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GROUP STUDY GUIDE

Minor Prophets, Major Messages: Jonah - Be Merciful, Even as Your Father is Merciful

Use with the full teaching and a Bible. Read or watch first, complete the questions, then discuss and apply. For family study, an adult can select suitable portions and accept spoken answers.

Test the teaching's explanations against the cited passages. Keep the answer key and facilitator notes separate when distributing learner pages.

Before family use, preview the full teaching: its opening contains graphic torture descriptions and an explicit suitability warning. This guide omits those details.

[Open the full teaching](#)

Teaching summary

This teaching examines YHWH's mercy toward enemies and his call for us to reflect that mercy. Jonah, identified in 2 Kings 14:25 as a prophet during Jeroboam II's reign, was commanded to warn the Assyrian city of Nineveh. The teaching describes Assyria's cruelty as background to Jonah's resistance. Rather than traveling to Nineveh, he boarded a ship for Tarshish. Jonah 4:2 explains that he fled because he knew YHWH was merciful and might relent from disaster.

God sent a storm, Jonah was thrown overboard, and a great fish swallowed him. After three days and nights, he returned to dry land and delivered the warning to Nineveh. The city responded by believing God, fasting, and turning from evil and violence. God saw their changed behavior and withheld the announced disaster. The story therefore presents real repentance as more than outward distress: it includes abandoning the ways that brought judgment.

Jonah became angry when YHWH spared Nineveh. YHWH provided a plant to shade him, then caused it to wither, exposing Jonah's concern for his own comfort. The closing question contrasts his concern for the plant with YHWH's concern for a city full of people and animals. The teaching interprets the people's inability to distinguish right from left as a picture of destructive ignorance and their need for instruction. That interpretation invites compassion without excusing their violence.

The teaching connects this challenge with Israel's calling to bless the nations. Genesis 12:3 and Isaiah 56 include Gentiles coming to know and serve YHWH. It contrasts that purpose with anti-Gentile statements in the ancient, nonbiblical Book of Jubilees. Acts 11 records some believers objecting to Peter's eating with Gentiles, followed by their response when he explains YHWH's work. These examples expose barriers to fellowship; they should not become a blanket description of Jewish people or Judaism.

Yeshua directly connects Jonah's three days and nights with his own death and resurrection in Matthew 12:40. He also uses Nineveh's response to rebuke those who hear a greater message yet refuse to repent. As Jonah's proclamation reached Gentiles after his deliverance from the fish, Yeshua's message reached the nations after his resurrection. The Great Commission and the Spirit's empowerment send his disciples beyond familiar boundaries with the call to repentance.

Yeshua also echoes Jonah's central lesson by commanding love for enemies and mercy like the Father's. Praying for persecutors, greeting enemies, and doing good require deliberate choices that may run against natural feelings. These actions help believers recognize enemies as people made in God's image. The teaching concludes that mercy does not deny wrongdoing; it desires that wrongdoers turn to God and learn a better way. Showing such mercy reflects the Father's character and fulfills the mission to be a light to the nations.

Summary points

- God sent Jonah to warn a city known for terrible cruelty.
- Jonah's flight reveals resistance to God's mission of mercy toward enemies.
- God redirected Jonah through the storm and the great fish.
- Nineveh responded to the warning by turning from evil and violence.
- God spared the city, but Jonah resented that mercy.
- The parable exposes the contrast between Jonah's self-concern and God's compassion.
- Israel's calling to bless the nations includes inviting Gentiles to repentance.
- Yeshua connects Jonah's experience with his death and resurrection.
- Nineveh's repentance challenges those who hear the Messiah yet refuse to turn.
- Believers reflect their Father by loving enemies and desiring their salvation.

Fill in the blank

Use the teaching and the cited Bible passages. Equivalent wording is welcome when it expresses the same meaning.

Basic

1. God commanded Jonah to preach to the city of _____.
2. Instead of obeying, Jonah boarded a ship for _____.
3. When the Ninevites turned from their evil ways, God withheld the announced _____.
4. Jonah became _____ when God showed mercy to the city.
5. God used a withering _____ to challenge Jonah's attitude.
6. Yeshua calls believers to be _____ as their Father is merciful.

