

Trainer's Notes for Jonah – Chapter 1

Jonah 1

1. Possible **themes, archetypes, and motifs** for selecting original stories.
Adventure, danger on sea, lake, or river, near death experiences, rebellion from authority, facing violent enemies, refusing to do an overwhelming task

Internalize the story

2. Discuss the main **characters**

Main characters and what we know about roles, responsibilities, intentions, and emotions:

- **Jonah** – Though the words prophet or prophecy never appear anywhere in this book we know from other sources that Jonah was a prophet (2 Kings 14:25). A prophet was/is a person specially chosen by God to speak to people on God's behalf. God told Jonah that he wanted him to go and warn the people living in the large city of Nineveh that He would judge them if they continued to do wicked things. Jonah does not want to do what God has told him to do. Instead of going to Nineveh Jonah chooses to get on a ship that is going in completely the opposite direction. Jonah knew that the God he serves is the one who created the sea and the land and has complete power over them. The Bible doesn't tell us why Jonah tried to run away from the job that God gave him. It seemed that God was announcing his judgment on the people of Nineveh. Was Jonah overwhelmed by the job of being one lone man going to the great city of the Nineveh and speaking God's judgment on the people who were often a threat to Jonah's people? Was he afraid of what the leaders and people of Nineveh would do to him if he gave them God's warning of judgment? Was he upset at the possible thought that the people of Nineveh could listen to God's message and repent and then receive God's mercy? Or did he feel all of these emotions? We find out later that when he does obey God and give God's strong warning to the people and they repent, Jonah is angry.
- **God** – God was aware of the wicked things that are going on in Nineveh and he is very displeased. He wanted to warn the people who live in Nineveh that He would punish them if they continued what they were doing. Because He is the LORD (Yahweh), the creator of the world, He knows what goes on everywhere and He has power over all the things he created like the sea and the creatures that live in the sea. God is the God of all people and not just the people of Israel. He promised Israel's ancestor Abraham that he would bless all nations through him (See Gen 12: 3).
- **Sailors/crew of the ship** – These men did not know about the God Jonah worshiped and prayed to. They prayed to other things they called gods. These men believed that storms were (could be) caused by forces or gods greater than themselves. These forces existed and operated outside and over the natural world they could see with their eyes. They also believed that the good or bad things they did could cause these forces to exercise their power over natural things. They seemed to be men who valued human life and would prefer not to destroy that life if they didn't have to. As sailors these men would have had experience on the sea and would have known what to do to stay safe in a storm. Since they were terrified of this storm, it must have been a very strong storm.
- **The captain of the ship** – The captain of the ship oversaw keeping the ship safe and delivering it to the correct port. He had the authority and responsibility to act to make sure the ship reached its destination. In this story, the captain chose to get rid of some cargo to save the ship and the people on the ship. Like his crew, he believed that supernatural forces or gods controlled the sea and if he and his crew pleaded with the gods, they could calm the storm. He was disturbed when he found Jonah sleeping while he and the crew were fearing for their lives.

3. Discuss **where** the story took place, the context, and cultural information regarding the story. Jonah left Israel on a ship that traveled west on the Mediterranean Sea in the opposite direction from where God told him to go. He boarded the ship somewhere between Joppa on the west coast of Israel and the ship headed to a place called Tarshish possibly located on the southern coast of modern-day Spain. As the ship was traveling, a storm that was so great that even the sailors who lived much of their lives on the sea, feared that the ship would break apart and they would all lose their lives.

The nation of Israel had a large and powerful neighbor called Assyria to the northeast. The capital city of Assyria was Nineveh. The Assyrians had a history of fighting with the Israelites and other nations for wealth and slaves and they were known to torture the people they conquered. The Assyrians had the well-deserved reputation of being vicious people and so the people of Israel considered the Assyrians as their enemies.

The story found in the book of (or maybe more accurately the book “about”) Jonah takes place sometime during the time Jeroboam II was king in Israel (786-746 BC). According to 2 Kings 14:25 Jonah had prophesied that Israel would expand her boundaries and that prophecy was fulfilled under the leadership of Jeroboam II.

