

**VBS
2024**

JONAH



**Day 4: Jonah 4
1st-5th Grade**

Jonah 4

The Objective is the key concept for this week's lesson. It should be the main focus of the study.

These are the key verses that you will find helpful in teaching your study this week. The "Main passage" is the basis of the study, where the other verses support the objective of the lesson.

Each day, the students will learn a memory verse. Students who learn all 5 memory verses this week will receive a prize.

An introductory activity or question that will settle the class, draw their attention to the study and prepare their hearts for God's Word.

Objective This lesson will show the kids that we are all recipients of God's mercy, and so we should show mercy to others.

Key Verses

Jonah 4—Main Teaching Passage

Colossians 3:13

Ephesians 4:32

Matthew 18:21-35

Memory Verse - Lamentations 3:23

"They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."

Hook

Review Lamentations 3:22

Ask the kids if they've ever gotten in trouble and asked their parent/guardian/teacher/etc. for a lesser punishment, or for no punishment at all. Did they get it? Now what if instead, someone did something wrong to them. Then do they want the person who hurt them to be punished less than they deserve?

When we do something wrong, we want to be shown mercy. But often when it comes to others wronging us, we don't want mercy for the other person. Ask the students if they think this is a right attitude to have. This will be Jonah's attitude in today's story.

What does the Bible say? This is where we will read a passage or series of passages that teach on the subject of the day.

BOOK

Yesterday we saw that in response to Jonah's preaching, the whole city of Nineveh repented, even the king. So God had mercy and didn't destroy the city. But rather than rejoicing that his work had brought such revival, Jonah sulked. He didn't want God to spare Nineveh, and he told the Lord to take his life. The Lord asked Jonah if he was right to be angry, a question the prophet didn't answer.

Jonah then left the city and built himself a shelter to watch and see what would happen, perhaps hoping Nineveh would return to their old ways and be destroyed. The place where Jonah sat was hot, and so the Lord caused a plant to grow and provide shade for him. Jonah was grateful for this gift. But then God sent a worm to destroy the plant, followed by a scorching wind that made Jonah grow faint. Jonah despaired over this loss and begged the Lord to take his life.

The Lord asked Jonah again whether he was right to be angry (this time about the plant). Jonah said that he was, and even that he was angry enough to die. The Lord then revealed Jonah's unmerciful heart. He noted how Jonah had pity on the plant, though he did nothing to cause it to grow. It came and went in a single day. Did it not make even more sense for the Lord to have mercy on Nineveh, a city full of people He created, including more than 120,000 young children, as well as many animals? The book ends on this question without giving us Jonah's answer, leaving the reader to wonder how he responded to this rebuke.

LOOK

After chapter 3, it would seem that the story of Jonah is complete. Jonah had fulfilled his mission to preach, and the entire city of Nineveh repented and was saved. But the book doesn't end there because, although the Lord had accomplished His purposes in Nineveh, He still had work to do on His prophet.

Earlier in the week, we saw how Jonah had received tremendous mercy from the Lord. He had rebelled against the Lord's command to go to Nineveh and was thrown into the sea for his sin, yet God sent a fish to rescue him. Jonah hadn't repented and didn't deserve the Lord's help, but God saved him because He is merciful and loving. Yet despite all the mercy God showed him, Jonah lacked a merciful heart toward others. He certainly had plenty of head-knowledge about the Lord (see verse 2), but that didn't translate to a heart that saw other people as the Lord does.

The Lord would not allow His prophet to continue with such an ungodly attitude, so He used an object lesson to teach Jonah about mercy. The chapter is narrated in a way that is meant to be melodramatic and even humorous. Jonah is displeased and angry at God's mercy on the city, grateful for the plant, but then in absolute despair over the plant's

The interpretation/ exegesis of the passage. What does this passage mean? How does this passage apply to my life?

LOOK (Continued)

destruction. In His gentle yet firm rebuke, the Lord invites Jonah to examine his own heart. Is it right for him to rejoice over shade for his head, but not God's mercy toward a great city? Should he desire the destruction of Nineveh, but mourn the loss of a plant?

