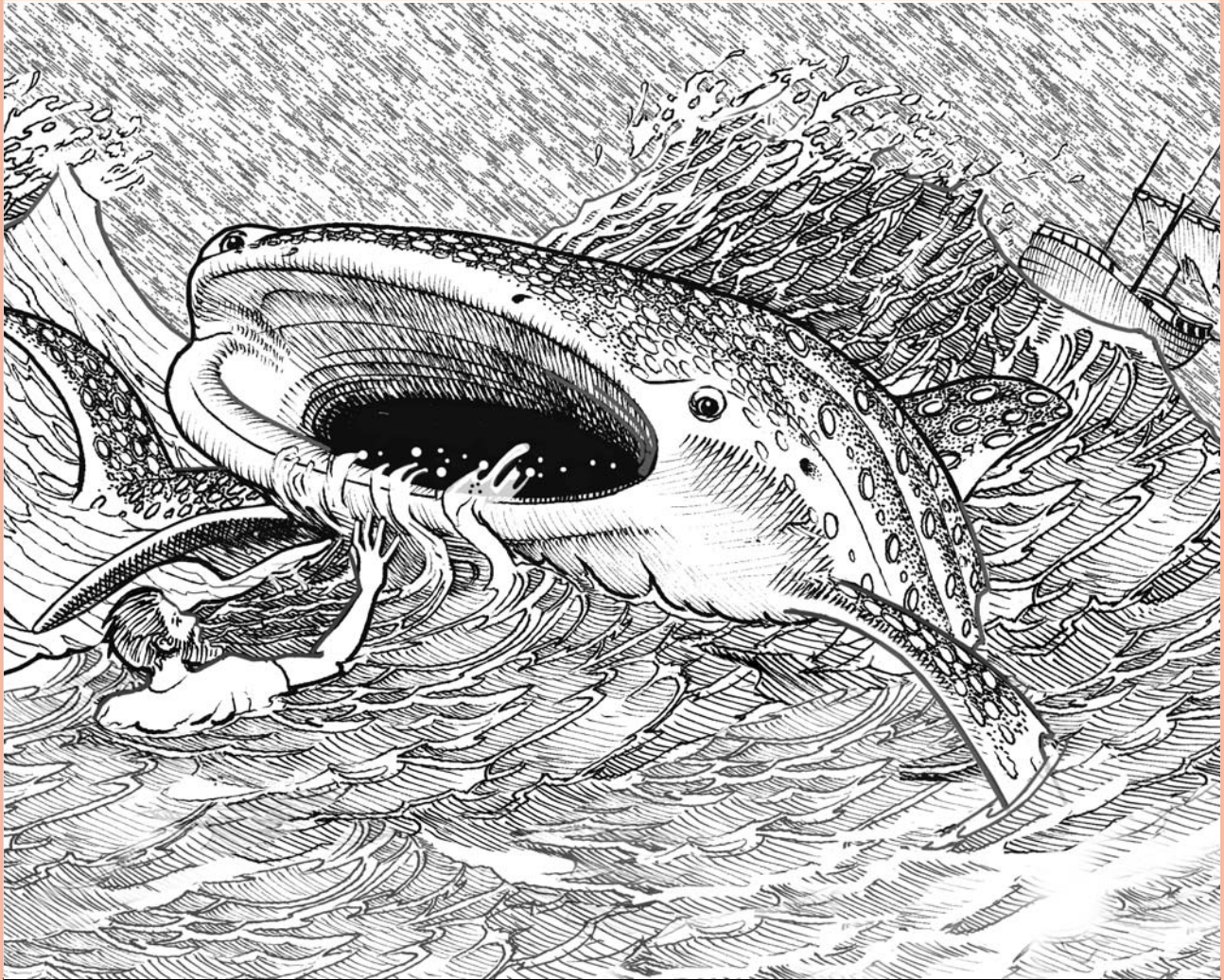
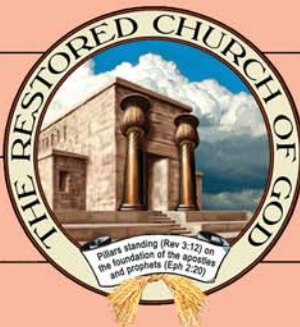