“Prior to this prophecy, it had been a difficult time for Israel, full of affliction and bitterness (2 Kings 14:26), but God rescued and saved the people of Israel from destruction. Though Jeroboam II was not a good king, God used him to help rescue Israel by giving him victory in war (2 Kings 14:27-28). Through these wars, God fulfilled the prophecy of Jonah, and the borders of Israel expanded.

4. Discuss the **plot**, or sequence of events. Tell the sequence of events together several times. (A plot may have several sections or groups of events. When working with long stories, you may find it helpful to tell one section of the plot several times before moving to the next section.) Consider using a storyboard or drama that might help you remember this part of the Jonah story. Discuss the progression/transitions of thought. For example:
- Jonah chooses to disobey the Lord and boards a ship going the opposite direction from where the Lord tells him to go. (vs 1-3)
 - A powerful storm comes down on the ship causing the crew to fear that the ship will break apart and they take measures to save the ship and themselves. (vs 4-6)
 - The crew determines that Jonah is the cause of the storm and they learn from him that the only way to save the ship and themselves is to throw him into the sea. (vs 7-14)
 - They pick Jonah up and throw him into the sea. (vs 15-16)
 - God sends a large fish that swallows Jonah and he is inside the fish for 3 days and 3 nights. (vs 17)

Section 1: (vs 1-3)

- The Lord spoke his word to Jonah son of Amittai:
- "Get up, go to the great city of Nineveh, and pronounce my judgment against it, because I see the evil things they do."
- Jonah got up but he tried to run away from the Lord by going in the opposite direction of Nineveh. He went to the port city of Joppa, where he found a ship that was going to the city of Tarshish. Jonah paid for the trip and went aboard, planning to go to Tarshish to run away from the Lord.

Section 2: (vs 4-6)

- But the Lord hurled a great wind across the sea and it whipped up a that slammed into the ship carrying Jonah and threatened to break the ship apart.
- The sailors were afraid for their lives, and each man cried to his own god. They began hurling the cargo from the ship into the sea to make the ship lighter.

But in the meantime, Jonah had gone down into the bowels of the ship to lie down, and he fell fast asleep.

6. The captain of the ship found Jonah where he was sleeping and shouted, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray to your god! Maybe your god will pay attention to us, and we won't die!"

Section 3: (vs 7-14)

7. Then the sailors said to each other, "Let's throw lots to see who caused these troubles to happen to us." When they threw lots, the lot showed that the trouble had happened because of Jonah.
8. Then they said to him, "Tell us, who caused our trouble? What is your job? Where do you come from? What is your country? Who are your people?"
9. Then Jonah said to them, "I am a Hebrew. I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." "I am running away from God."
10. The men were very afraid, and they asked Jonah, "What terrible thing did you do?"
11. Since the wind and the waves of the sea were becoming much stronger, they said to him, "What should we do to you to satisfy your god and make the sea calm down for us?"
12. Jonah said to them, "Pick me up, and hurl me into the sea, and then it will calm down. I know it is because of me that this great storm has come on you."
13. Instead, the men tried to row the ship back to the land, but they could not, because the sea was becoming stormier.
14. So the men cried to the Lord, Jonah's God saying, "Lord, please don't let us die because of this man's life; please don't think we are guilty of killing an innocent person. Lord, you have caused all this to happen; you wanted it this way."

Section 4: (vs 15-16)

15. So, they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea became calm.
16. Then the sailors were awestruck by the Lord's power and began to fear the Lord very much; they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made promises to him.

Section 5: (vs 17)

17. In the meantime, Jonah was sinking down into the sea. The Lord caused a big fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the bowels of the fish three days and three nights.

