

25 Jonah the Prophet

The book of Jonah is written like a story, but since Jesus believed its message, we are sure that the events in Jonah really happened. The book shows us that God loves and cares for all the people He has made, and that He would prefer to forgive us than punish us. God wants to save us, not destroy us. The Book of Jonah tells of God's love for the human beings in this world. The Book also has a future meaning about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The writer of the Book of Jonah was probably Jonah himself, the main character.

Where in the Bible is the Book of Jonah? It is a very short book in the prophecy section of the Old Testament. It is the 5th book of the minor, or smaller prophets.

When did Jonah live? He lived about 700 years before Jesus was born.

Where did he live? Jonah lived in the land of Israel. God told Jonah to go to a city called Nineveh in the country of Assyria, about 800 kilometres away.

Background

The Bible calls Nineveh "a great city" (Jonah 1:2). 120,000 people lived there. The city was filled with temples and palaces. The royal palace had 71 rooms. The city had a high wall going all around it to keep out the enemy. The water that the people drank came through tunnels from springs far away. All of this has been found by archaeologists. To read more about what the archaeologists found at Nineveh click [here](#).

In the time of Jonah, Assyria was becoming a very powerful country, and God's people in Israel were afraid that Assyria would attack them. Nineveh was an evil city- an Israelite would never go there.

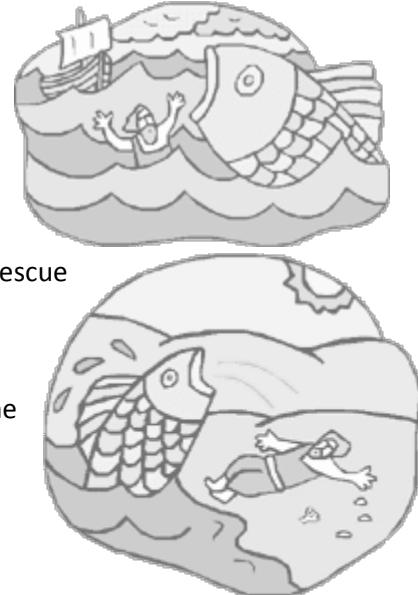
God spoke to Jonah and told him to go to Nineveh and tell the people there to change their ways. They were not doing what God wanted. But Jonah did not want to go! He did not like the job that God had given him to do, so he decided to run away. He went to the west instead of the east. He got onto a boat that was going to Tarshish (the place we know as Spain today), about 5000 kilometres away. But while Jonah thought he could run away from Nineveh, he had to learn that he could never run away from God.

The large fish

Read what happened on the trip in Jonah 1:4-17. Because this story is in the Bible, we believe that it is a true story, and not a "fairy" story, or a legend. What kind of fish swallowed Jonah? Some people say that it was a great white shark. A 6 metre long shark can swallow a man whole. Large sperm whales have been known to visit the Mediterranean Sea. Sperm whales grow up to 20 metres long - plenty of room in there! Whatever the fish was, the Bible says that God sent it to rescue Jonah from the sea.

Inside the big fish, Jonah told God that he was sorry that he did not obey God's words. Jonah asked God to help him. Can you imagine how it must have been in the stomach of the fish? Jonah would have had no light, and he would not have had much air. He would be cold and wet. He may have had some injuries. It would be like being awake inside a coffin.

God answered Jonah's prayer, and the fish vomited Jonah onto a beach.



Jonah travels to Nineveh

Once again, God called Jonah to go to Nineveh. This time, Jonah had learnt his lesson, and went there immediately. He went into the city and gave them God's message: if they did not change from their evil ways within 40 days, God would destroy them and their great city.

The people of Nineveh listened to Jonah. They saw how evil they had been. The king even made a law that everyone had to turn back to God. Read Jonah 3:10.

God would not destroy the people of Nineveh. But Jonah was NOT pleased! Jonah had to learn another lesson. When God forgave the people and saved the city, Jonah was angry. Why might this be? You can read about this in chapter 4 of the book of Jonah.

Jonah had to learn that God cares about all people and wants to save them. This is good news for us living today as well!

The story of Jonah had a message for the future as well. Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights. Jesus Christ told the people that when he was killed, he would be buried in a tomb for three days and three nights, just like Jonah. On the third day, Jesus was made alive again. Jesus knew what was going to happen to him. He used the story of Jonah to help his hearers understand (see Matthew 12:40-41).

What does the story of Jonah teach us?

1. We cannot hide from God. He sees everything we do.
2. God loves those who try to follow Him, and He will protect them.
3. We must do our best to obey the words of God (and His Son Jesus) as we read them in the Bible.
4. If we change our sinful ways, God will forgive us, and we can be His children.

