

WINTER 2025–2026

The Prophet Jonah

LESSON 05

JANUARY 04, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Jonah 1–4

FOCUS VERSE

Jonah 4:11

And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy.

MY RESPONSE TO COVENANT

I will rejoice when God is merciful to others and to me.

COVENANT CONTEXT

Beyond the section of Historical Books in our Bible, a significant section of the Old Testament contains the writings of prophets who spoke as they were moved by God. After God opened the door for the world to be in covenant with Him, He sent a prophet named Jonah to the Gentile nation of Assyria to preach repentance from sins. Although Jonah was reluctant to preach to Assyria, God was willing to show them mercy, thus extending covenant to people beyond the Jews. God's mercy is greater than we can imagine.

TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: What is the biggest excuse you have used to get out of doing something you didn't want to do?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to set up the story of Jonah refusing to do what God had called him to do.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

- I. JONAH THE PROPHET?
 - A. Jonah Prophesied Revival
 - B. Jonah's Reluctant Prophecy
 - C. I will overcome reluctance through obedience to God.

DISCUSS: *Why are we sometimes reluctant concerning an assignment God gives us?*

- II. JONAH THE REPENTANT PROPHET?

- A. Repentance or Remorse?
- B. Nineveh's Short-Lived Repentance
- C. I will turn to God with true repentance when I am disobedient.

DISCUSS: *How do you keep from feeling disqualified from God using you?*

III. JONAH THE REJECTING PROPHET

- A. Jonah Rejected God's Mercy

DISCUSS: *What steps could you take to help you grant mercy to someone who has wronged you?*

- B. Jonah Rejected God's Calling

DISCUSS: *What mission does God have for you to carry out? If you're not already obeying, what will you do today to obey?*

- C. I will live out my mission to share covenant with all who need mercy.

DISCUSS: *What actionable steps can you take to live out your mission of sharing God's mercy?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to give us a fresh revelation of His mercy
- For God to use us to reach people of all walks of life

LESSON CONNECTION

On November 18, 2012, thirty-six-year-old Salvador Alvarenga set off the coast of Mexico with his inexperienced crewmate, Ezequiel Córdoba. Fishing was the plan for the day, so they loaded a few items: sardines for bait, fishing hooks and lines, knives, and bailing buckets. In addition they took a few navigating tools: a mobile phone in a plastic bag to keep it dry, a GPS tracking device (not waterproof), and a two-way radio with a half-charged battery. What was supposed to be routine turned out to be disastrous. Suddenly the tiny crew found themselves ambushed by a storm. Battling and bailing against the water rushing in, Alvarenga and Córdoba worked furiously.

Frantic and freezing, they held on for life as the waves battered the small twenty-five-foot watercraft. With the storm lifting a bit, Alvarenga radioed his boss, "Willy! The motor is ruined!"

"Calm down, man, give me your coordinates," Willy responded from the docks.

But Alvarenga would not be calmed. The GPS was not working and they did not have an anchor. He had noticed it was missing before pushing away from land, but he didn't think he needed it on a deep-sea mission. Willy realized his friend was in trouble, so he set out to save him. As the sun disappeared and darkness overtook them, the storm pushed Córdoba and Alvarenga further and further out to sea. There would be no rescue. The men were lost at sea.

Over the next 438 days, Alvarenga battled dehydration, starvation, fear, loneliness, depression, and hallucinations. Córdoba only survived four months before he died of starvation, sliding off the boat and into a watery grave.

Alvarenga did everything he could to survive. He fed off fish and fowl, using ingenious tactics for his next meal.

Several times he was tempted to give up hope, but he kept fighting to live. Over fourteen months at sea, he had drifted nearly eight thousand miles off course, and Alvarenga washed ashore onto a small island at the southernmost tip of the Marshall Islands. Alvarenga had survived. He was saved.

We, too, have been saved. We have been saved by the mercy of God, having drifted off course from His original plan for our lives. Like Alvarenga, a life separated from God is nothing less than a survival mission. However, God's mercy turns our survival into salvation. Throughout this lesson from the Book of Jonah, we will learn about the lengths God's mercy will go to save people. God extends His mercy to those who are far from His ways, and He even helps those who lose their way, like Jonah.

BIBLE LESSON

I. JONAH THE PROPHET?

A. Jonah Prophesied Revival

It may seem odd to begin the story of Jonah with King Jeroboam II, but that is where the Bible begins Jonah's story. Jeroboam II reigned in Israel for forty-one long years, continuing the evil he inherited. His reign of terror was marked by idolatry, materialism, and disregard for people in need. Despite Jeroboam's wickedness, God still did not want to destroy Israel. Although Israel turned their back on God, God was not turning His back on them. He had every intention to save His people. God was not condoning their sin, but He was remembering His covenant with them because Israel was His people. Even though they broke covenant with Him, He would continue to protect them from their enemies. When God saw how vulnerable His people were, He sent them a prophet named Jonah.

