

**THE METHODIST CHURCH IN THE CARIBBEAN AND THE AMERICAS
JAMAICA DISTRICT**



**District Theme: “Spreading Scriptural Holiness to Reform the Nation... beginning with me”
Focus: Caring for body, mind and soul, as we serve the present age.**



MOTTO: SINCERITY IN SERVICE

WOMEN’S LEAGUE ANNUAL WEEK OF PRAYER

SEPTEMBER 20-23, 2021

STUDY TOPIC: THE BOOK OF JONAH

- DAY 1: Jonah’s Call and subsequent disobedience
- DAY 2: Jonah’s repentance and deliverance
- DAY 3: Jonah Delivers God’s Message to Nineveh
- DAY 4: Jonah’s Anger and God’s Grace

Introduction:

The Book of Jonah is unlike other prophetic books of the Bible in that it is a narrative, describing the adventures of a prophet who tried to disobey God's command. God told him to go to Nineveh, the capital of the great empire of Assyria, Israel's deadly enemy. But Jonah did not want to go there with God's message, because he was convinced that God would not carry out his threat to destroy the city. After a series of dramatic events, he reluctantly obeyed, and finally sulked when his message of doom did not come true.

The book portrays God's absolute authority over his creation. But above all it portrays God as a God of love and mercy, who would rather forgive and save even the enemies of his people, than punish and destroy them.

Day One: Jonah's Call and subsequent disobedience

Suggested Hymn: (VIP #91): "O the bitter pain and sorrow..."

Scripture Reading: Jonah 1:1-17

God calls Jonah and instructs him to go to Nineveh and preach to the people to change their sinful ways and to let them know that God is watching and is about to punish them. Jonah decides to hide from the presence of God by going on a boat heading to Tarshish in the opposite direction. The ensuing events make him realise that no one can escape the presence of God. As a result of his rebellion, God sent a wild storm. The sailors threw him overboard because they didn't want to be punished for what Jonah had done. After they threw him overboard, the waves grew calm and Jonah gets swallowed up by a large fish.

Discussion Questions:

- What does God's initial call and Jonah's response say to us about what Jonah was thinking?
- Why do you think Jonah did not want to go and preach to the Ninevites?
- How did God react to Jonah's disobedience?
- Has God ever prompted you to do something difficult or inconvenient? How did you respond?
- Is there someone in your life that incites the same feeling that Jonah had? Would you feel obligated to tell them what they are doing wrong or would you avoid their company? Discuss.
- What do we reveal about ourselves when we fail to confront the wrongdoings of others for fear of reprisal?
- The captain and sailors were praying to their 'gods', why do you think Jonah did not pray to his God?
- Instead of praying to God as the others were doing Jonah went to sleep. Why do you think he did this?
- In verse 9, what great witness did Jonah give to the captain and his sailors?
- Why do you think the sailors became fearful when Jonah told them about his God?
- In the context of verse 13, do you try to do things on your own strength and forget about God? Discuss.
- In the midst of the storm the sailors realised that Jonah was the cause of their trouble, instead of asking them to turn around and take him back to Nineveh, he instructed them to throw him overboard. Why do you think he told them to do this?
- Are you surprised that the Sailors prayed to God seeking forgiveness that they were about to throw Jonah overboard? Discuss.
- Do you believe that Jonah was offering himself as a sacrifice to appease the storm?
- What does Jonah realize while he was inside the belly of the fish?

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS: The instruction from the Lord came to Jonah in a clear and concise way. It was not that Jonah did not understand God's instruction, his problem was that he simply did not want to obey. There are lessons to be learnt from Jonah's action. First, Jonah was unprepared to adequately witness to the sailors. When they asked him what they could do to stop the storm, Jonah does not pray or did he tell them to pray to God, he does not confess his sin, he does not repent, he does not turn the boat around and go home. He tells them to throw him overboard.

The sailors cried out to their gods. Then later, they actually prayed to the one, true God. Jonah, instead of calling out to the one True God, went to sleep and makes himself comfortable. The sailors are all around Jonah, fearing for their lives, and Jonah, who is the only one who has the ability to make them safe, is asleep at the bottom of the boat. When we are living in deliberate disobedience to God, and we know it, one of the hardest things to do is to pray.

As we go through life, there are people who are involved in storms all around us. As Christians, we sometimes find it difficult to lead people to Christ, because we are asleep as they battle the storms of life. When your neighbours or co-workers are going through the storms of life, are you taking the opportunity to minister to them and reveal to them the power of the God you serve, or are you asleep at the bottom of the boat?

When you are having trouble praying, ask God to reveal any sin in your life, ask Him to search your heart, so that you can confess it and repent of it, and get back into right fellowship with Him.

Day Two: Jonah's Repentance and Deliverance

Suggested Hymn: "Change my heart O God..."

Scripture Reading: Jonah 2:1-10

Saved from certain drowning and death beneath the waves, Jonah spends three days in the belly of the fish. He prays to God, thanking Him for His great compassion and vowing to obey His command. Jonah realizes and remembers why he chose to follow God in the first place.

