

# God's Preserving Love

Bible Background • JONAH 1  
Printed Text • JONAH 1:7-17  
Devotional Reading • PSALM 139:1-12

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: DISCERN the nature of God's love in the story of Jonah; SENSE how people feel when faced with calamity and how they respond when others think they have caused the calamity; and PRAY for assurance of the presence of God's love in the midst of calamity.



A spring storm had caused major damage throughout the town of Lansdowne. Jumbo's Hoagie Shop had withstood the wind and hail but mysteriously burned down. Mr. Sam was devastated. He and his son, Charles, sat on the curb in tears the next morning. All the residents gathered in disbelief. The store had been in Lansdowne for over 20 years.

The fire chief, Kenneth, asked to speak with Mr. Sam and Charles in the back of the store. "Mr. Sam, I'm so sorry about your store. We figured out what happened. The grill was left on. And when the power went out and then came back on, it caused sparks to fly in the kitchen area. Then flames engulfed the entire building. I'm so sorry." He patted Mr. Sam on the back as he walked away.

"Charles, you were supposed to close up last night. What happened?" Mr. Sam asked.

"Dad, I was talking to Cynthia on the phone. I guess I got distracted and forgot to turn it off. Now, our whole lives are destroyed, and the community will suffer, too." Charles laid his head on his father's shoulder and sobbed. "Charles," he hugged his son, "everything will be OK. God will see us through this as we rebuild."

*When we make bad choices, others can suffer, too. In today's lesson, we will evaluate how God's love and presence can make a difference in the midst of life's calamities. How has God's presence made a difference when you face the different challenges of life?*

## Keep in Mind

"Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this?" ([Jonah 1:10a](#)). "Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this?" ([Jonah 1:10a](#)).

## **KJV**

**Jonah 1:7** And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

**8** Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?

**9** And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.

**10** Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

**11** Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.

**12** And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

**13** Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

**14** Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.

**15** So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

**16** Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.

**17** Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

## **NLT**

**Jonah 1:7** Then the crew cast lots to see which of them had offended the gods and caused the terrible storm. When they did this, the lots identified Jonah as the culprit.

**8** "Why has this awful storm come down on us?" they demanded. "Who are you? What is your line of work? What country are you from? What is your nationality?"

**9** And Jonah answered, "I am a Hebrew, and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land."

**10** The sailors were terrified when they heard this, for he had already told them he was running away from the Lord. "Oh, why did you do it?" they groaned.

**11** And since the storm was getting worse all the time, they asked him, “What should we do to you to stop this storm?”

**12** “Throw me into the sea,” Jonah said, “and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault.”

**13** Instead, the sailors rowed even harder to get the ship to the land. But the stormy sea was too violent for them, and they couldn’t make it.

**14** Then they cried out to the LORD, Jonah’s God. “O LORD,” they pleaded, “don’t make us die for this man’s sin. And don’t hold us responsible for his death. O LORD, you have sent this storm upon him for your own good reasons.”

**15** Then the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once!

**16** The sailors were awestruck by the LORD’s great power, and they offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him.

**17** Now the Lord had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights.

## **The People, Places, and Times**

**Nineveh.** Nineveh was a famous ancient city situated on the eastern bank of the Tigris River opposite the modern city of Mosul. It was built by Nimrod and eventually made the capital of Assyria, until its fall in 612 BC. It was more than 500 miles from Jonah’s hometown of Gath Hopher in Israel. The prophet Nahum speaks at length about the city’s sins, including evil plots against the Lord ([Nahum 1:9](#)); prostitution and witchcraft (3:4); and commercial exploitation (3:16).

## **Background**

Jonah’s name means “dove.” He was the son of Amittai, who came from Gath-hepher, which was three miles northeast of Nazareth. Jonah’s prophetic ministry took place before the reign of Jeroboam II (782–753 BC). He predicted the victory over the Syrians and the largest extension of the Israelite border ([2 Kings 14:25](#)).

Jonah was commissioned by God to go and prophesy to the people of Nineveh. Like other Israelites, he hated the Assyrians, and so he decided to flee by ship instead. He hopped on board a ship headed to Tarshish in Joppa. That is when the trouble began for all on board. God sent a storm with strong, gusty winds to create havoc. The sailors called on their false gods to calm the sea and nothing happened. They woke up Jonah and implored him to pray to his God for help.

## In Depth

### 1. Jonah's Disobedience Exposed ([Jonah 1:7–10](#))

After the men's prayers did not help to calm the seas, they cast lots. Casting lots was an ancient tradition believed to help determine a matter without influence from others. But this time God intervened. It was determined Jonah was at fault for them being in the midst of a storm. This proved to Jonah he could not run away from God. No matter where we go, He knows ([Psalm 139:7–12](#)). So if God calls us to do something, we must be obedient. There is no other way to show we love Him ([John 14:15](#)).

Jonah admitted to being a Hebrew who worshiped the God of heaven and creation. The other sailors were angry and afraid. They even confronted Jonah about his disobedience because they were suffering because of him. Sometimes people's actions affect our lives as well. What would they do? People react differently during times of trials and tests. How do you respond when experiencing hardship and calamities?