THE RESTORED CHURCH OF GOD

CHILDREN'S BIBLE LESSONS



The Book of Jonah



LEVEL 6
LESSON 9

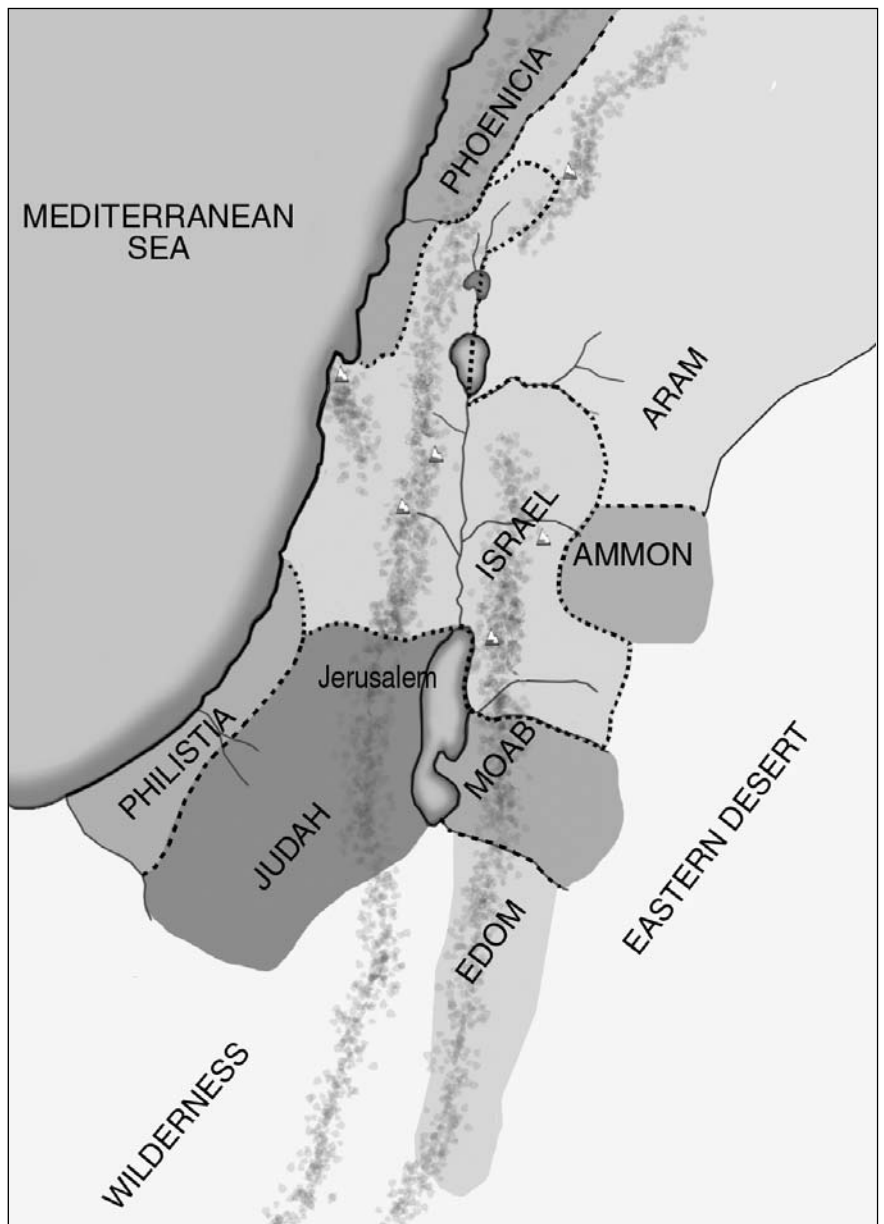
The Book of Jonah

In II Kings 14:25, we are introduced to a prophet named Jonah, who was from Gath-hepher. The name Jonah means “dove.” He lived in the same time period as did the prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Joel (the 8th century B.C.). He was most likely an elderly man at the time we read of him in the book of Jonah.

The Kingdom of Israel

After King Solomon’s death, Israel and Judah divided into two separate kingdoms, each with their own king. In I and II Kings, the Bible gives us some history of the leaders over these two kingdoms.