5. Discuss possible **re-ordering** of parts of the story
Teams may find it helpful to reorder the events of this story so it will sound more like the way they tell stories. Here is another way to order the information in this Bible story.
6. Share the **main point** or the most important thing of the story.
Here are some of the possible main points:
 - God gave Jonah a huge job to do and Jonah tried to run away to keep from doing what God told him to do. But Jonah could not hide from God.
 - When Jonah tried to run away from God and not do what God commanded him to do, he brought serious trouble to himself and to the others aboard the ship.
 - God uses Jonah's rebellion to make Himself known to people who did not know Him before they met Jonah.
7. Identify the **twist** of the story.
 - Jonah, a prophet of God, deliberately chooses to disobey the Lord.
 - Jonah thinks that he can either go somewhere the Lord won't follow/find him or somewhere the Lord will no longer bother him.
 - Either out of desperation or they believed what Jonah told them, the sailors did as Jonah asked and threw him in to the sea. As soon as the sailors threw Jonah overboard, the storm died down.

- The sailors who were not Israelites prayed but Jonah, an Israelite did not pray. The sailors recognized the power of God and offer a sacrifice to the Lord and declare their willingness to serve him, while God's prophet, Jonah tried to escape from God.
- God did not let Jonah drown but saved him by having a huge fish swallow Jonah.
- Other?

8. Discuss possible **openings**.

Here are some possible openings:

- "One day the Lord spoke to Jonah, Amittai's son and he said, ..."
- Long ago when Israel was ruled by kings, God spoke to his prophet named Jonah. He instructed Jonah, "..."
- In the land of Israel, there lived a man named Jonah, who was a prophet of God.
- Long ago there was an Israelite man named Jonah. God spoke to Jonah saying, "..."
- Here is a story that teaches us that God cares for all people and wants everyone to repent of their wicked ways of living. Long ago, God spoke to a man named Jonah...
- Other?

9. Discuss possible **endings**.

Here are some possible endings:

- "Now/however, the Lord sent a very large fish to swallow Jonah."
- It is not possible to hide from God.
- Other?

10. **Difficult words or phrases**

Here are options for expressing words or phrases that may be difficult to express in the teams' language(s):

The Lord spoke his word to Jonah son of Amittai:

- **Consider adding** – [One day] the Lord..."
- **The Lord** – YHWH, personal name of God;
 - translation possibilities
 - English type transliteration Yahweh
 - French-like: "the Eternal one"
 - Language specific word that is used both as a personal name and a general word for God
 - Language word for: the Creator; the Owner of the world/all people
 - Etc.
- **his word** – may be unnecessary or clarify the message God wanted Jonah to give to the people of Nineveh
- **Jonah** [a prophet?]- consider adding implied info 'prophet'; God's spokesperson; etc.
- **son of Amittai** – little/no pertinent info re Amittai

"**Get up**, go to the **great city** of Nineveh, and **preach against it**, because I see the evil things they do."

- **get up** – NET "go immediately"; may be redundant; more natural way to say?
- **preach against it** – announce my judgment against the people/tell the people that I am going to severely punish them

But Jonah got up to **run away from the Lord** by going to Tarshish. He went to the city of **Joppa**, where he found a ship that was **going to the city of Tarshish**. Jonah paid for the trip and went aboard, planning to go to **Tarshish** to run away from the Lord.

- **BUT** [instead??] - clear contrast with previous statement – i.e. God told Jonah to do one thing, but Jonah is about to do something completely different
- **run away from the Lord** (orig. Heb. “flee from before the face of the Lord”)
 - ‘run away from what the Lord told him to do’
 - Jonah knows God is everywhere, so how could he think he could run away from Him? Speculation but possibly thinking if he left Israel where God’s temple was located and went to a place where people didn’t follow God the Lord might not bother him there.
- A ship that was **going [in the opposite direction]** to Tarshish
- **Joppa** – a city in Israel on the Mediterranean coast where there was a port for ships
- **Tarshish** – possibly located in on southern tip of Spain which is on the opposite end of the Mediterranean Sea where Israel is located

But the Lord hurled a great **wind** on the sea, which made the sea so stormy that the ship was in danger of breaking apart.

- **wind** [storm??]

5 The **sailors** were afraid, and each man **cried** to his own god. They began hurling the cargo from the ship into the sea to make the ship lighter. But Jonah had gone down far inside the ship to lie down, and he **fell fast asleep**.

