

WEEK 33 | SUNDAY, AUGUST 16, 2026

Jonah, God's Mercy for All

Primary Scripture: Jonah 1-4

Supporting Scripture: 2 Kings 14:23-25 | Exodus 34:6-7 | Jeremiah 18:7-10 | Matthew 12:38-41 | Romans 5:8-10

Memory Verse, Jonah 2:9: Salvation comes from the LORD.

BIBLE TIMELINE PLACEMENT

Jonah served during the divided kingdom, in the reign of Jeroboam II. Second Kings 14:25 names Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hepher. This places Jonah in the eighth-century BC world of Israel and Assyria.

2 CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Nineveh was a real Assyrian city in the region of modern northern Iraq. Assyria became feared for warfare and harsh treatment of conquered peoples. That background helps explain why Jonah did not want mercy shown to Nineveh, but Scripture itself gives his deepest reason: Jonah knew God was gracious and compassionate and feared that God would spare the city if the people repented (Jonah 4:2).

God did not ignore Nineveh's evil. He said its wickedness had come up before Him (Jonah 1:2), and Jonah 3:8 specifically mentions violence. Mercy in Jonah never means calling evil good. God warns, the people turn, and God relents from the announced destruction (Jonah 3:10; compare Jeremiah 18:7-10).

Joppa was a Mediterranean port. Jonah found a ship bound for Tarshish, deliberately moving away from the place God commanded him to go (Jonah 1:3). The exact location of ancient Tarshish is debated, so do not build the lesson around a precise modern destination. Sackcloth and fasting in Jonah 3 were public signs of grief, humility, and repentance; the important change was that the people turned from their evil ways (Jonah 3:8-10).

Teacher accuracy note: call Nineveh an important Assyrian city in Jonah's time. It later became the imperial capital under Sennacherib. Do not claim archaeology has found proof of Jonah's sermon or the citywide repentance. Archaeology confirms the real Assyrian setting, not the supernatural event itself.

3 WHAT HAPPENS IN THIS PASSAGE

God commands Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach against its wickedness. Jonah instead travels toward Tarshish. The LORD sends a violent storm. The sailors discover Jonah is fleeing from the LORD, and after they reluctantly throw him into the sea, the storm immediately becomes calm. The sailors fear the LORD and worship Him (Jonah 1:4-16).

The LORD provides a huge fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah remains there three days and three nights, prays, and confesses, 'Salvation comes from the LORD' (Jonah 1:17; 2:9). God commands the fish to put Jonah onto dry land and then gives Jonah the command again. This time Jonah goes (Jonah 2:10-3:3).

Jonah announces judgment. The Ninevites believe God, humble themselves, and turn from their evil ways. God shows mercy and does not bring the threatened destruction (Jonah 3:4-10). Jonah becomes angry because this is exactly what he feared God might do. God then uses a plant, a worm, and a hot wind to expose Jonah's heart. The book closes with God's question: should He not care about the people of Nineveh (Jonah 4:1-11)?

4 KEY THEOLOGICAL TRUTHS

1. God Is Sovereign (Jonah 1:4, 17; 2:10; 4:6-8)

Wind, sea, fish, plant, worm, and wind all remain under God's authority. Creation obeys while Jonah struggles to obey. God is never trapped by Jonah's rebellion.

2. God Is Holy, Just, and Merciful (Jonah 1:2; 3:10; 4:2)

God sees wickedness and warns of judgment. When sinners turn, He shows mercy. Jonah 4:2 echoes God's self-revelation in Exodus 34:6-7: gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love.

3. Repentance Means Turning (Jonah 3:5, 8, 10)

The Ninevites do more than feel afraid. They believe God and turn from evil and violence. Repentance is agreeing with God about sin and turning from sin toward Him.

4. Knowing Truth Must Shape the Heart (Jonah 4:1-2)

Jonah's doctrine was accurate, but he resented God's mercy when it benefited enemies. Children need more than correct answers; they need the Holy Spirit to shape their hearts.

5. Salvation Comes from the LORD (Jonah 2:9)

Jonah cannot rescue himself. The verse points beyond physical rescue to our deeper need. Acts 4:12 and the gospel reveal salvation in Jesus Christ.

6. Jesus Is Greater Than Jonah (Matthew 12:39-41)

Jesus treats Jonah's three days as a sign pointing to His own death, burial, and resurrection. Jonah resisted going to enemies; Jesus willingly came to save sinners and enemies (Romans 5:8-10).

5 CMA ALIGNMENT, GOSPEL, AND TRINITY

Jesus our Savior: Jonah's confession, 'Salvation comes from the LORD' (Jonah 2:9), reaches its fullest meaning in Christ. Jesus died for sinners, rose from the dead, and saves those who repent and believe (1 Peter 3:18; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Romans 3:21-24).

