FLOURISH
BIBLE STUDY

JONAH

LEADER'S GUIDE



LYDIA BROWNBACK

WEEK 1: PRIVILEGED PROPHET

1. Read 2 Kings 14:23–26, which recounts this earlier episode in Jonah's life. How does this passage in 2 Kings liken King Jeroboam II of Jonah's day to an earlier King Jeroboam (identified here in 2 Kings as the son of Nebat), and what does this likeness reveal about the spiritual state of Israel at this time?

   Answer: The mention of two Jeroboams can be a bit confusing. The point to make is that both Jeroboams were evil and led Israel down a bad path.

   Why, according to 2 Kings 14:26, did God give this good news to Jonah and then carry it out?

   Answer: The second Jeroboam "restored the border of Israel," which means he regained some Israelite territory that had been lost in battle. The impetus for this military feat was Jonah's prophecy that Jeroboam would have success in reclaiming those lost borders. God gave this word of hope to Jonah because "the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there . . . was none to help." The Lord's covenant promise to preserve his people is here in verse 26.

2. Jonah is identified as "the son of Amittai," which means "son of my faithfulness." The name isn't so much about the faithfulness of Jonah's father or of Jonah himself but about God's faithfulness to Jonah, as we will soon see. The actual meaning of Jonah's name is "dove." What does Hosea 7:11 reveal about the meaning of Jonah's name?

   Answer: Hosea shows that one meaning of *dove* is "silly and without sense." *Dove* conveys other meanings in the Bible, but way it's used in Hosea is applicable to Jonah, as we will see.

3. Jonah wasn't the only prophet in Israel to receive a challenging assignment from the Lord. Before Jonah's time, God sent Elijah the prophet to confront evil head on. In Elijah's case, it was the evil of Israel's very own King Ahab. Read 1 Kings 18:1–46, which recounts one of these confrontations, and answer the following questions.

- How does Elijah respond when the Lord tells him to go to Ahab?

  Answer: He goes without argument. Elijah's actions all through the story stand in contrast to the selfish cowardice of Jonah.

- How does Elijah address the powerful King Ahab? (See 1 Kings 18:17–18.)

  Answer: Elijah is courageous in ordering Ahab to gather Israel to watch a display of God's power, even before the miracle unfolded. He also shows great courage when he accuses Ahab of being the source of Israel's troubles.

- How does Elijah challenge God's straying people in 1 Kings 18:21?

  Answer: The point is, whom will you serve—yourself or the Lord?

- How does Elijah demonstrate great faith in 1 Kings 18:22–40 and again in 41–46?

  Answer: Elijah trusted that the Lord would expose idols as worthless. Afterward, he kept looking for rain even when it seemed none was forthcoming.

- What do you learn from this story about the God-appointed role of Israel's Old Testament prophets?

  Answer: The OT prophets illuminated that the Lord, Yahweh, is the only God and that he keeps his covenant promises.

4. Given how the great prophet Elijah responded to the Lord's instructions, history that Jonah surely knew about, how would we expect Jonah to respond when the Lord calls him?

   Answer: God blessed Elijah's courage and faith with great displays of his power. Knowing all this history should have encouraged Jonah to follow in Elijah's faithful footsteps. He should have gone immediately to Nineveh when God first called him.

5. Jonah is instructed to go to Nineveh and tell the Ninevite people that the Lord sees what they are doing and calls it "evil" (v. 2). Not knowing the God of Israel, the people of Nineveh most likely viewed their ways and their deeds quite differently, so we'd expect them to respond, "Who cares what Israel's God thinks of us?" The real question, however, isn't what they think of God but what God's thinks of them. The fact that God takes notice of these Assyrian people and sends Jonah to tell them—what does this reveal about God himself ?

   Answer: The Lord sees and knows everyone and takes note of every heart and will judge or show mercy as he chooses. No one escapes God's notice. The Lord identifying the Ninevites as "evil" indicates that those Ninevites are responsible to God—he alone determines what is evil and what is righteous.