Throughout history, the people of Israel would prosper in peace and plenty as long as they had a righteous leader. When their king was obedient to the laws of God, he would lead Israel away from idolatry and pagan practices. But once



the righteous leader died, and a wicked one took his place, the people would drift away from obedience to God. Over and over in the books of Kings, when speaking of a particular leader of God's people, the scriptures state, "And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord." This is especially true when describing those who ruled over the kingdom of Israel, which stretched north from Jerusalem to Galilee.

Without strong faithful kings who obeyed God, it was not long before the people of Israel turned to copy the wicked behavior of their leaders. They fell into immorality, worshipping false gods and copying the pagan customs of the nations surrounding them, instead of worshipping the one true God.

God used Assyria throughout various times in history to punish the people of Israel for their disobedience. When Israel would stray from obeying God, He would send them into captivity. God would allow Assyria to invade Israel and carry off His people into other lands as slaves.

Brief History of Assyria

The country of Assyria covered approximately 82,000 square miles and was located in what today is the northern part of Iraq. Nomadic tribes occupied the western region of Assyria, but the fertile eastern region thrived with wheat and barley farms that also contained cattle, pigs, goats and sheep.

Assyria's national power depended on the victories of its army. Assyrian soldiers were known for their severe cruelty in battle. The army of spearmen, archers, charioteers and cavalry was equipped with pikes, bows and short swords. Only part of the infantry wore armor. Cavalrymen rode

without saddles, and chariots had three-man crews. They used siege towers and battering rams to break down walls and defenses of cities they attacked. They were known as "city-smashers" who slaughtered or carried off whole populations in order to break their captives' sense of national identity. The defeated cities were looted, and then often leveled in the aftermath of battle. The Assyrians' fierceness kept neighboring lands trembling in fear. You may want to read through the book of Nahum to see God's description of these people.

The capital city of Assyria was Nineveh. It is first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 10:11. The next time it is mentioned is in the book of Jonah. Described as a great and densely populated city, it is also identified as the capital of the Assyrian empire in II Kings 19:36 and Isaiah 37:37.

Nineveh was a mighty, thriving city surrounded by three moats and five walls, the tallest of which rose up 100 feet and stretched for 60 miles around the city. Nineveh was known for its wide avenues and squares, its extensive public and private libraries, and the beauty of its temples, parks and gardens. Water was brought in from a reservoir located approximately 30 miles away through a system of aqueducts. Language, religion and culture united the people. Merchants dealt in textiles, gold, silver, copper and tin, and craftsmen were known for the excellence and design of their pottery.

It was to this city that God sent his prophet, Jonah.

Jonah Runs Away

The prophet Jonah served as an advisor to King Jeroboam II, the fourteenth king of



Israel (II Kings 14:23-25), who reigned from approximately 792-753 BC. He reigned from Israel's capital city of Samaria. While Assyria was busy conquering other nations, Israel fortified their cities, built up their army, and worked to develop international relations. Jonah was well-known as a diplomat and statesman of Israel.

Jonah prophesied God would restore Israel's boundaries in the reign of King

Jeroboam II "from the coast of Hamath as far as the Dead Sea" (II Kings 14:25). Under Jeroboam II's reign, Israel not only rose to the height of wealth and luxury, but its people sank to the depths of immorality and idolatry, forgetting the lessons of the past.

The book of Jonah, written around 770-760 BC, opens with God instructing Jonah, "Go to Nineveh, that great city, and prophesy its destruction, for I have seen their disgusting wickedness" (Jonah 1:1-2).

Jonah was well acquainted with the cruelty of the Assyrian armies and the sinful environment of Nineveh. While he must have been encouraged that God planned to punish the long-standing enemy of Israel, he was not pleased with the idea of being sent personally to the capital city of the warrior people to deliver the bad news that they were about to be destroyed. He was also aware that because of Israel's disobedience to God, Amos had prophesied that God was going

to send them into captivity (Amos 9:1-4).

If God did not destroy Nineveh, Jonah knew that, at some time in the future, the Assyrians would be used by God to punish the rebellious kingdom of Israel.