### 2. Jonah's Fate (vv. 11–17)

The sailors questioned Jonah about how to calm the seas. Jonah was willing to sacrifice his own life to save the sailors. But he did not want to go to Nineveh to warn them of God's upcoming judgment. Jonah's hatred and prejudices clouded his perception. The sailors were so compassionate that they tried to save Jonah's life by fighting against the storm to get the ship back to land. Their effort was fruitless. We cannot calm God's wrath until we obey His will.

The sailors cried out in prayer to the God of Israel for help. They recognized He was in control. Some who do not follow God or know much about Him will still call on Him in times of hardship and suffering. But once they are delivered, they often turn back to their former ideas. The sailors threw Jonah into the sea, and immediately the storm calmed. They were in awe of God's power and worshiped Him. The Scripture does not state whether the sailors accepted the God of Israel as their God permanently.

Jonah did not die. God had mercy on him, in the form of a big fish that swallowed Him. He remained in the fish's belly for three days and three nights. While in the fish's belly, Jonah called upon God for help. In the midst of our calamities, God wants us to cry out to Him and He will respond. He loves us and will show mercy to any of His children.

## Search the Scriptures

1. Is it acceptable for God's people to cast lots([Jonah 1:7](#))?
2. Do you believe the sailors kept their vow to serve the Lord (v. 16)? Explain why.

## Discuss the Meaning

In the story of Jonah, we see God's love in action in the midst of the storm. After Jonah was confronted, he acknowledged his disobedience to God. The sailors he had endangered through his disobedience were angry but still compassionate. Jonah was saved by God's divine actions. What does Jonah's story teach us about God's love?

## Lesson in Our Society

God loves all people, even our enemies and those whom we view as different. We have to be obedient to God's commands even if we dislike the task. If we do not, others might be hurt. Repentance is necessary when our words and actions inflict harm on ourselves or others. Prayer is key when we face trials and suffering. God will hear us and have compassion.

## Make It Happen

In our lives, we might experience trials and misfortune. It could be our own fault or the fault of others. We might have to acknowledge our wrongdoing to restore relationships and begin the process of healing. We might also have to forgive and show love to those who have caused us harm. No matter what the circumstances, we can be assured that God is present. If we pray and seek God, we will find He is compassionate, loving, and merciful.

## More Light on the Text

### Jonah 1:7–17

On one hand, the book of Jonah is a story about a personal encounter between Yahweh and His servant Jonah, who tried to avert God's plan. On the other hand, it is also about an encounter for a wicked people to whom He decides to show mercy. These encounters arise from God's call to Jonah to go and preach to the wicked nation—Nineveh—so that they can repent from their evil ways and be saved. The title, “the book of Jonah,” tends to suggest that Jonah was the author, but this is misleading; the author is unknown. The book is about Jonah and his encounter with God.

**7 And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.**

**8 Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?**

Casting lots was a common practice in ancient times and was used for decision making. People would throw or pick stones, sticks, or animal bones and used these to determine what steps or course to take next. Even through the casting of lots, God is in control. Jonah thought that he could hide from the Lord, but even now he is exposed as disobedient. The sailors ask him questions to determine the cause of the storm and what part he had to play in bringing it about.

**9 And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. 10 Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him. Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.**

Jonah begins by stating his nationality and theological beliefs. He fears the God of heaven who created the sea and the dry land. He lets the sailors know that God is the cause of their predicament. The ship's crew are incredulous when they find out that he tried to run away from a God you can't run away from. God made the sea and the dry land, so He has control over all of it. Jonah stands convicted in the presence of those who do not even know the Lord.

**11 Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought and was tempestuous. 12 And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.**

The people on the ship ask Jonah what they should do with him to calm the storm, because it was now becoming worse, and the sea was very turbulent. Jonah tells them to throw him overboard in order to pacify the raging sea.

Why does Jonah prefer to die rather than carry out God's instruction? His patriotism and love for his people—because of which he could not comprehend how his God could have mercy on the Ninevites—and (theologically speaking) his ignorance had blinded his spiritual eyes and clouded his mind so that he could not understand God's eternal salvation plan for all peoples ([Jonah 4:1–3](#)). Jonah's confession, "I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land," is contradicted by his actions. If he truly feared Yahweh, he would have obeyed Him, rather than trying to die.

Rather than repenting from his sin of disobedience, Jonah decides to give up his life. He tells the people to throw him into the sea, with the idea that he will avert the plan and responsibility God has for him. But God has a different plan for him. His ways are irrevocable; His plans must be fulfilled.

**13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them. 14 Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.**

Here, the crew decides to return to the port of Joppa so that Jonah can get off the ship alive. By now, they were probably far out to sea and were a great distance from the shore when the storm began. Under normal circumstances, it is suicidal to try to row a boat to shore in a heavy storm like the one described here.