6. What words or ideas are found more than once in verse 3, and what does each repetition communicate to us?

   Answer: The word "down" appears twice in verse 3. This is important because it indicates the trajectory of Jonah's spiritual life. Ask group members to keep an eye out for this downward course of Jonah's life at this point. Also clear in verse 3 is Jonah's trying to get away from the presence of the Lord.

7. How might Jonah's earlier "success"—his prophecy of military victory (the episode

we noted in 2 Kings 14)—have contributed to his present desire to run away from God's call to go preach in enemy territory?

Answer: No doubt he was popular and well-regarded for prophesying good news for Israel. Now that the Lord is calling him to give a salvation message to Israel's most feared enemy, the people might begin to see him as a traitor. He might well fear the loss of his reputation.

8. How does Psalm 139:7–12 show us the folly of Jonah's actions?

   Answer: The psalm makes crystal clear that there is simply no escaping the Lord!

9. We always pay a price when we run away from God. How do we see the beginnings of that here in Jonah's flight?

   Answer: He had to fork over his money to board the ship to Tarshish. The implication here is that disobedience is always costly.

10. Tarshish, Jonah's intended destination, was likely somewhere along the coast of Spain, although no one is exactly sure of its precise location. A ship departing from Joppa would have sailed west in the Mediterranean Sea—in the exact opposite direction of Nineveh. Tarshish is included in a prophecy made by Isaiah, who foretold how God would one day bless this place and other nations. But at the time of both Isaiah and Jonah, that blessing had not yet come. What is indicated in Isaiah 66:19 about the spiritual state of Tarshish at the time of these prophets, and how might that reveal a bit about why Jonah wanted to flee there?

    Answer: Tarshish is a place where he won't be questioned or criticized. Perhaps he believes, wrongly, that if he can just get God out of sight, he can get him out of mind as well.

WEEK 2: GOING DOWN!

1. "But the Lord . . ." The first word of verse 4, "but," is important because it links us back to verse 3. What does this linking word reveal about the reason for the storm?

   Answer: The purpose of the storm was to halt Jonah's fleeing from God.

2. Storms are fascinating to watch from the safety of indoor shelter. We're awed by flashes of lightning and crashes of thunder and the sight of trees bent low by the wind as dense roiling clouds shroud the landscape in darkness. Storms—each and every one—are designed and sent by our Creator God. Pick two or three (or more) of the following passages and jot down what each reveals about the Lord of storms and

his purposes for sending them. Afterward write a summary statement that notes any common themes you discover.

- Exodus 9:13–29

  Answer: The plague of hail was meant to show Egypt, especially Pharaoh, that there is only one true God, the Lord God of Israel. Egypt worshiped numerous deities, many of which were thought to control weather and other natural phenomena, and if rightly worshiped, these gods would be favorable toward the Egyptians. The hail plague proved their worship false.

- Exodus 19:10–20 with Hebrews 12:18–24

  Answer: God manifesting his glory is called a "theophany," and such theophanies are shown through powerful forces of nature such as awe-inspiring displays of thunder and lightening.

- Joshua 10:7–11

  Answer: God can work in and through his creation to protect his people. Here, he sends hail to stop Israel's enemies.

- Psalm 29:1–4

  Answer: God's majesty is revealed in a powerful storm.

- Psalm 107:23–32

  Answer: God creates storms and then stills those storms to draw people to himself.

- Isaiah 30:30–32

  Answer: Displays of God's power over nature are also sent to terrify the wicked.

- Nahum 1:3

  Answer: God's control over nature debunks false gods and exposes their powerlessness.

- Revelation 16:17–21

  Answer: Storms can be an indicator of God's pending judgment

  Summary Statement: God works in and through his own creation to reveal his glory, power, and authority over everything and everyone.

3. As we return to Jonah, how is the storm impacting his journey?

   Answer: Get your answer from verse 4, where we see that the relentless power of the storm is taking a toll on the Tarshish-bound ship.

4. Divesting the ship of cargo was no fear-based reflex. It's what any knowledgeable mariner would do in a storm, whether afraid or not. But fear is what made each one cry out for divine intervention. How does Romans 1:19–20 reveal why they look beyond themselves for help?

   Answer: Everyone knows that God exists, but the majority choose to suppress this knowledge. Helplessness can bring this covered-up knowledge to the forefront.