Deciding that God's assignment was not to his liking, Jonah ran in the opposite direction to the port city of Joppa, on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. There he bought passage on a ship headed for

Tarshish (modern day Spain) hoping to avoid the task that God had given him. He knew Hebrew tradition said that God could not use someone if they were no longer in the land of Israel, where God was present. So Jonah thought if he went to the Gentile nation of Tarshish, he would have a legitimate excuse to avoid performing the duty God had given him (Jonah 1:3).

Perhaps Jonah hoped that by taking this route, he would be able to elude God. Psalm 139:7 asks of God, “Where shall I hide from your presence?” Read verses 8 through 12, which explain that God is everywhere and sees everything. It is impossible to hide from God!

Jonah should have known better. However, sometimes when we want to get out of doing something we are told to do, we do not think clearly. We may concentrate so hard on avoiding what we should do that our thinking becomes clouded and we act foolishly.

A Storm From God

Once aboard the ship bound for Tarshish, Jonah went below deck and fell asleep. He felt no pangs of guilt or conscience about running away. While he was asleep, God brought a great wind and mighty turbulence to the sea. The storm was so violent that the waves beating over the ship threatened to break it apart and sink it. The sailors had never seen a storm like it. They grew very afraid, and cried out to their false gods to save them, but the storm continued. Hoping to keep the ship from sinking, they began to throw their cargo into the sea to lighten their load.

Meanwhile, the ship’s captain went below to shake Jonah awake. “How can you

sleep? We’re about to sink! Get up and pray to your God. Maybe He will hear and save us!” the captain exclaimed.

Blinking sleep from his eyes, Jonah made his way up to the violently pitching ship’s deck. The sailors were casting lots to see who on board was at fault for bringing this terrible storm upon them. Finally, the lot pointed to Jonah.

“Why have you brought this evil upon us?” they demanded of Jonah. “What’s your occupation? What country do you come from? Of what people are you?”

Jonah responded, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven who made both the sea and the dry land.”

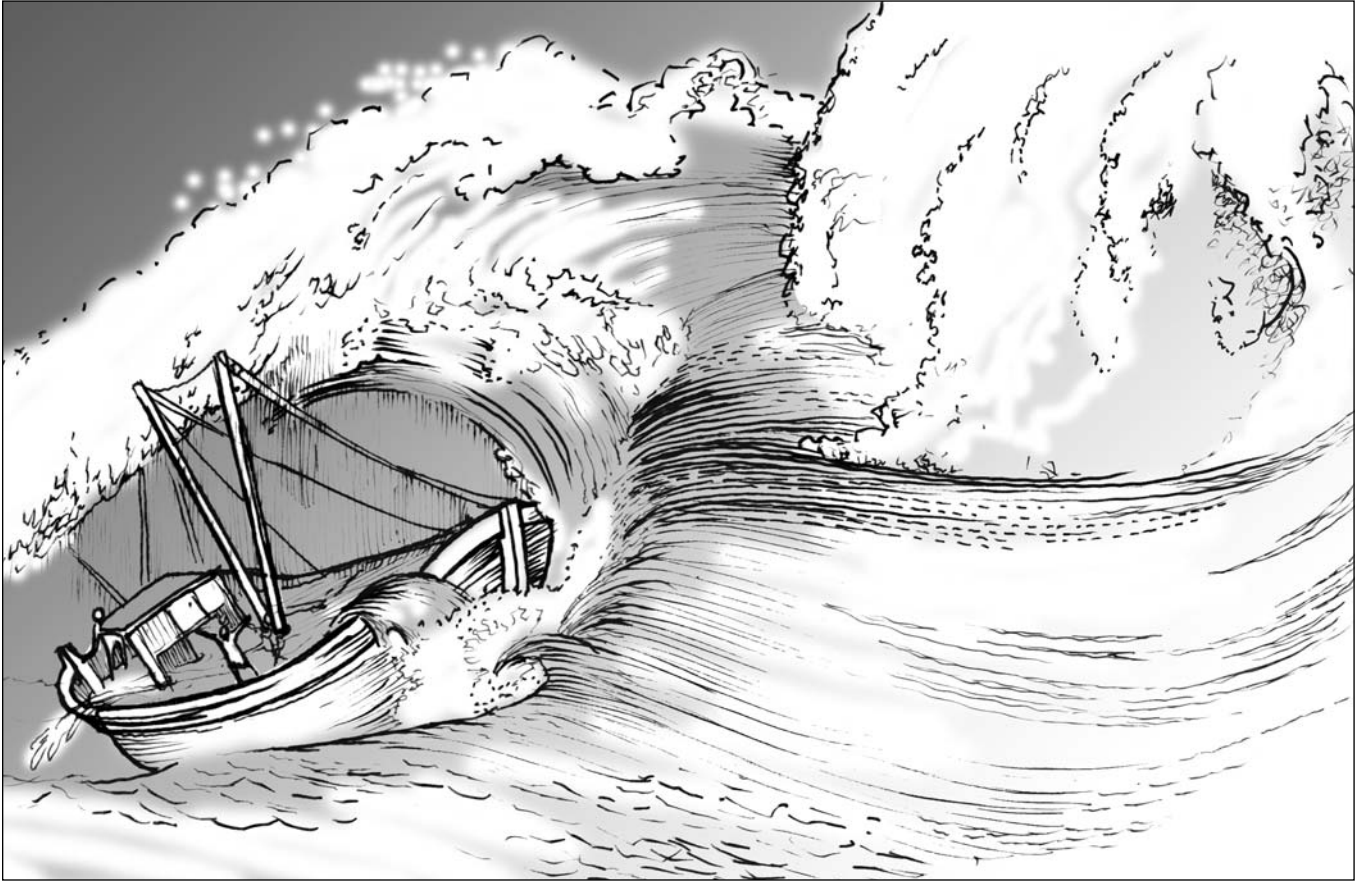
This made the frightened sailors even more afraid, “What have you done to anger your God and bring this destruction down on all of us?”

