



## **BIBLE STORIES EVERYONE OUGHT TO KNOW**

Main and Oklahoma Church of Christ ^ Adult Bible Studies ^ Winter-Spring 2010

May 2, 2010

Jonah

### **Getting Started**

The story of Jonah is famous as a children's story. Children learn that a great fish swallowed Jonah. However, the fish is a minor player in the story. The main point of the story is that God cares about everyone, not just believers and he is eager to show mercy to anyone who is genuinely sorry for the wrongs they have done.

### **What's the story?**

In the early 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Israel is expecting the Assyrian Empire to invade their country. When God orders Jonah into the heart of Assyria to warn the people of Nineveh that God plans to destroy their city, Jonah runs away. He books passage on a ship headed in the opposite direction. God churns up a storm that nearly swamps the ship. Finally, in desperation, the sailors turn to prayer. Jonah confesses that he is the cause of their trouble, and he advises them to throw him overboard. Initially, they refuse and try rowing back to shore. When they realize it is hopeless, they throw him overboard and the sea calms down.

A huge fish swallows Jonah, and he remains inside for three days, praying a beautiful prayer of thanks to God for rescuing him. After he fish vomits him up onto a beach, Jonah walks to Nineveh and delivers the assigned message, "In forty days, Nineveh will be destroyed" (3:4). For some unexplained reason, the Assyrians believe Jonah, a stranger from another country. The contrast is striking. Back in Israel and Judah, the Jews are ignoring God's prophets. But the Assyrians—even the king—fast, dress in ragged clothes, and sit in the dust. They do this to show their sorrow. They will not even let their animals eat or drink. When God sees this, he has pity and does not destroy them as he planned.

Jonah is incensed. "I knew from the very beginning that you wouldn't destroy Nineveh," he complains to God. "You are a kind and merciful God, and you are very patient. You always show love, and you don't like to punish anyone, not even foreigners. "Now let me die! I'd be better off dead!" (4:2-3) Yet, God explains his love for the people of Nineveh, "Nineveh has more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left ... Should I not be concerned about that great city" (4:11).

### **So, what does this story say about God?**

Common thought says that God loves good people and hates bad people. The message of Jonah is that God loves all, even unbelievers. One can find this as a primary attribute of God throughout Scripture. When God selected Abraham to become the father of the Jewish nation, God said, "Everyone on earth will be blessed because of you" (Genesis 12:3). Later, through the

prophet Isaiah, God told the Jews, "I have placed you here as a light for other nations; you must take my saving power to everyone on earth" (49:6). In addition, Paul, writing to Christians in Rome, said that if a person has faith in God it does not matter if that person is a Jew or a Gentile. "There is only one Lord, and he is generous to everyone who asks for his help. All who call out to the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:12-13).

### **Now, what about our faith?**

Like Jonah, we have been given a message, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). God wants this message to go out because of His love for all people, not just the people that we choose. Because of His love, we, the people of God, must let the lost know that God loves them and is willing and able to accept anyone who repents.

### **Monday: Read "Getting Started" and Jonah 1**

- 1) Jonah refused to deliver God's message to Nineveh. Are there commands that God has given you that you refused?
- 2) Jonah tried to run away from God, even though as a prophet he must have known hiding from God is impossible. In what ways do people hide from God today?

### **Tuesday: Read "What's the story" and Jonah 2**

- 1) The sailors tried with all their might to save Jonah's life even though he was a Jew and they were unbelievers. Unbelievers are capable of unselfish actions, sometimes outshining the believers. How is this possible?
- 2) Jonah prayed to God for salvation after the fish swallowed him. Why do believers wait until the last moment to pray for God's mercy?

### **Wednesday: Read Jonah 3**

- 1) Jonah preaches a very simple message to the people of Nineveh, and even that he seems to offer reluctantly. Why do you think the city responded so favorably?
- 2) History does not record the Nineveh's repentance, which indicates the repentance was brief and not meaningful by human standards. Why would God accept such a shallow repentance?

### **Thursday: Read Jonah 4 and "So, what does this story say about God"?**

- 1) Ironically, Jonah is one of the few prophets in the Bible who is successful. He convinces the people to repent. Why is the repentance of the people of Nineveh not a joy to Jonah?
- 2) Are there people so undesirable you would not accept their repentance?
- 3) The shade plant that Jonah enjoyed was of trivial value compared to the city of people. Why was Jonah so concerned about the plant.

### **Friday: Read "Now, what about our faith?"**

- 1) How would you describe the message Jesus commands us to spread in the Great Commission?
- 2) Why is the church sometimes reluctant to go teach the Good News?