5. Jonah's rebellion has brought the mariners into a perilous situation, yet we mustn't suppose they were good men deserving of rescue. How do Psalm 14:1–3 and Romans 3:10–12 help us understand why?

   Answer: Because human beings are born in sin, none deserves God's grace and mercy. Even our best works are tainted by sin, rendering us guilty before a holy God.

6. In those days (and in our day too), people who didn't know the Lord God of Israel worshiped other gods and goddesses, false gods that the Bible calls "idols." What does Isaiah 44:10–20 reveal about idols?

   Answer: Idols produce nothing but shame in those who create them. Serving a false god leads to spiritual blindness and actually takes away all that's good in life rather than gives it.

7. Meanwhile, where is Jonah? Surprisingly, almost impossibly, he's asleep below deck. We're told that he had gone down below and had lain down for a nap. How does this wording carry forward what we're told about Jonah in verse 3?

   Answer: This points again to his downward trajectory.

8. Idol worshipers are the same in every age. Centuries later, in the New Testament, the Gentiles—those not part of God's covenant people—sought blessings from whatever god seemed most ready, willing, and able to provide. How does the apostle Paul refute the lies of idolatry in Acts 17:22–28?

   Answer: God is the giver of life and sovereign over all of creation, so worshiping any other so-called god is futile.

9. "Wake up, you sleeper!" exclaims the frantic captain. What an interesting choice of words. In waking Jonah, the captain unknowingly gets underneath Jonah's physical drowsiness, penetrating all the way into his current spiritual condition. Read Isaiah 52:1–2, Ephesians 5:11–14, and Revelation 3:2–3. Although these passages are rooted in different times and situations in the history of God's people, the message to spiritual sleepers is the same in each. What is that message?

Answer: The cry to Jonah is a cry to us as well—wake up! Jonah's physical sleep reflects spiritual sleep, where God is first ignored or disobeyed, and then, as a result, spiritual sluggishness sets in. As believers, we are called to be awake to the things of God—his Word and ways.

10. Centuries later, in a different storm on a different sea, another prophet—the ultimate prophet, the Lord Jesus—was asleep in a teetering boat. Read Matthew 8:23–27 to answer the following questions.

- In what way is Jesus's sleep different from Jonah's?

  Answer: Jonah's sleep is an escape from reality. Jesus's sleep is peaceful because he created reality.

- Why is the disciples' reaction to the storm similar to the mariners' reaction in Jonah?

  Answer: The fear of the men in both stories is due either to misplaced faith (the mariners trusted in powerless idols) or to weak faith (the disciples were slow to believe that Jesus was God, with all the power of God at his disposal

WEEK 3: LIFE OR DEATH

1. The lot has fallen on Jonah, and he doesn't try to deny that he's the one responsible for putting them all in this life-threatening situation. According to verse 9, what specifics did Jonah tell them?

   Answer: He identifies himself as one of God's people (a Hebrew, an Israelite), and he says that he worships this God (fears the Lord).

2. Which of the mariners' questions from verse 8 does Jonah not answer?

   Answer: He does not tell them his occupation, that he is a prophet called by God. After all, he is running away from this calling.

3. How does Jonah's description of himself contradict his life at this point?

   Answer: Running away from God is the very opposite of living in the "fear of the Lord," which is all about orienting our life completely around God and his ways.

4. What in Jonah's description of God provokes even more fear in the mariners?

   Answer: That God is the creator of the sea and dry land, and thus creator of the storm-tossed waves threatening their lives.

5. Why do you think that the mariners ask Jonah for the solution to the problem they now know he has caused?

   Answer: They believed that their idol-gods could be easily angered and vent this anger by wreaking havoc in nature. The kernel of truth is that God did indeed cause the storm, but not from the kind of anger the mariners imagined.

6. Instructions for how Israel was to observe the Day of Atonement were given in Leviticus, a book of the Bible that sets out the ways God's people were to deal with their sin and impurity in order to dwell with a holy God. Centuries later, the New Testament book of Hebrews reflects on this Day of Atonement and explains why its ritual—a scapegoat—is no longer necessary. How does Hebrews 9:7–14 reveal the way in which Jonah's declaration in 1:12—"Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you"—is a forward-pointing sign?