“I was given an assignment by God that I don’t want to do, so I boarded your ship to avoid it, thinking maybe God would send someone else to do it,” Jonah admitted.

Jonah is Thrown Overboard

“What do we have to do to quiet down this stormy sea?” the sailors asked. Even while they had been talking to Jonah, the storm was growing ever more violent. Huge waves came crashing over the deck, and strong winds were beating it so that the ship reeled from side to side, almost tipping over.

Jonah took a deep breath, realizing this was no ordinary squall. It could only mean that God was unhappy with his decision not to go to Nineveh. But rather than do as God had commanded, he decided he would rather drown. “Throw me overboard into the sea,” Jonah demanded. “Then God will



quiet the storm for you. I know it is my fault that this storm has come upon your ship.”

The men believed if they threw Jonah overboard, he would certainly drown in the churning waters. Because they did not want that to happen, they tried to row the ship back toward land, but the storm just kept growing more and more violent. Finally, they knew they had no other choice but to get rid of Jonah. They cried out to Jonah’s God, “Please, O Lord, don’t cause us to perish for this man’s life, and don’t place his death on our heads, for You have done what You pleased.” Then they reluctantly picked Jonah up and tossed him into the roaring sea.

Immediately, the sea grew calm. And all the sailors feared and respected the God of Jonah who had shown them He was more powerful than all their false gods. They offered a sacrifice to God and made vows.

Now God had prepared a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and for three days and nights Jonah lived in the belly of the great fish. Imagine the dark, damp, stinking surroundings that Jonah had been brought into as he lay in the cramped confines of this fish’s stomach. Rotting fish, stringy seaweed and slimy algae must have been in there with Jonah. It probably smelled awful!

And, of course, it was wet. Jonah was completely soaked from being thrown into the sea, and there was no possibility his clothes were going to dry out while he lived in this fish’s belly. No doubt, he did not have much room for movement, so there was no way he could stretch his limbs or find a comfortable position to lay in. He had nothing to eat, unless he chose to munch on remnants of half-digested fish, soggy sea-

weed and whatever else the great fish had swallowed. We know from the Bible account that he stayed in the belly of the great fish for three days and nights. But while Jonah was inside the fish, he had no idea how long God would make him stay there. He had plenty of time to rethink his foolish idea of trying to run away from the job that God had given him to do!

And Jonah had plenty of time to pray.