The Scripture records of Jeroboam II: "He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amitai, the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher" (II Kings 14:25). God used Jonah to help restore and reclaim Israel's borders and national identity.

B. Jonah's Reluctant Prophecy

God called Jonah, saying: "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me" (Jonah 1:2). The Ninevites worshiped a goddess of love and war. Priding themselves on these two traits, the Ninevites flaunted a lifestyle of promiscuity and violence. Their sin reached a point where God was about to judge them, but first He sent Jonah to preach repentance to them. However, Jonah chose a different plan from the plan of God: "Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD" (Jonah 1:3). Jonah went in the exact opposite direction: he fled to Tarshish. If Jonah lived in 2026 and God called him to preach to New York City, we would find him on a flight headed to Los Angeles. Jonah disobeyed God because he could not understand why God would send him to wicked Nineveh.

Jonah even tried to flee from the presence of the Lord partly because he misunderstood mercy. Jonah was glad God was merciful to him, but he was reluctant to see God extend mercy to others, especially to a wicked people like the

Assyrians. After God's reluctant prophet was seemingly safe on the seas, God sent a storm to get Jonah's attention. "But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken" (Jonah 1:4). Jonah did not expect the storm, but it brought him to repentance.

C. I will overcome reluctance through obedience to God.

We learn some lessons the hard way. Doing the will of God is not always easy, but it is always right. We will likely not understand God's whys and wherefores, but we don't have to understand; we just need to trust God knows what He's doing and thank Him that He includes us in His plan. If you feel reluctant to do what God is calling you to do, simply repent and say "yes, Lord" to the will of God. You will find what Jonah found—God is more merciful than we realize.

DISCUSS: Why are we sometimes reluctant concerning an assignment God gives us?

II. JONAH THE REPENTANT PROPHET?

A. Repentance or Remorse?

During the storm, Jonah's shipmates were out of options. They tossed out cargo and prayed to their gods, but nothing calmed the storm. Finally Jonah confessed that he was running from the call of God, and against their better judgment (yet at Jonah's request) they tossed him into the angry waters. Once Jonah sank into the sea, the storm calmed. Jonah was indeed the problem. But God was ready for him, and God had prepared a great fish to keep Jonah for three days and three nights. The fish opened wide, swallowed Jonah, and for the first time in the story, we read that Jonah prayed. Jonah 2:2 declares: "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou hearest my voice."

Although we cannot know his heart, we are left to wonder if Jonah was repentant or remorseful. There is a difference. Remorse may lead us to repentance, but remorse is incomplete without repentance. Sometimes God prepares storms to get our attention and help us return to Him, but God does not intend to harm us. He is always working toward our salvation. In the depths of the ocean in the belly of a fish, Jonah had begun to turn from his plans to follow God's plan. He vowed to do what God had called him to do, no matter how tough the task.

B. Nineveh's Short-Lived Repentance

After Jonah repented, God performed another great miracle: "The LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land" (Jonah 2:10). He began his march toward Nineveh with a simple, eight-word sermon: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). Amazingly the Ninevites repented, much to his annoyance. They believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Even the king laid aside his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. From the king to the commoners, all of Nineveh repented. Unfortunately, their repentance was short lived. About 150 years later, God used another prophet named Nahum to prophesy to Nineveh of God's impending judgment in the book that bears Nahum's name.

At one point God had offered them mercy; now He was administering judgment. Under Jonah they had a chance to repent. Just how bad had Nineveh gotten? The Scripture records: "There is a multitude of slain, a great number of

bodies, countless corpses—they stumble over the corpses—because of the multitude of harlotries of the seductive harlot, the mistress of sorceries, who sells nations through her harlotries, and families through her sorceries” (Nahum 3:3–4, NKJV). Nineveh practiced their wickedness and even peddled it to corrupt the nations around them—an abomination in God’s eyes.

C. I will turn to God with true repentance when I am disobedient.

We must turn to God in true repentance any time we are disobedient. God is not willing for any of us to perish in our disobedience; rather, He offers us mercy so we can repent of our sins. Also note that God did not look for another man to carry out the task He originally gave Jonah. God does not take His giftings and callings from us when we fail. We can pick up these gifts of God and continue with the mission He gave us.

DISCUSS: How do you keep from feeling disqualified from God using you?

III. JONAH THE REJECTING PROPHET

A. Jonah Rejected God’s Mercy

Jonah understood God’s mercy, but he rejected it. Initially he refused to preach to the Ninevites because he understood God enough to know God would forgive them if they repented:

And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not....But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. (Jonah 3:10; 4:1–2)

The absurdity that Jonah would be upset because God extended His covenant to forgive others is spiritual blindness at its worst. Lest we look down on Jonah, we must examine our own hearts. When we willingly overlook our mistakes but point out the errors of others, we are missing the central point of mercy. Paul was right to write: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Every one of us needs God’s mercy, so we should be quick to share God’s mercy.