Challenging

1. Jonah was the son of _____.
2. Jonah warned that Nineveh would be overthrown in _____ days.
3. Yeshua connects Jonah's three days and nights with his death and resurrection in Matthew _____.
4. The book discussed as expressing opposition to Gentile fellowship is _____.
5. The apostle criticized for eating with Gentiles in Acts 11 was _____.
6. Yeshua commands his followers to _____ for those who persecute them.

Group discussion

Discuss respectfully and support answers from the passages. Use these lines for brief notes or a notebook for longer responses.

1. How does Assyria's cruelty help explain Jonah's resistance without making his refusal the right response?

2. What shows that Nineveh's repentance involved more than an outward display?

3. What does God's final question reveal about the difference between his compassion and Jonah's concern?

4. How does Jonah's story challenge barriers to sharing God's message with outsiders?

5. How do Yeshua's references to Jonah connect resurrection, repentance, and the mission to the nations?

6. What would showing mercy toward an enemy look like while still recognizing the seriousness of that person's wrongdoing?

Answer key

For the leader or parent. Answers follow the teaching and the passages. Accept equivalent wording that expresses the same meaning.

Basic

1. Nineveh

Jonah 1:1-2

2. Tarshish

Jonah 1:3

3. disaster (also: calamity, destruction)

Jonah 3:10

4. angry (also: displeased)

Jonah 4:1-2

5. plant

Jonah 4:6-10

6. merciful

Luke 6:36

Challenging

1. Amittai (also: Amitai)

Jonah 1:1; 2 Kings 14:25

2. forty (also: 40)

Jonah 3:4

3. 12:40 (also: 12:40-41)

Matthew 12:40

4. Jubilees (also: Book of Jubilees)

Teaching Interesting Connections: Jubilees 15:30-32; 22:16

5. Peter

Acts 11:2-3

6. pray

Matthew 5:44

Facilitator notes

These responses give direction for discussion. They are not a test of identical wording. Invite participants to explain the passages and consider a faithful practical response.

1. The source's account of Assyrian violence helps us understand how costly mercy could feel. Jonah nevertheless admits that he fled because he knew YHWH might spare the city. We can acknowledge the reality of wrongdoing without treating resentment as authority to reject YHWH's call.

Jonah 1:1-3; 4:1-2; teaching overview

2. The Ninevites believed the warning, fasted, and called on God, but the text especially notes that they turned from evil and violence. YHWH saw what they did. The visible signs accompanied repentance; they did not replace changed behavior or obligate God by themselves.

Jonah 3:5-10

3. Jonah grieves over a plant he did not create, while YHWH cares for a great city and its animals. The question asks whether Jonah can accept mercy for those he resents. The teaching uses the right-and-left description to encourage compassion for people needing a better way.

Jonah 4:6-11

4. YHWH sends his prophet beyond Israel and responds to outsiders who repent. The teaching compares this with Abraham's blessing, Isaiah's welcome to foreigners, and Peter's experience. We should examine our own barriers without making blanket accusations about a people or religious group.

Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 56:1-8; Acts 11:1-18; Jonah 3:10

5. Yeshua explicitly compares Jonah's three days and nights with his own coming burial and uses Nineveh's repentance to challenge his hearers. The teaching then draws a mission parallel: deliverance is followed by proclamation reaching the nations, as the risen Yeshua commissions his disciples.

Matthew 12:40-41; 28:18-20; Acts 1:8

6. We can pray for an enemy's repentance, refuse dehumanizing speech, and choose a safe act of kindness. Mercy seeks a wrongdoer's transformation rather than denying the harm. It does not require private contact with someone dangerous or prevent protection, reporting, and appropriate accountability.

Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36; Jonah 3:8-10

Facilitator reminders

Preview the teaching before using it with children: its opening historical section contains graphic torture descriptions and carries its own suitability warning. This guide deliberately omits those details. An adult may instead read Jonah's biblical narrative and explain cruelty in age-appropriate terms.

Do not ask participants to disclose trauma or contact an unsafe person. Enemy-love can include prayer and refusing dehumanization while protecting victims and maintaining accountability. Jubilees is discussed as historical literature, not Scripture.

Put it into practice

Choose one response to the passages. What will we do, and when will we revisit it? Share only what you are comfortable sharing.