Jesus our Sanctifier: Jonah belonged to God but still needed his heart corrected. The Holy Spirit indwells and transforms believers for holy living and service (Galatians 5:22-23; Romans 6:1-14). Simple child language: Jesus saves us, and Jesus keeps working in us.

Jesus our Healer: Healing is not the main theme of Jonah, so do not force it. We can still teach that God is compassionate toward the whole person and that the Church is invited to pray for the sick (James 5:13-16). Never imply that faithful children are guaranteed immediate physical healing.

Jesus our Coming King: Jesus' words about Jonah include future judgment (Matthew 12:41). Christ will return personally and judge with perfect justice (Acts 17:31; Titus 2:11-14). This frees us from revenge and gives urgency to sharing the gospel.

Trinity clarity: Jonah teaches the one true LORD, 'the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land' (Jonah 1:9). The fuller revelation of Scripture teaches that this one God eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Jesus the Son speaks directly about Jonah in Matthew 12. Do not use egg, water, clover, or role-switching analogies. Teach the repeatable sentence: God is one God in three Persons.

Simple Gospel Sentence: Jesus is greater than Jonah. He came willingly for sinners, died for our sins, and rose again so everyone who turns to Him in faith can receive God's mercy.

6 RELIABILITY OF SCRIPTURE AND APOLOGETICS

Scripture first: Jonah is named outside his own book. Second Kings 14:25 identifies Jonah son of Amittai during Jeroboam II's reign. The Bible places him among real kings, places, and events. Jesus later speaks of Jonah, the great fish, Nineveh's repentance, and the coming judgment (Matthew 12:39-41).

Historical support: Nineveh is a well-attested ancient Assyrian city. Its ruins and the material remains of Assyrian kings are known from archaeology. These findings support the real historical setting. They do not prove the miracle or the repentance, and teachers should never claim that they do.

The great fish: Jonah 1:17 says the LORD 'provided a huge fish.' Scripture does not name a species, so do not insist it was a whale. Jonah's survival is presented as God's miraculous work. The God who created the sea and its creatures has authority over them (Genesis 1:20-23).

Child-friendly apologetics answer: 'Normally a person could not live inside a sea creature for three days. That is why this is a miracle. The Bible says God provided the fish, and Jesus Himself spoke about Jonah.' Confidence should be calm, never argumentative (1 Peter 3:15).

7 QUESTIONS CHILDREN WILL ASK

Why did Jonah run away?

Jonah 4:2 gives the deepest reason: he knew God was merciful and did not want Nineveh spared. Do not teach fear as the Bible's stated reason.

Can we hide from God?

No. Psalm 139:7 asks, 'Where can I go from your Spirit?' Jonah could leave Israel, but he could not leave God's presence or authority.

Was it a whale?

The Bible says a huge fish. We do not need to guess the species (Jonah 1:17).

Why did God warn Nineveh and then not destroy it?

God's warning called them to repentance. Jeremiah 18:7-10 explains that when a warned nation turns from evil, God may relent from announced disaster.

Does God forgive really bad people?

Yes, when they truly turn to Him. Forgiveness does not call evil good. Jesus' sacrifice is sufficient for sinners who repent and believe (1 John 1:9; 1 Peter 3:18).

Did Jonah die in the fish?

The text does not plainly say that. It describes Jonah praying inside the fish and later being put onto dry land. Do not teach Jonah's death as a fact.

Why does Jonah end with a question?

God's final question makes the reader examine his own heart: do we care about people who need God's mercy (Jonah 4:11)?

8 TEACHER SUMMARY AND HEART PREPARATION

Big Idea	God is holy and just, and He is wonderfully merciful. He wants sinners everywhere to turn to Him and receive His mercy.
What God Did	He pursued a disobedient prophet, revealed Himself to sailors, warned Nineveh, showed mercy when the city turned, and patiently exposed Jonah's hard heart.
How It Points to Jesus	Jesus is greater than Jonah. Jonah spent three days in the fish; Jesus died, was buried, and rose again. Jonah resisted enemies receiving mercy; Jesus died for His enemies.
Errors to Avoid	Do not reduce Jonah to a fish account, claim he ran only from fear, insist the fish was a whale, claim archaeology proves the miracle, or imply mercy means evil does not matter.
Hope to Emphasize	Before we see ourselves as Jonah, remember we are also Nineveh: sinners who need mercy. Salvation comes from the LORD, and that salvation is offered through Jesus Christ.

Teacher heart: ask God to expose any place where you want mercy for yourself but judgment for someone else. Jonah does not teach us to ignore abuse, danger, or justice. It teaches us not to decide that another sinner is beyond God's reach. Pray for a heart that tells the truth about evil and still longs for people to know Jesus (Matthew 5:44; Romans 5:10).

Prayer focus: Father, thank You for being holy, just, patient, compassionate, and merciful. Thank You for sending Jesus to die for sinners and rise again. Holy Spirit, help us teach Your Word faithfully, answer children gently, and care about people who need Your mercy. In Jesus' name, amen.