

LEADER Bible Study

Jonah lived during the time Jeroboam II was king over Israel, mere decades before the Northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed. Jonah was a prophet—and while he is best known as the man who was swallowed by a big fish when he tried to run away from God, his story continues beyond chapter 2 to reveal what Jonah knew all along: God is “a gracious and compassionate God” (John 4:2b).

Jonah’s account centers around the compassion of God, not only for the people of Israel but for people throughout the earth—even Israel’s worst enemies!

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, and the rulers of Nineveh were notoriously evil and cruel. That was the very reason God called Jonah to go to them: “Their evil has come up before me” (Jonah 1:2). God is the Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25), and He is sovereign over all the nations.

Jonah discovered that no one can flee from God’s presence. (Ps. 139:9-10) Through a storm and some time in the belly of a fish, God got Jonah’s attention, and Jonah went to Nineveh. For three days, Jonah walked around the city. His message to the Ninevites was brief: “In forty days Nineveh will be demolished!” (Jonah 3:4)

The people of Nineveh immediately repented, and God withheld His judgment. “Jonah was greatly displeased and became furious” (Jonah 4:1). God rebuked Jonah. He left Jonah—and the reader—with a question to consider: “May I not care about the great city of Nineveh?” (Jonah 4:11).

Emphasize to kids that Jesus is greater than Jonah. (Matt. 12:41) Jesus came calling all sinners to repentance. He submitted to God’s will with joy and laid down His own life for our sins. God shows His mercy in the gospel, forgiving those who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. God sends us out, like Jonah, to share the good news of salvation.