   Answer: This question could use some revision for clarity, and it will be revised in a future printing. For now, here's a good simplification to use: Jonah says, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you" (v. 12). What does his sacrificial offering of his life foreshadow?

7. The mariners do all they can to avoid doing what Jonah has suggested, working furiously to preserve every life on board. What does the Lord do in response in verse 13?

   Answer: The Lord makes the storm worse.

8. What clues do we have in verses 14–16 that the mariners' appeal to the Lord arose from genuine faith and not just fear?

   Answer: The use the Lord's covenant name, Yahweh, and they made vows and sacrifice to the Lord after the storm ceases.

9. How do verses 14–16 reveal the way God sometimes works to bring forth faith?

   Answer: The Lord can work through natural disasters and troubling circumstances of all kinds to humble human hearts so they will turn to him in faith.

10. The book of Acts records a time when the apostle Paul and his missionary companions were traveling by ship along the coast of Crete. Because it was winter, the season for especially rough seas, Paul had advised against setting out on the journey, but the ship's captain wanted to press ahead, so the band of men along with a large contingent of mariners and prisoners set out. As Paul had cautioned, a strong storm kicked up and soon jeopardized the lives of everyone on board. Read about this inci-

dent in Acts 27:13–44. How does this incident at sea stand in contrast to the one in Jonah, and what makes it different?

Answer: The varying circumstances point to the fact that Paul was running toward God's will whereas Jonah was fleeing from it.

WEEK 4: THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS

1. Before we look at the specifics of this verse in Jonah, read through Psalm 104 and note what you see there about God's intentions in, through, and for his creation.

   Answer: You'll want to highlight God's greatness, his sovereign control, and his caring provision for his creation.

2. What do we learn about God from the water in each of the following passages?

   Answer: *various observations*

3. The water holds great significance, but so does the direction it carries Jonah—down. That's where water takes anyone who can't swim or boat successfully. When we see the expression "go down," or "he went down" in Scripture, the words are often meant to communicate something significant. How does Psalm 88:3–7 reveal what this is?

   Answer: Going down symbolizes death and the place of the dead, Sheol.

4. We're going to look more closely at the context of Jesus's words in Matthew 12 when we get to Week 10, but for now, let's focus on the implications of what he says here and how it ties back to Jonah. First, it is Jesus himself who says that what happened to Jonah was a sign. According to Jesus, what did Jonah's days beneath the sea signify? See also Acts 2:22–23.

   Answer: Jesus's death for sinners.

5. The fish represents hell and no doubt felt that way to the suffering Jonah. And perhaps his mind wandered unwillingly to thoughts of a fearsome sea creature called Leviathan. This creature, found in ancient myths, was a well-known symbol of evil, and for that reason, we might consider the great fish that swallowed Jonah another sign, this one pointing all the way to the end of time and what will happen then because of Jesus's death on the cross. What is this sign, according to Isaiah 27:1?

   Answer: The great fish symbolizes being trapped in death because of evil, but all death and evil will end when the Lord slays this great sea creature.

6. Back up from the deep, onboard the ship, the mariners have been enjoying a radically different experience—the wonders of salvation. The storm has stopped, they are amazed by the power of God, and they express their awe-filled wonder in acts of worship. Jonah the guilty had been sacrificed, and through his sinking down, they'd been saved. According to Ephesians 2:11–16, how does what happened to the mariners also serve as a sign pointing to the work of Christ?

   Answer: The mariners, outsiders to God's covenant promises, are brought in, which symbolizes the Gentiles—peoples from every tribe and nation—coming into God's family of true believers.

WEEK 5: DOWN IN THE DEPTHS

1. Imprisoned at the bottom of the sea, Jonah is experiencing a foretaste of hell, of "Sheol" (v. 2), the place of the dead. In our day, we associate the sea with fun at the beach and boating adventures, but in ancient times, the sea was feared. While necessary for travel and commerce, it was associated with danger and chaos. Write down all the sea images you find in verses 1–6.

   Answer: The deep, heart of the seas, the flood, waves and billows, the waters.

