

Trainer's Notes for Jonah – Chapter 3

Jonah 3

1. Possible **themes, archetypes, and motifs** for selecting original stories.
obeying God or doing what is right even when it costs, repentance, being sorry for doing what is wrong, second chance, delivering a hard message or warning, earnest prayer for forgiveness

Internalize the story

2. Discuss the main **characters**

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

- **LORD** – God speaks to his prophets who then relay his message to the people. He demands obedience. God demands righteousness and has the power to enforce punishment. God changes his mind when he sees repentance.
- **Jonah** – He was an Israelite man meaning he is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He worshipped the God of his ancestors and was a prophet of God. When God sent him to give a warning message to the people of Nineveh, he tried to run away from God. But God stopped him and then rescued him and gave him a second chance to obey God. In this part of the story, Jonah went to Nineveh, the city of his enemies and gave them the message that God is not happy with them and would destroy their city.
- **People of Nineveh** – The people of Nineveh at that time were the enemies of the people of Israel. When the people heard Jonah's message, they believed him and acted in repentance. As evidence of their changed attitude they fasted and wore rough clothes.
- **King of Nineveh** – Leader/Ruler of Nineveh. He heard the message Jonah gave to the people of Nineveh and he too responded in repentance. He issued a decree for everyone, including animals, to fast so that God would not punish them.

3. Discuss **where** the story took place and the context of the story.

Jonah chapter 3 takes place in the city of Nineveh. Nineveh was a large city, so big that it took three days to walk across it. It was located east of the Tigris River. Nineveh was the famous capital of the ancient city of Assyria. It was a center for the worship of Ishtar (Astarte) the fertility goddess. At the time of Jonah its population is over 120,000 (Jonah 4:11). The Assyrians were the enemies of the Israelites. Nineveh means "the residence of Ninus," that is, Nimrod.

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.)
 - a. Then the LORD spoke to Jonah a second time and gave him this command: "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh and deliver the message I have given you."
 - b. This time Jonah obeyed the LORD's command and went to Nineveh, a city to give them the message from God. The city was so large that it took three days to walk through it all.
 - c. On the day Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: "Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!"
 - d. The people of Nineveh believed God's message, and from the greatest to the least, they fasted and put on burlap to show their sorrow.
 - e. When the king of Nineveh heard what Jonah was saying, he stepped down from his throne and took off his royal robes. He dressed himself in burlap and sat on a heap of ashes to show his repentance.

- f. Then the king and his nobles sent this decree throughout the city:
 - g. “No one, not even the animals from your herds and flocks, may eat or drink anything at all.
 - h. People and animals alike must wear garments of mourning, and everyone must pray earnestly to God. They must turn from their evil ways and stop all their violence.
 - i. If we do this, maybe God will change his mind and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us.”
 - j. When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind. He did not carry out his threat to destroy the city and all who lived in it.
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:
 - The people of Nineveh repented of their wicked and violent ways and so God changed his mind and did not destroy them.
 - Jonah obeyed God and delivered God’s message to the people of Nineveh. The Ninevites believed the message and repented and as a result God forgave them.
 - Other?
 7. Identify the **twist** of the story.
 - The people of Nineveh, who are enemies of Israel, believe Jonah’s message and respond with repentance.
 - God does not destroy Nineveh as he had planned.
 - Other?
 8. Discuss possible **openings**.
Here are some possible openings:
 - **Connected to the previous chapters of Jonah:** After God freed Jonah from the belly of the great fish He again spoke his word calling him to preach in Nineveh.
 - **Connected to the audience’s life:** What is required of us when we sin? God desires our repentance. Here is a story of a wicked city that turned from their wrongdoing in repentance. God spoke to Jonah again to go to Nineveh.
 - Other?
 9. Discuss possible **endings**.
Here are some possible endings:
 - As it is in Jonah 3:10.
 - Add “When God sees our repentance, he will respond with forgiveness too.”
 - 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** – a title for God

- **Preach** – literally “proclaim the proclamation”
- **Obedied** – did as God said
- **Three days’ journey** - about sixty miles, allowing about twenty miles for a day's journey
- **Believed** – gave credit to Jonah's message from God; thus, recognizing Jehovah as the true God
- **Fast and put on rough clothes to show their sadness** – In the East outward actions are often used as symbolical expressions of inward feelings. So, fasting and clothing in sackcloth were customary in humiliation.
- **Turn away from evil living** – Turn from evil ways, to repent.
- **Stop doing harm all the time** – Violence is singled out as special sin of Nineveh.
- **(God repented of the evil) God will/did change his mind** – when they repented, the position in which they stood towards God's righteousness was altered. So, God's mode of dealing with them must alter accordingly, if God is not to be inconsistent with His own immutable character of dealing with men according to their works and state of heart, taking vengeance at last on the hardened impenitent, and delighting to show mercy on the penitent. The reason why the announcement of destruction was made absolute, and not dependent on Nineveh's continued impenitence, was that this form was the only one calculated to rouse them; and at the same time, it was a truthful representation of God's purpose towards Nineveh under its existing state, and of Nineveh's due.

Rhetorical Devices and Oral Features

Contrasts

- Jonah, the prophet, did as God directed him to do the second time God told him to go to Nineveh. He delivered God’s message to the people of Nineveh in contrast to Jonah’s running away from God the first time he spoke to Jonah. The ‘evil’ people of Nineveh heard God’s message that Jonah shouted to them and they believed from the greatest to the least of them and acted in sorrow.
- The king stepped down from his throne and took off his royal robes. He dressed himself in burlap and sat on a heap of ashes. The leader moved from a privileged and respected position of power to a humble and mourning position.
- Jonah’s short speech and the king’s and noble leaders’ long decree.

Repetition

- Destruction and violence – Jonah shouted, “Nineveh **will be destroyed.**” The king decreed, “The people must turn from their evil ways and stop **all their violence.**... Perhaps God will change his mind and hold back his fierce anger from **destroying** us.” God changed his mind and did not carry out the **destruction** he had threatened.
- Symbols of burlap and garments of mourning – The people of Nineveh put on **burlap to show their sorrow.** The king **dressed himself in burlap.** The king decreed, “People and animals alike must **wear garments of mourning.**...” Similarly, **fasting or eating and drinking** nothing is also repeated.

Irony

- Jonah, God’s prophet and a descendent of Abraham, did not immediately obey God and when he did it was tersely and with reluctance. The people of Nineveh, the powerful aggressive people who fought against the people of Israel and who did not worship the God of Abraham, believed God’s message and humbled themselves before him. The king of Nineveh commanded the people pray earnestly to God.

Sudden Change

- The people of Nineveh believe God's message shared by a Hebrew prophet and perform acts of contrition. They fast and they dress in clothes of mourning and they pray. They put a stop to their evil ways.
- God saw that the Ninevite people put a stop to their evil ways and he did not destroy Nineveh as he had threatened to do.

Additional resources

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

- **Jonah 1-4** – the whole story
- **Luke 11:30** – As Jonah was a sign for those people who lived in Nineveh, the Son of Man will be a sign for the people of this time.
- **Matthew 12:39, 16:1-4** – Pharisees ask for a miracle and Jesus gives sign of Jonah

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

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