- **sailors** – men who work on the ship
- **cried [out??]** to his own god – cried out in prayer; prayed earnestly
- **fell [?] fast asleep** – sound asleep; into a deep sleep

7 Then the men said to each other, "Let's **throw lots** to see who caused these troubles to happen to us." When they threw lots, **the lot showed** that the trouble had happened because of Jonah.

- **throw lots** – CEV “ask our gods to show us;
- **the lot showed [?]** – God showed them that Jonah was the cause of the trouble.

8 Then they said to him, "**Tell us, who caused our trouble? What is your job? Where do you come from? What is your country? Who are your people?**"

- Lots of questions are probably a sign that the sailors were panicked. Where do you come from; what is your country; who are your people?

9 Then Jonah said to them, "I am a Hebrew. I **fear the Lord**, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land."

- **Fear the Lord** – worship/pray to the Creator of the world

10 The men were very afraid, and they asked Jonah, "**What terrible thing did you do?**" (They knew he was running away from the Lord because he had told them.)

- Rhetorical question – “Do you realize what a foolish thing you have done?” Another way to say this would be, “You have done an incredibly foolish thing.”

11 Since the wind and the waves of the sea were **becoming much stronger**, they said to him, "What should we do to you to [satisfy your god and] make the sea calm down for us?"

- **Becoming much stronger** – the storm becoming worse

14 So the men **cried to the Lord**, "Lord, please don't let us die because of this man's life; please **don't think we are guilty** of killing an innocent person. **Lord, you have caused all this to happen**; you wanted it this way."

- **cried to the Lord, Jonah's God**
- **don't think we are guilty** – don't hold us responsible
- **Lord, you have caused all this to happen...** - all this has happened because you wanted it this way

16 Then they began to **fear the Lord** very much; they offered a **sacrifice** to the Lord and made promises to him.

- **Fear the Lord** – worship the Lord Jonah prayed to/served
- Offer a **sacrifice** [questions/concerns re what/how?]
 - TN Note: We are not given any details about what kind of sacrifice the sailors made or how it was done. However, the Hebrew verb used here, when it refers to literal sacrifices, is always used in the OT for sacrificing an animal. So they probably killed an animal.

17 The Lord caused a big fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.

- “**Now/meanwhile...**” [??] – to signal return to main story line

Rhetorical Devices and Oral Features

- **Repetition**
 - God **hurled** strong winds across the seas. Sailors **hurled** cargo into the sea. Sailors **hurled** Jonah into the sea. Chpt 2 The fish **hurled** Jonah onto the beach.
 - **Violence** – evil deeds of the Ninevites, powerful winds, strong storm smashing into the boat, hurling cargo into the sea, offending the gods and causing the storm, sailors pleaded with the Lord, “Don't let us perish on account of this man's life. Do not make us guilty of innocent blood.” Hurling Jonah into the sea.
- **Contrast**
 - **Stormy seas** turned calm as soon as Jonah was thrown into the sea.
 - **Sailors** working hard to survive the storm and Jonah asleep in the bowels of the ship.
- **Irony**
 - **Jonah**, the Lord's prophet did not obey God and did not pray in the storm. The sailors who were not Hebrew, prayed to God and worshipped him.
 - **Jonah** sought safety in the bowels of the ship was rescued in the bowels of a fish.
- **Movement or Direction**
 - **Toward Nineveh** – the direction God pointed toward
 - **Toward Tarshish** – away from the direction God pointed toward
 - **Down** – into the ship's hold/bowels, into the sea, into the fish

Additional resources

Here are some scriptures to read to better understand the wider context of this story:

- 1 Kings 14:25 – Jonah is a prophet of God
- 2 Kings 14:25 – God speaks through Jonah during the time Jeroboam II was king in Israel
- 2 Kings 10:34 – King Jehu accepted Assyrian control and paid tribute to the king.
- Nahum 1-3 – God’s message to Nineveh regarding their wicked way of living.
- Matthew 12:40-41, 16:4; Luke 11:29-32 – Jesus talks about Jonah

Here is a list of audio and visual resources that might help the team understand the story:

-