

# JONAH'S LESSON IN COMPASSION

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A Bible Study on Economic Justice

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**BACKGROUND:** Jonah was a prophet to the 10 northern tribes of Israel during a period of relative peace and prosperity under the 35-year reign of Jereboam II (793-758 B.C.). But the nation remained in spiritual, ethical, and moral poverty as economic justice and true worship became increasingly perverted. Jonah was commissioned by God to carry a message of judgment and repentance to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria having perhaps 600,000 inhabitants, and noted for its enmity toward Israel and for its cruelty. Possibly his message was to shame Israel, since they had refused many prophetic warnings, while the heathen of Nineveh repented immediately upon hearing Jonah's intreaties.

READ ALOUD THESE PORTIONS OF JONAH AND DISCUSS THESE QUESTIONS:

JONAH 1:1-3

What was Jonah commanded by God to speak in Nineveh?

What was Jonah's response to God's commission?

JONAH 1:10-17

What did it take to convince the heathen sailors that God was involved in this misfortune?

What does Jonah's offer to sacrifice himself say about his fear of going to Nineveh?

What does the reluctance of the sailors to throw Jonah into the sea say about their values?

What values does Jonah exhibit?

Is it productive or relevant to argue about the truth or accuracy of verse 17? Why, or why not?

JONAH 3:1-9

What did the people of Nineveh do when they heard Jonah's preaching?

What did the king do, and what was his command to the people?

What most likely was the violence that the people were commanded by the king to cease from?

What do you think God would do if we and our leaders did the same as did Nineveh?

JONAH 4:1-11

How did Jonah respond to God's mercy in sparing Nineveh?

What does God's response to Jonah indicate about God?

What does Jonah's anger at the death of the plant say about his motivations and values?

Discuss how there is often a conflict for us between our stated motivations and our behavior.

Is our attitude toward the poor any different than Jonah's attitude toward Nineveh? If so, how?

What messages does God deliver to us through the account of Jonah?

PRINCIPLES FOR CONSIDERATION:

- We often have more compassion for "things" and animals than we do for people.
- God places us in challenging situations for the purpose of teaching us His will.
- In our pride and arrogance we sometimes rejoice over the pain of others and are angry at their success.
- God's mercy is much greater than ours, even though it might not always seem so.
- God wishes our mercy and obedience as we deal with the poor and unfortunate in society.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY: Daniel 9; John 17; Heb. 8