2. Revelation, the last book of the Bible, contains a lot of symbolism for the return of Christ at the end of the age and the new heavens and earth. What is symbolized by the sea imagery in Revelation 13:1–4 and 21:1–2?

   Answer: The sea is a symbol for chaos, and the beast (evil) rises from it.

3. How does Jonah's reference to these particular psalms provide insight into how his desperate situation is changing his heart and the way he views both himself and the Lord?

   Answer: He refers to God as "O Lord my God." He turns toward God rather than away. When he says that he "remembers" the Lord, he is speaking of spiritual remembering.

4. Jonah well knows that the mariners had tossed him into the sea at his very own suggestion, but now, even though he nears the sleep of death, his heart and mind are waking up, and his entire perspective is changing. Whom does he now see as the cause of his plight?

   Answer: God is the one who "cast" him into the sea.

5. In last week's lesson we focused on how Jonah's going down into the sea points

forward in time to the death of another prophet—the ultimate prophet—the Lord Jesus Christ. We know this from the words of Jesus himself, who said, "Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). What does Jonah say in his prayer that further points to what Christ experienced in his suffering for sinners, as revealed in Matthew 27:46?

Answer: Jonah cries out that he is driven away from God's sight (2:4).

6. Identify all the things that Jonah attributes directly to the Lord in verses 1–6.

   Answer: God hears and answers him (v. 2); God cast him into the deep (v. 3); God raised him up (v. 6).

7. Identify Jonah's declarations of hope in verses 1–6.

   Answer: He believes he will "look again upon God's holy temple," which demonstrates hope that God will rescue him. He declares hope in God's "steadfast love." He looks ahead to making sacrifices and offering God thanksgiving.

8. In Jonah's day, the Lord chose to set his presence in a man-made structure, first in the tabernacle and later in the grand temple built by King Solomon. The tabernacle and temple were where God's people brought sacrifices for sin and received cleansing and forgiveness. With this background in mind, what do you think Jonah is saying in verse 4 when he speaks of the temple?

   Answer: That he will once again enjoy worshiping in the presence of God.

9. Jonah has no idea that he's going to be rescued from the fish at this point. In fact, death likely seems inevitable. So if physical survival isn't his hope, what is?

   Answer: His hope is that through God's grace and mercy, one way or another, he will be in God's presence.

WEEK 6: A REORIENTED HEART

1. Why do you think this particular moment led Jonah to remember the Lord?

   Answer: Jonah had reached the epitome of helplessness—there was nothing he could do to save himself.

2. What insight do we get from Proverbs 3:34 to help us understand Jonah's remembering?

Answer: The Lord first humbled Jonah, which tenderized Jonah's heart to be receptive to the Lord's grace.

3. When Israel's grand temple in Jerusalem was completed and ready to be used for worship, King Solomon dedicated it to the Lord with a prayer. How do the words of Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8:27–30 help us understand Jonah's mention of the temple here in verse 7?

   Answer: The Lord had centered his presence at the temple, and it's where God's favor was regularly sought in prayer. Jonah has this standard practice in mind as he prays here.

4. Jonah declares that idol worshipers "forsake their hope of steadfast love" (v. 8). The Hebrew word translated here as "steadfast love" is hesed. It's an important word in the Old Testament because it's used primarily to describe the Lord's love, kindness, and good intentions toward his people. It is also translated as "mercy" or "faithful love." With this in mind, what do you think Jonah means by his declaration in verse 8?

   Answer: No one can cling to an idol and to God at the same time because if you are turned toward an idol, you are turned away from the only source of this hesed. In other words, you make yourself unavailable to receive it.

5. What do Isaiah 44:12–20 and Jeremiah 2:11–13 add to your understanding of Jonah's declaration in verse 8?

   Answer: Isaiah shows us how idols lead to spiritual blindness. Jeremiah shows that idols leave us trying to find sustenance where there is none and that trusting in them is an act of forsaking the Lord.

6. Those who "pay regard" to idols miss true blessing, Jonah says. What do you think it means to pay regard to an idol? Identify some examples either from Scripture or from personal observation and experience.