DISCUSS: What steps could you take to help you grant mercy to someone who has wronged you?

B. Jonah Rejected God’s Calling

Jonah was not only rejecting God’s mercy, but he was also rejecting God’s calling: “And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death” (Jonah 4:8–9). Jonah’s story ended as it began: He wished to die instead of living out his prophetic calling. The story of Jonah mirrors the story of Israel on a smaller scale—rejecting God’s covenant to be a witness to the Gentiles.

God wanted Israel to be a light, but they chose to stumble in darkness like the nations around them. Jonah and Israel

had become so misguided that Jonah got to a place where he cared only for his comfort, showing how far he had strayed from God's call on his life. That led to the Lord's stern rebuke: "Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:10–11).

DISCUSS: *What mission does God have for you to carry out? If you're not already obeying, what will you do today to obey?*

C. I will live out my mission to share covenant with all who need mercy.

That last verse in the Book of Jonah summarizes the entire book. While God waited for Jonah to answer that question, God Himself already had answered it through His actions. He spared Jonah's life and was willing to hear him when he cried out from the depths of his despair. While God did save Jonah's life, it was partly so he would preach to Nineveh, so Nineveh would repent, and God would forgive. The Lord was leaving the window of mercy open to the Ninevites.

As people of God's New Covenant, we must live out our mission of mercy with all who need mercy. Yes we live in a wicked world, but so did Jonah. While wickedness was going up to God, God's mercy was coming down to humanity. Because we do not understand God's love at times, sometimes we magnify sin more than God's mercy. We become like Jonah, a quasi-prophet, and a contradiction of the very good news we preach and teach. Jonah confessed that God mercifully saved his life, but when God wanted to use Jonah to help save others, Jonah became angry. Thankfully, God is patient and willing to show us mercy when we struggle to understand why He chooses to operate in the manner He does. May God baptize all of us with a fresh revelation of the vast richness of His mercy.

DISCUSS: *What actionable steps can you take to live out your mission of sharing God's mercy?*

Teacher Option: *Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how we must be willing to show mercy and rejoice with others whom God forgives.*

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Chris was only ten years old on that Friday morning in 1974 when he got off the school bus in Coral Gables, Florida. A stranger told him he needed help decorating for a party for Chris's dad, only five days before Christmas. The ten-year-old jumped into the camper as the stranger drove out of town and into a secluded area where he suddenly stopped.

He pulled Chris into the middle of the RV and repeatedly stabbed him. His attacker stopped long enough to drive him down a country road in the Everglades known as Alligator Alley. He forced Chris outside the camper where he pulled out a gun, aimed it at ten-year-old Chris, and that was his last memory before he awoke in a hospital days later.

When he tried to open his eyes, he discovered he was blind in one eye. His dad told him the whole story. "Chris, you

were kidnapped, you were shot through the head, and you were left to die in the Florida Everglades. And you were missing for six days.” Trauma causes some people to run from God, but Chris ran toward Him, realizing he could trust the God who spared his life.

The police had one suspect, David McAllister, but not enough evidence to convict him. Twenty-two years later, the Sheriff’s department called Chris to let him know they had found the man who tried to kill him. He was dying in a nursing home, and he confessed to brutally attacking ten-year-old Chris Carrier and leaving him to die in the Everglades.

Not long after that phone call, Chris walked into the room where his attacker David McAllister lay dying. Carrier told McAllister, “Mr. McAllister, I’d like you to know what’s really been the source of my strength through all of this....I want you to know there’s nothing between you and me except our newfound friendship. I want you to know I forgive you.” Chris prayed with David and shared the gospel with him. McAllister was blind and frail, but he grabbed Chris’s hand, and weakly said through tears, “I’m sorry.”

Chris needed God’s grace and mercy. And for twenty-two years, God poured out His grace and mercy on a boy who was kidnapped, stabbed, and shot just five days before Christmas. And at the end of those twenty-two years, Chris prayed for God to pour out His mercy on the man who kidnapped and attacked him.

No doubt other people have hurt you or hurt people you love. Human nature wants to see them judged for what they have done, but God wants to bring them to repentance so He can forgive them. Part of that process is us being willing to share God’s mercy and gospel with them and pray for God to forgive them, not judge them. Although we don’t know how Jonah responded to God’s probing question at the end of Jonah 4, we still have the opportunity to rejoice when God is merciful: merciful to us and to those who have hurt us. After all, as Jesus taught, only the merciful will obtain mercy (Matthew 5:7).