Jonah's Prayer

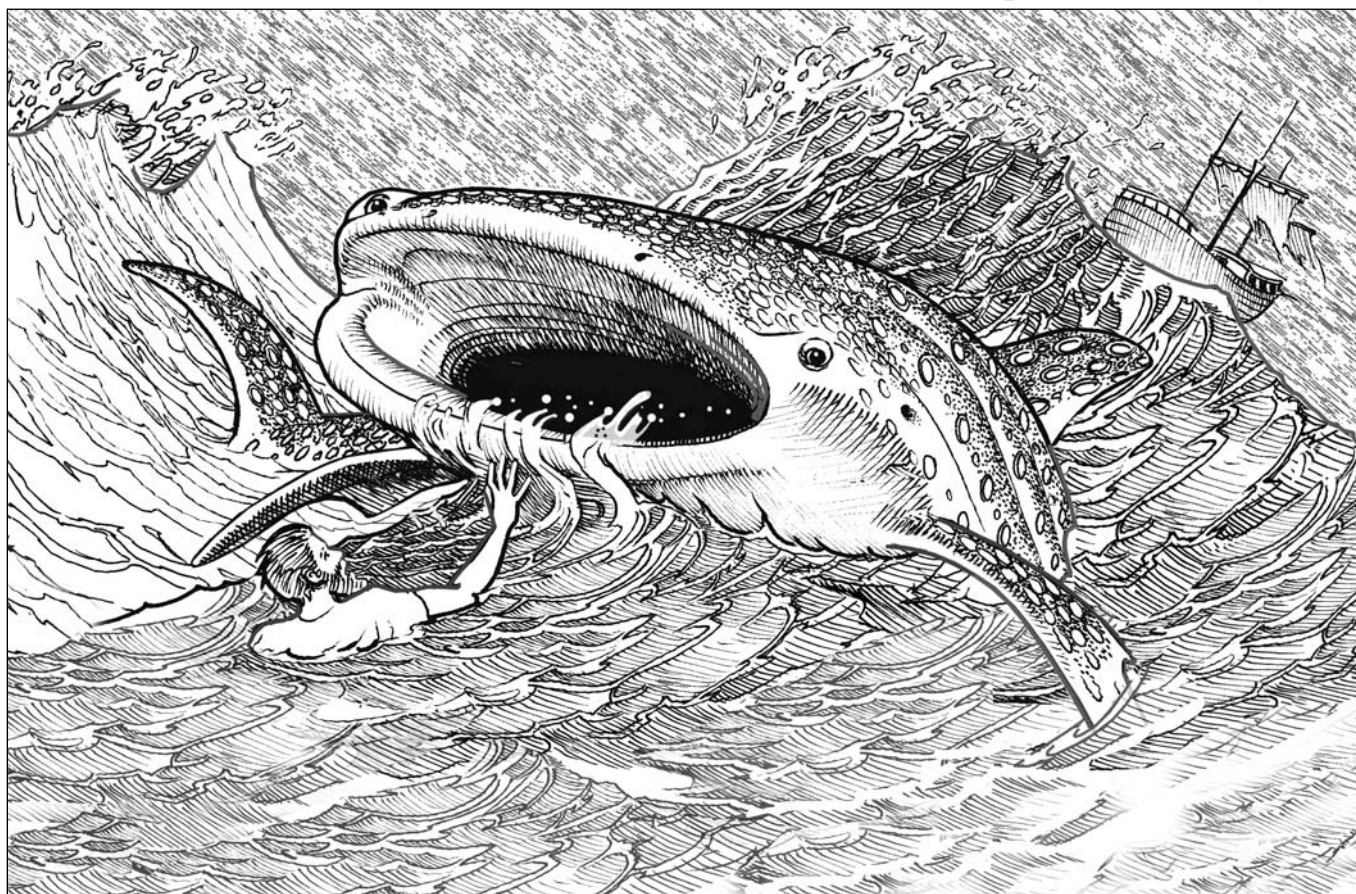
The book of Jonah, chapter 2, records Jonah's prayer: "I called to the Lord out of my misery, and He answered me; out of the belly of the grave I cried, and You heard my voice. For You had cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the waters were all around me: all the wild and stormy waves covered me. Then I said, I have been

cast out of Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your Holy Temple. I sank beneath the waves, and death was near: the waters closed me round about; seaweed was wrapped about my head.

"I sank down to the bottoms of the mountains that rise up from the ocean floor; the earth with her bars imprisoned me in certain death: yet You brought up my life from jaws of death, O Lord my God. When my soul fainted within me and I lost all hope, I remembered the Lord: and I prayed to You in Your Holy Temple.