   Answer: To "pay regard" to an idol is to direct our time, energies, resources, and affections toward getting what we think it can give us. It's always a delusion. One example: If people are idols, we will shape our lives around getting their love and approval.

7. Despite the fact that Jonah is still inside the fish, still near death, he pours out thanks to God and makes a powerful declaration about him. Given the circumstances and timing, what does this indicate about the nature of genuine repentance?

   Answer: True repentance is not conditioned on our circumstances. It's easy to be sorry for sin when bad consequences loom large, but this isn't the same as genuine

repentance, which includes sorrow for the wrong we've done and a renewed desire for the Lord himself.

8. How do Jonah's words in verse 9 tie back to the mariners in 1:16?

   Answer: Both demonstrate genuine repentance by acknowledging the Lord's authority and offering true worship God.

9. Given his circumstances, what does Jonah mean when he declares that "salvation belongs to the Lord" (v. 9)?

   Answer: If he is to be rescued, only the Lord can accomplish it, but even more—whether Jonah lives or dies—his life is eternally in God's hands

10. The Lord didn't rescue Jonah because he repented. In other words, Jonah didn't "earn" divine rescue. Scripture overall makes clear that God doesn't work that way. We don't earn his blessings, nor can we negotiate for his favor. How then can we best understand God's work in Jonah's life through this chain of events?

    Answer: With a humbled heart and renewed zeal to serve the Lord, Jonah has been made ready to reenter the life God has for him.

WEEK 7: PREACH IT, JONAH!

1. How do the following passages deepen your understanding of how the Lord works in and through our own choices for his purposes?

- Job 42:1–2

  Answer: No matter what human beings believe, say, or do, they can never alter or thwart God's purposes.

- Proverbs 16:9

  Answer: We make plans and take steps to carry them out, but the Lord is always ten steps ahead of us, working in our circumstances to direct us where he wills.

- Acts 17:24–28

  Answer: God determines even the places where we live at any given time. The context of Paul's words is people groups, but since people groups are made up of individuals, we can apply this personally.

- Romans 8:28–30

Answer: God works through even our bad choices to accomplish his purpose of conforming us into the likeness of Jesus.

2. What subtle difference do you note between God's first call of Jonah (1:2) and the second call here in 3:2?

   Answer: Both calls contain the command, "Arise, go." The first one has the instructions to call out against Nineveh's evil. The second call is more succinct: "call out . . . the message that I tell you." Differences aside, it's clear that the intention of the second call is the same—the need for Nineveh to repent.

3. How would you describe the differences in Jonah's heart that would compel him to press through his physical weakness and his understandable qualms about going in among the fierce Ninevites with the Lord's message—a message that could be perceived as hostile?

   Answer: Jonah has been humbled by his experience and renewed in his faith to serve the Lord, both of which impart a confidence in leaving the results of his mission up to God.

4. Jonah spends a day getting the lay of the land, and as he gets into the heart of the city, he calls out the message the Lord has given him, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (v. 4), a message of just eight words. How would you characterize the tone of this message?

   Answer: Urgent and direct. The message God has told him to give is a clearcut warning of dire consequences if the Ninevites won't repent of their sin.

5. The message Jonah delivers is given not as an appeal but as a warning. How does the content of Jonah's short message differ from so many of the messages and sermons preached about the Lord in our churches today?

   Answer: Many preachers today try to win converts by appealing to felt needs with promises of an easy life: "Health, wealth, and happiness will be yours if you just give your life to Christ!" Such messages leave out salvation from sin, which is man's greatest need.

6. Many years later, another prophet, Nahum, called out against Nineveh after the city had once again declined, fallen away from the Lord, and finally reached the peak of its terrifying power and depravity. Read Nahum 3:1–7. How does this later prophecy reveal what God's current message through Jonah is designed to spare them?

   Answer: Judgment and utter destruction.

7. How does Romans 2:6–11 help us understand why Jonah warning the Ninevites of God's wrath was not harshness but rather a demonstration of God's kindness?

   Answer: God wasn't obligated to warn the Ninevites. They deserved judgment. God showed kindness in sending his prophet to change their hearts before they got what they deserved.

