>Saturday</b>	Jonah 4:6-11 (God's Compassion Overrides Jonah's Personal Comfort)
<b>Sunday</b>	Jonah 3 (God's Mercy Prevails)