Note that in verse 5, the sailors and everyone in the ship "cried every man unto his god," but now they turn to Yahweh. In their prayer, they acknowledge two facts about the sovereignty of the

Lord. First, simply by going ahead with the plan to throw Jonah into the sea, they acknowledge that no human efforts can save them from the fierce storm through which God is exhibiting His authority and anger. Second, they acknowledge that God in His sovereignty does what He pleases. They recognize the hand of God at work.

The clause “lay not upon us innocent blood” indicates their reluctance to carry out Jonah’s wish, as does their request that, since they have no other alternative than to throw Jonah overboard, they should not be held accountable for the action they are about to take. They are begging for God’s understanding in regards to the crime they are about to commit. There is, however, one positive outcome of the whole situation: the people who hitherto never knew the Lord God of Israel are able to confess Him as the only sovereign God.

### **15 So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.**

The verb “took” is the Hebrew word *nasa’* (**nah-SAH**). Jonah goes into the sea, and the sailors’ ordeal ends as the storm stops. Here again, as in the previous verses, the sea is personified (vv. 11–12); the reaction of the sea is idiomatically expressed as “the sea ceased from her raging.” The word “raging” (Heb. *za’aph*, **ZAH-aff**), i.e., “indignation” or “wrath,” is used elsewhere in the Bible to denote emotions attributed to kings and God. The boisterous movement of the sea is restricted, which shows that it is the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, who controls the waves and the sea (cf. [Mark 4:37–39](#)).

### **16 Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.**

The author gives three reactions of the sailors: (1) they “feared the Lord exceedingly,” (2) they “offered a sacrifice to the Lord,” and (3) they “made vows.” Rather than being punished further for what is a potentially murderous act, the sailors receive calm and peace, prompting a different reaction than before. We note that in verse 9 as he confesses to the sailors, Jonah says to them, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land” (NIV). Although they are terrified by that confession, they do not seem totally convinced by Jonah’s word. Now, however, they recognize the Lord’s greatness by the instantaneous calm that follows the moment Jonah touches the waters of the sea. They begin to fear the Lord. The verb “fear” (Heb. *yare’*, **yah-RAY**) has a number of connotations, including “to be afraid” or “to be frightened, to be dreadful” as in verse 10, where it is used to describe the reaction of the sailors upon hearing Jonah’s confession. It also means “to revere, to be astonished, or to stand in awe.” It is a fear that inspires reverence and godly awe, as we see here (v. 16). Jonah’s confession in verse 9, “I fear the Lord,” is accurately translated “worship” (NIV). Also, *yare* is to be understood in the same light—they stand in reverence and awe and worship the Lord.

Astounded by what they have just experienced, the sailors not only “feared the Lord exceedingly;” they show their reverence for Him by an act of worship: they offer a sacrifice to the Lord followed by vows. We do not know of the type of sacrifice the sailors offered to the Lord from the ship. However, the author’s use of both the verb *zabach* (**za-BAKH**, to offer) and its noun derivative *zabach* (**zeh-BAKH**, a sacrifice) suggests that they killed an animal as an offering to the Lord. Therefore, animals were likely on board as part of the ship’s cargo, or perhaps reserved for sacrifices to the sailors’ gods (a common practice at the time whether at the

beginning or end of a journey, or during a crisis). Here, the sailors offer the animal in a legitimate way as a mark of their worship, no more to their own individual gods, but instead to the living God of Israel.

The third thing the author tells us is that the sailors made vows, connoting the act of verbal consecration or promise that is often associated with devotion and service to God. Overwhelmed by the instant quieting of the sea, the sailors make a pledge, not under compulsion or duress, but in appreciation and thanksgiving to the Almighty God. The author is silent, however, about whether the sailors become proselytes and follow the true God later.

### **17 Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.**

As Jonah falls into the sea, the Lord prepares a great fish to swallow him up. The word “now” serves here as both a conjunction and as a transition from where we left Jonah (v. 15) before reading about the sailors’ reaction. With this word, the author brings our mind back to the main character and continues the story from there. The statement about God’s preparation indicates that even before Jonah touches the sea, even before the sailors throw him overboard, the Lord had already appointed a great fish to swallow him. The verb “prepared” (Heb. *manah*, **ma-NAH**) also means “to appoint, assign, tell, or ordain.” We note here that God has control of all His creatures and that He can use anything to serve His purpose.

### **Say It Correctly**

Wrought. **RAWT**.

Tempestuous. tim-**PES**-choo-us.

## **Daily Bible Readings**

### **MONDAY**

Can I Flee from God’s Presence?

([Psalm 139:1–12](#))

### **TUESDAY**

The Lord’s Voice in the Storm

([Psalm 29:1–9](#))

### **WEDNESDAY**

Compassion After Rejection

([Isaiah 54:1–10](#))

## **THURSDAY**

God's Wrath Against Nineveh

([Nahum 1:1-8](#))

## **FRIDAY**

Fleeing from God's Call

([Jonah 1:1-5](#))

## **SATURDAY**

A Stormy Confession

([Jonah 1:6-12](#))

## **SUNDAY**

God's Sustaining Love Despite Rebellion

([Jonah 1:7-17](#))