8. Although Jonah has delivered the message, whom do the Ninevites actually hear?

   Answer: God himself. Verse 5 says it was God whom they believed.

9. No pretty words, no prosperity promises, yet the people believed what Jonah told them. We'd think they'd need more information as to the whats and the hows and the whys, but Jonah stuck to the eight words God had instructed him to preach. How do the following passages show us why such a change was possible?

- Isaiah 65:1–2. God desires to be sought and found and makes appeals to accomplish his purpose.
- Romans 10:14–17. They heard God's word with spiritual "ears"—with their hearts.
- Galatians 3:5. They were given faith, which enables spiritual hearing.

WEEK 8: SACKCLOTH AND ASHES

1. Look at the king's edict in verse 8, which includes even the animals. In addition to fasting, what components of genuine repentance do you see in his edict? If you aren't sure what those components are, take a look at Psalm 51, a prayer of repentance.

   Answer: There is mourning for sin. The Ninevites also turn to God with cries for mercy, and they reject their former sinful lifestyle.

2. People often fasted during times of personal or national mourning and sorrow for sin. Those who were fasting wore clothing made from a coarse fabric typically used for grain sacks, and during the fast they would sit outside in a pile of ashes. Led by the king, the Ninevites did all these things. What do these actions reveal about their heart response to Jonah's message?

   Answer: Both the fasting and sackcloth are acts of self-humbling. They now see their sin for the wickedness it is and that it offends a righteous God.

3. In the Bible we find other national fasts initiated by leaders, such as the one led by Ezra the priest. According to Ezra 8:21, what is fasting intended to accomplish in one's heart?

Answer: Ezra reinforces the humbling aspect of fasting. We also see from Ezra that God often blesses humbled hearts with tangible answers to prayer. It is not the hunger that pleases God but the humbling that accompanies it.

4. Which attribute of God does the king acknowledge here, and which attribute does he hope to experience?

   Answer: He acknowledges God's righteous wrath (fierce anger), and he hopes to experience God's gracious mercy.

5. How would knowing of Jonah's underwater experience have served as a sign of hope for the Ninevites?

   Answer: The sovereign, ruling God of creation mercifully rescues sinners. The Ninevite god Dagon was depicted as half man and half fish. Jonah's rescue from a great fish would have showcased the Lord's superiority to Dagon, thus lending even more credibility to his message.

6. To get a deeper grasp of God's unchangeableness—what theologians define as his immutability—read Numbers 23:19, 1 Samuel 15:29, and James 1:17. Why is this truth about God comforting for Christians?

   Answer: God is not swayed by the ups and downs of human beings. We don't have to fear that our weaknesses and sins will change his mind toward us. God is faithful to his covenant promises even when we are unfaithful, because that is his nature.

7. How does knowing of God's unchangeableness shape or reshape our approach to prayer?

   Answer: Our prayers do not change God's mind, so we don't have to worry about praying the "right" words or otherwise finding some sort of formula to receive answers. Prayer changes us and reshapes our thoughts, desires, and wills to want what God intends to give us. Additionally, God has determined that some blessings come by means of prayer, but it is not the prayer that brings those blessings but the God who has predetermined the means to those ends.

8. What does the Lord's response to the Ninevites' repentance reveal about his character?

   Answer: The Lord delights to show mercy to even the most hard-hearted sinners when they humble themselves and turn to him.

WEEK 9: GRACE FOR BACKSLIDERS

1. We're not left to interpret how Jonah is feeling—he's just plain angry. Verse 1 points us to the reason. What has so displeased him?

   Answer: He is displeased that the Ninevites repented and therefore weren't destroyed.

2. Note the times and ways God has been true to his character—merciful, gracious, and slow to anger—so far in the story to:

- Jonah: Not letting him run away, judging/discipling him for his sin in order to humble his heart, and restoring him to his calling.
- The Ninevites: They received the Lord's "abounding mercy.

3. Another angry man is found in a parable Jesus told about a father who had two sons. Read Luke 15:11–32. What connection can you make between the anger of the older son in Jesus's parable and Jonah's anger here?

   Answer: The anger of both is rooted in self-righteousness and forgetting their own need for and receiving of God's mercy.