"They that worship false gods have turned their backs on all Your mercies. But I will worship You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will perform all promises that I have made You. Salvation and deliverance comes only from the Lord."

God heard Jonah's prayer and spoke to the fish; it threw up Jonah onto dry land



(Jonah 2:10). What a mess he must have been!

Test Your Memory:

- 1) Jonah's name means _____.
- 2) What would happen when Israel would stray from obeying God? _____

- 3) What did Jonah do when God told him to go to Nineveh? _____

- 4) When the sailors found out that Jonah was the cause of the storm that threatened to sink their ship, what did they do to him? _____

- 5) Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for _____ days and _____ nights.

Go to Nineveh!

Once again, God spoke to Jonah, "Go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim the message that I tell you."

This time, Jonah did not run away from his duty. He headed straight for Nineveh as God had commanded. We do not know exactly where the fish deposited Jonah on the shore, but he probably had a several-day journey to get to the city. Nineveh was such a big city that it took three days to travel its width. Jonah went a day's journey into the city and began to deliver the message from God.

"Forty days from now, Nineveh will be completely destroyed," Jonah warned the Ninevites.

The people of Nineveh knew who Jonah was. No doubt, they heard about the storm and Jonah being thrown overboard three days ago. He should have drowned; but here he was, in their midst, prophesying the destruction of their city. It must have been clear to them that the God of Israel had performed a mighty miracle for Jonah to still be alive. They believed the message from God, and proclaimed a fast. They all put on sackcloth—from the mightiest of them to the most insignificant. Sackcloth was a thick, prickly cloth made of black goat's hair, and was not at all comfortable against the skin.

When news reached the king of Nineveh, he took off his royal robes, put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes. He had an announcement made throughout the city, "By the decree of the king and his nobles, no person nor animal, no herd nor flock, shall eat food or drink water. Don't let the animals graze or drink water. Every person and animal will be covered with sackcloth. Every person will cry out to God, and turn from his evil ways and from violence. Maybe God will change His mind and turn away from His fierce anger toward us, so that we do not die."

When God saw their fast, and how they sincerely repented and turned from their evil ways, God changed His mind concerning the destruction He planned to bring on Nineveh. He did not destroy the city (Jonah 3:10).

Jonah's Childish Behavior

However, Jonah was not happy that God's warning had changed the lives of those in Nineveh. He was very angry that this capital city of the ancient enemy of Israel was going to be spared.

He complained to God, “Didn’t I say when You ordered me to come to this city that they might listen to Your warning, O God, and turn from their evil ways? That’s why I ran away. I knew that You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and that You would change your mind about destroying

east of Nineveh and constructed a small rickety booth made of a gourd vine. He sat under the makeshift shelter and watched from a distance to see what would become of the city. He was angry with himself, at God, and at the people of Nineveh.

Jonah’s reasoning may have been the following: He had tried to avoid giving



them. So just let me die, O Lord, for it is better to die than to live knowing You have spared the enemy of Your people.”

God asked Jonah, “Should you be so angry?”

Jonah gave a big sigh, and with his head hung down, he went out from the city to the

Nineveh the warning, but God did not let him get away with that. God had left him in the stink and slime of the fish’s belly—cold, wet and miserable for three long days and nights. Then when he had done what God commanded, and delivered the message of coming destruction, the Ninevites listened!

They fasted and repented from their wicked and violent ways. And just as Jonah thought He would, God changed His mind and spared their lives. It did not seem fair that they had managed to avoid getting what Jonah felt they deserved for all the cruelty the Israelites had suffered in the past at the hands of the Assyrians. And Jonah knew they would suffer at their hands in the future!

Underneath it all, perhaps Jonah also hoped the people of Nineveh would soon tire of not doing their normal sinful daily routines and quickly turn back to their evil ways. As he sat under the hot sun, with almost no shade, Jonah must have hoped that God would destroy the city.

He watched, and he waited.

God Shows Mercy

God saw Jonah's slumped posture and gloomy countenance, so He caused a large plant to grow up overnight. Its wide leaves shaded Jonah from the intense heat and sun. Jonah was grateful for the cool shade of the plant.