We don't know what Jonah's response was to the exposure of his wrong attitude, but this story should cause us to examine ourselves. Do you have an unmerciful heart toward others? Perhaps someone has really wronged you, and you don't feel like they deserve God's mercy. Maybe they've never apologized, or perhaps they have and you still just don't want to forgive them. But no matter the case, followers of Jesus don't have any right to withhold mercy from others, because they have all received mercy from God themselves. We all stand in need of God's forgiveness, and none of us deserve it any more than the people we struggle to show mercy to.

The New Testament teaches us to forgive as we have been forgiven by Christ (Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:32). As Jesus notes in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21-35), no amount of forgiveness that we may need to offer others can compare to the forgiveness that God has offered to us. So let's make sure we don't have unmerciful hearts. Let's love those who have wronged us and forgive, knowing that, as children of God, we ourselves have been forgiven of far more and remembering that we are in just as much need of God's mercy as the people around us.

What is my response to this passage of Scripture? How should my life change according to what this passage teaches me? What are the practical things I can do throughout the week to make this true in my life?

TOOK

As a class, memorize Lamentations 3:23

Review the lesson by asking the class why Jonah was upset in today's story. What was wrong in Jonah's heart? What did God do to teach him a lesson?

Pray: Thank the Lord for His mercy toward us. Ask Him to give everyone in the class a merciful heart toward others.

Family Question: Why should we as Christians show mercy to others?

FURTHER STUDY

Commentary on Jonah 4 by David Guzik

GOD DEALS WITH A PROPHET'S HEART

A. Jonah's complaint.

1. ([Jonah 4:1](#)) Jonah's displeasure at the repentance of the people of Nineveh.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.

a. **It displeased Jonah:** This was strange, because usually the preacher is pleased when the congregation repents, but Jonah wasn't. There was something about the whole matter that **displeased Jonah**.

b. **Exceedingly, and he became angry:** Not only was this strange, it was *very strange*, because Jonah was *very* upset at the success of his preaching. We should not miss Jonah's intensity here, because the language in the original Hebrew is strong.

2. ([Jonah 4:2-3](#)) Jonah explains his anger.

So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You *are* a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for *it is better for me to die than to live!*"

a. **I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm:** Jonah was angry because God granted repentance to the Ninevites, and the Assyrians were enemies of Judah and Israel. Jonah wanted God to bring judgment upon these people he hated.

i. Jonathan Swift wrote some verse that expresses Jonah's frame of mind:

*We are God's chosen few,
All others will be damned;
There is no place in heaven for you,
We can't have heaven crammed.*

b. **Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country:** Jonah knew that God was full of grace and mercy, and *that* was why he was afraid to tell the people of Nineveh. This was at least part of the reason why Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh — he was afraid they would repent, when all along he wanted God to judge the Assyrian capital.

i. Jonah himself called on the mercy of God and enjoyed the mercy of God when it was extended to Jonah. Now he resents it when it is extended to others. What if God treated Jonah the way Jonah wanted God to treat the people of Nineveh?

c. **For it is better for me to die than to live:** The repentance and salvation of the people of Nineveh is so painful to Jonah that he would rather die than think about it; and he also states that this was the reason he fled the call - not out of fear that he would be ineffective, but fear that he *would* be effective!

B. God confronts a prophet.

1. ([Jonah 4:4](#)) God questions Jonah's heart.

Then the LORD said, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

a. **Is it right for you to be angry?** Jonah, in expressing his anger against God, was being honest about his feelings — something good; but we should not for a moment think that all of our feelings towards God are justified.

i. God likes to ask us questions, because they reveal our heart. It also put us on proper ground before God, because He has every right to question us and we owe Him answers.

Where are you? Who told you that you were naked? What is this you have done? ([Genesis 3](#))

Where is your brother Abel? What have you done? ([Genesis 4](#))

What have you done? ([1 Samuel 13:11](#))

Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? ([2 Samuel 12](#))

Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? ([Isaiah 6](#))

Who do you say that I am? ([Matthew 16](#))

What do you want Me to do for you? ([Matthew 20](#))

Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss? ([Luke 22](#))

Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? ([Acts 9](#))

c. **Is it right for you to be angry:** This is the question we should and even must ask ourselves if we find ourselves angry with God. The answer must always be “No, LORD. All Your ways are right even if I don’t understand them.”

i. Yes, Jonah was angry towards God, and yes, it was all right for Jonah to state his anger towards God; but he must also repent of his anger towards God.