4. As you consider how Jonah prays here in verses 1–2, what would you say is the root of his anger?

   Answer: The Ninevites receiving mercy seems unfair. And it is! God doesn't play by man's rules of fairness. Mercy is receiving undeserved—not deserved—favor. Resenting the mercy shown others is typically rooted in a wrong belief that we are less in need of mercy ourselves.

5. Perhaps Jonah really did wish to die, but just as easily his words might be a pitiful expression of bitterness. Asaph was another Old Testament figure who experienced bitterness for similar reasons. In his case, bitterness came not because God saved undeserving sinners but because sinners seem to profit from sin at the expense of God's own people. Read Psalm 73. What changes Asaph's outlook, and how does it change?

   Answer: He "went into the sanctuary"; in other words, he got into God's presence, and it restored him to right thinking. He was able to see the reality of sin and evil and that God's ways are praiseworthy.

6. Summarize how the Lord has "failed" to meet Jonah's expectations.

   Answer: The Ninevites had caused no small amount of trouble for Israel, God's people, so shouldn't the Lord have exercised judgment on these enemies? It seems

to defy the promises. Jonah is forgetting (or rejecting) the fact that God intended to bring other nations to himself through Israel.

7. As you consider the Lord's question of Jonah as well as these other examples, what seems to be God's purpose in this approach?

   Answer: It compels God's people to examine their hearts.

8. Jonah never answers the Lord's question, at least not that we're given to see. But much later in history, the apostle Paul offers an answer to those who take issue with God's ways. Read Romans 9:14–24. Based on what Paul says there, how should Jonah have answered the Lord's question, "Do you do well to be angry?" (v. 4).

   Answer: He should have acknowledged that his anger was wrong. Paul has strong words for those who take issue with God's ways: "Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?" (Romans 9:20).

WEEK 10: A PLANT, A WORM, AND A HOT EAST WIND

1. What do you think he is hoping to see as he sits there in his booth?

   Answer: He's still hoping that judgment will fall on Nineveh and destroy its inhabitants.

2. What is indicated about Jonah's heart from the fact that this is the first (and only) time in the story that he is glad?

   Answer: He craves personal comfort.

3. The Lord's activity is the focal point of these two verses, just like in chapter 1, where the Lord "hurled" the wind upon the sea (1:4). Here, as well as earlier in the story, we're told that the Lord appoints. From the verses that follow, jot down the Lord's appointing work throughout the story of Jonah.

   1:17. The Lord appoints the fish to swallow Jonah and humble him into repentance.

   4:6. The Lord appoints a plant to relieve Jonah from the heat, and the plant gladdens Jonah's heart.

   4:7. The Lord appoints a worm to destroy the plant, taking away Jonah's comfort.

   4:8. The Lord appoints hot wind to blow on Jonah, who now sits in the open elements unprotected by the plant.

What do you think these appointments were designed to accomplish?

Answer: These appointments were designed to exposed Jonah's heart—what he really loves and serves—and lead him to repent.

4. What does this section teach us about God's purposes in sometimes taking away the very blessings he gives?

   Answer: The Lord is more concerned with our hearts than with our earthly comforts, and when he deems necessary, he will take those comforts away in order to transform us.

5. The Ninevites were Israel's enemies, as we know, and surely their salvation has contributed to Jonah's resentment, especially that God has sent him to have a part in it. But the plant and the worm and the wind reveal another reason for Jonah's anger. How has the Lord exposed through these means what Jonah really cares about, and thus why Jonah is unable to share the Lord's pity for the Ninevites?

   Answer: Jonah cares most of all about himself. The pity he has for the plant is really a cover for self-pity.

6. The Ninevites "do not know their right hand from their left"; in other words, they've had no knowledge about God until now, and what they know now is just a beginning. How does the Lord's self-description, which Jonah recited in verse 2, enable us to understand what is meant by the Lord's "pity"?

   Answer: The Lord overflows with compassion toward wayward sinners.

7. How does the ending of the story—the mention of the cattle in Nineveh—underscore the attributes of God revealed in this chapter?

   Answer: The Lord is not only the creator but also the ruler of everything and everyone on earth, and he takes note of all his creatures.