But the next morning at dawn, God sent a worm to attack the plant, so that it withered and died. When the sun came up, God sent a scorching east wind. The sun and wind were so hot that Jonah became faint. He mourned that the plant that had offered him shade was dead. So he told God, "It is better for me to die than to live" (Jonah 4:8).

God asked him, "Are you angry over the death of that plant?"

"Yes, I am angry, and I just want to die," Jonah grumbled to God.

God replied, "You pity that plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow. But it grew up in one night, and

then died the next night. Should I not pity Nineveh, a great city, in which there are more than 120,000 people who don't know their right hand from their left? And there are animals, too" (Jonah 4:10-11).

Here we see that God reminded Jonah He will show mercy to all of creation, and can show mercy to whomever He pleases in any nation—even a wicked one, just as He had often extended mercy to Israel in spite of the people's disobedience.

Jonah is one of the twelve minor prophets of the Old Testament, but this does not mean that what we can learn from the book of Jonah is of lesser importance. Every scripture in the Bible is inspired by God, and literally "God-breathed" (II Timothy 3:16).

The story of Jonah teaches us a valuable lesson about God's mercy. Even though Jonah did not want God to show mercy to the people of Nineveh, God showed great mercy to both Jonah and the Ninevites. He punished Jonah for running away from his responsibilities; yet rather than let Jonah drown, God prepared a safe place in the belly of the fish to give Jonah time to rethink his decision. Although the people of Nineveh had behaved so wickedly that God wanted to destroy them, when they fasted, admitted their wrongdoing and changed their lives, God showed them mercy and spared them. History shows they remained repentant for about 35 years.

Christ Gave a Sign

Centuries after Jonah lived, when Jesus Christ walked the earth, He taught God's principle of mercy, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

Jesus also spoke of Jonah. The scribes and Pharisees asked Him to give them a sign proving that He was the Messiah. Christ's answer to them was, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah. And He left them, and departed" (Matthew 16:4).

The book of Luke adds a few more details about Christ's response to those asking for proof that He was the Messiah: "And when the people were crowded around, he began to say, 'This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation'" (Luke 11:29-30).

As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, Christ would be three days and three nights in the grave (Matthew 12:40). Christ meant a total of 72 hours, and we can know this because He indicated in John 11:9-10 that there are twelve hours in the day, then likewise there are 12 hours in the night, totaling 24 hours.

A future Day of Judgment is coming when the scribes and Pharisees, as well as the people of Nineveh, will be resurrected. Christ told the scribes and Pharisees, "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, one greater than Jonah is here" (Matthew 12:41).

Test Your Memory:

1) The people of Nineveh responded to God's warning of coming destruction by doing what? _____

2) Why did Jonah say it was better to die than to live? _____

3) With whom was Jonah angry? _____

4) In Matthew 5:7, what did Christ teach us about mercy? _____

5) The scribes and Pharisees wanted a sign proving that Christ was the Messiah. What did Christ tell them was the only sign they would be given? _____

Below: A tomb in Jerusalem that is thought to be Jesus Christ's.



BIBLE MEMORY: Jonah 2:10

WORD SEARCH

CLUES

- ☐ The name of the man God called to go to Nineveh.
- ☐ The city he came from.
- ☐ The city he was sent to.
- ☐ The country that city was in.
- ☐ Those people were known for great _____.
- ☐ Assyria was Isreal's _____.

- ☐ Someday they would take Israel into _____.
- ☐ The ship Jonah was on encountered a _____ on its way to Tarshish.
- ☐ When thrown overboard, Jonah was swallowed by a _____.

- ☐ While in the _____ of the creature...
- ☐ Jonah made a _____ to God.
- ☐ He was inside the creature for _____ and _____.

- ☐ It was a _____ when he was cast on shore alive.
- ☐ Nineveh was told it would be destroyed in _____ days.
- ☐ The people _____ in _____.
- ☐ They obtained _____, but _____.

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- Jonah was _____.
- ☐ He sat on a hill under a _____ waiting to see what God would do.
 - ☐ Jonah wanted to _____ when God sent the _____ to kill the vine.
 - ☐ The _____ of Jonah was to prove _____ was the son of God when he remained in the grave a full _____.