2. ([Jonah 4:5-8](#)) God prepares an object lesson for Jonah.

So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah’s head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”

a. **Jonah went out of the city... till he might see what would become of the city:** Jonah seems to hope that the repentance of Nineveh was lacking, and hopes that he will see the city destroyed after all. He goes **out of the city** for safety.

b. **The LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah:** Just as God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah, now He prepared a particular plant to shelter Jonah as he waited, hoping that they city would be destroyed.

i. This is the first time we find Jonah happy. “Jonah was pleased because at last, after all the compassion of God for other people, God was finally doing something for Jonah. Selfish? Of course, it was. And petty too!” (Boice).

ii. We could say that Jonah’s happiness was just as fleshly as his anger. Both were all about *self*.

c. **The sun beat on Jonah’s head, so that he grew faint:** Jonah was angry with God because He brought the people of Nineveh to repentance ([Jonah 4:1](#)). The ancient Hebrew word for “angry” is literally “to be hot.” Now God would let *Jonah* feel some of the heat!

d. **Jonah was very grateful for the plant... “It is better for me to die than to live”**: When God took the plant and its pleasant shelter away from Jonah, he missed the plant so much that he wanted to die.

i. “If, dear friends, like Jonah, you want to complain, you will soon have something to complain of. People who are resolved to fret, generally make for themselves causes for fretfulness.” (Spurgeon)

ii. Jonah allowed even a silly thing like a plant to become an idol. “How often our gourds are allowed to perish, to teach us these deep lessons. In spite of all we can do to keep them green, their leaves turn more and more sere and yellow, until they droop and die” (Meyer).

3. ([Jonah 4:9-11](#)) God applies the object lesson.

Then God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” And he said, “It is right for me to be angry, even to death!” But the LORD said, “You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left; and much livestock?”

a. **Is it right for you to be angry about the plant**: Jonah, in response to God’s question, felt totally justified in his anger about the sheltering plant’s destruction. This is considering that the plant was just a plant, and Jonah had no personal interest or investment in the plant except what it provided for him at the moment.

i. Jonah made three errors that angry people often make. Each of these things put Jonah in a worse place, not a better place.

- Jonah quit.

- Jonah separated himself from others.

- Jonah became a spectator.

b. **It is right for me to be angry, even to death**: These are the last words of Jonah recording in this book, but thankfully they are not the last words of the book. God’s mercy and compassion still worked with Jonah, teaching him and guiding him to God’s heart.

c. **And should I not pity Nineveh**: How much more should God be concerned about the destruction of *persons* — those made in His image, even if they are Assyrians. God’s response to Jonah showed the prophet that he really didn’t know God as well as he thought he did.

i. Those **who cannot discern between their right hand and their left** are those who are unable to make moral judgments.

ii. The lesson is clear: not only does God’s concern for people go beyond Israel, but He is totally justified in doing so. The lesson of Jonah reminds us that God is the God of all people.

iii. The lesson of Jonah is what he proclaimed before being freed from the great fish: *Salvation is of the LORD ([Jonah 2:9](#))*, and not of any race or nation or class. This is the same message God made clear to Peter in [Acts 10:34-35](#): *In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.*”

d. **Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city**: Jewish tradition says that after God said the words of [Jonah 4:11](#), Jonah then fell on his face and said: “Govern your world according to the measure of mercy, as it is said, *To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness.*” ([Daniel 9:9](#)) We can only hope that Jonah — and we — would have such a humble response.

i. God showed His mercy to Jonah through a lot of *preparation*.

The LORD prepared a great fish ([Jonah 1:17](#)).

The LORD prepared a plant ([Jonah 4:6](#)).

The LORD prepared a worm ([Jonah 4:7](#)).

The LORD prepared a wind ([Jonah 4:8](#)).

ii. Nevertheless, the real work of preparation happened in *Jonah*. What God really prepared was a *person*, a *prophet*. “I would suggest to some of you here who have to bear double trouble that God may be preparing you for double usefulness, or he may be working out of you some unusual form of evil which might not be driven out of you unless his Holy Spirit had used these mysterious methods with you to teach you more fully his mind” (Spurgeon).