Discussion Questions:

- Do you consider the fish swallowing Jonah punishment or salvation? Discuss.
- In Chapter 1, in spite of all that transpired, we did not see Jonah praying. Why do you believe we see Jonah praying at this time?
- What do you think of Jonah's prayer, was it within context? Discuss.
- What indicates that Jonah felt relief rather than distress while he was inside the belly of the fish?
- What critical event does verse 7 records for us?
- What significance is there that Jonah made a vow or sincere promise from within the belly of the fish?
- In Verse 9 Jonah declares, "Salvation belongs to the Lord." What do you think he means by this? Discuss.
- Have you ever been at a point in life where you forgotten why you followed God in the first place? Discuss.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Jonah's prayer is more a prayer of thanksgiving than a petition for help. The belly of the fish is God's means to rescue Jonah. God prepared the fish, not to destroy Jonah, but to save him. The belly of the fish represents the "tomb" from which God resurrected Jonah to a renewed mind; and a renewed commitment. Observe the use of the past tense in **vs. 2** – *'I called to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me.'* This is the simple statement that sums up what happened when Jonah was thrown into the water: he cried out to God, and God answered him by sending the fish to swallow him.

The general idea is that *'God answers his children when they cry to him in distress'*. I think the text gives us some specific pointers to how and why God answers us when we call on him in distress: God answers us in spite of our guilt. God answers us in spite of his judgment. God answers us and delivers us from impossible circumstances. God answers us in the nick of time. God answers us in stages, not all of which are comfortable. God answers us in order to win our undivided loyalty and thanks. God answers us in our guilty distress to help us to emulate Him. Let us be encouraged to call on God with confidence, knowing he answers our prayer to meet our needs.

Take some time to compose your own prayer of thanksgiving. This could be about a time God delivered you from trouble, brought you to Jesus, or some other miraculous thing He has done for you.

Day Three: Jonah Delivers God's Message to Nineveh

Suggested Hymn: (VIP #455) "I the Lord of sea and sky..."

Scripture Reading: Jonah 3:1-10

After being vomited ashore by the big fish, Jonah proceeds to Nineveh to proclaim the message he was sent by God to preach: "*repent or be destroyed in forty days*". The biggest miracle in the story of Jonah is not that he survived in a fish, but that an entire city repented! Here we see a city – a people who were far from God – repented of their sins and God relented from destroying them.

The Ninevites believed God. Jonah was the one speaking, but they knew that the message came from God. They responded from the top down, from the greatest to the least. In verses 6-9 we see how it started with the King. We see the King of Nineveh responding to the message from God. Not only does he instruct all the people to fast and pray and call urgently on God, but he even wanted the animals to fast as well.

Discussion Questions:

- How does the structure of Jonah Chapter 3:1–3 compare with Chapter 1:1–3? What are the similarities? What are the differences?
- It is said that Jonah preached to the Ninevites telling them that the city would be destroyed in 40 days. What is the significance of the number 40?
- What lesson should Jonah have learned from the Ninevites' response to God's call for repentance and faith?
- What is remarkable about the King's response to hearing Jonah's warning?
- What is the most important thing spoken in verse 5?
- What strong lesson could be learnt from Jonah's experience?
- Why do you think the Ninevites responded in the way they did?
- How should Jonah's experience encourage us towards obedience?
- How does God respond to the repentance of the Ninevites (3:10)?
- Have you ever received a second chance to do something that you had previously failed at? What if anything did you do differently the second time around? Discuss.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: It is a positive indictment when the leader of a nation repents before God and calls everyone to repent as well. Leaders often think that they are "just giving the people what they want" but in reality, a leader makes a nation what they are. The King led the nation in repentance before God and commanded that there be fasting and praying.

Each of us is a leader in one way or another. We may be the leader in our family, or the leader of our children, a leader at work or at church, or in our community. Leaders lead not only in vision and direction, but in repentance and holiness. The King was doing the right thing here. We know that God is a compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love and patience. But there comes a time, as it did here for Nineveh, that God says, "I have been patient enough".

Are you at a place like that in your own life? Is there something in your life that you know is not pleasing to God? Is there a hidden sin or hidden rebellion that God has been putting on your heart to confess to? Repent and seek His forgiveness, He will forgive you and cover you with his love.

Day Four: Jonah's Anger and God's Grace

Suggested Hymn: (VIP #294): "Have thine own way Lord ..."

Scripture Reading: Jonah 4:1-11

Imagine an entire community or city turning to God, and suddenly filling our churches. How would we respond? One would hope that we would rejoice. Yet, in Chapter 4, Jonah provides a snapshot of a propensity in all of us. It would be inconvenient for us. We would not be able to claim our usual seat. We would have to make room for the newcomers. We might not be served and catered to in the way we are used to. In this chapter, we get to see God's desire for our hearts and His patience towards us. Jonah was despondent as he speaks with the Lord in prayer. He was given the opportunity to proclaim God's warning, Jonah preached, but his heart was certainly not in it—at least not a heart of love and compassion for the Ninevites. God sets out to teach him a lesson on what mercy is all about.

Discussion Questions:

- Describe Jonah's attitude. Why is he so upset with God?
- What do we learn about the relationship between Jonah and God from his prayer?
- How does the vine show God's tender love and compassion for Jonah?
- What lesson is God trying to teach Jonah through the vine and the worm?
- According to Jonah 4:2, why did Jonah flee to Tarshish?
- According to 4:2, what is God like? And why do you think Jonah has a problem with this?
- How does God's compassion compare to Jonah's? Discuss.
- Does this challenge the attitudes you have toward people? Discuss.
- What does the interaction between Jonah and God in verses 3-4 teach us about our relationship with God?
- What do you think Jonah was waiting to see in verse 5?
- In the closing verses of this chapter, we see God continually provide for His obstinate prophet. In your most stubborn times, how has God expressed grace and mercy in your life?
- What do verses 10-11 teach us about God?

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Sometimes God asks us to do things, because he wants to first and foremost work on our hearts, to give us a lesson in humility and forgiveness. Jonah was so caught up in his own self righteousness that he could not see that he was a sinner too, and that God loves all people, especially sinners, as we all are.

Jonah knew that if he prophesied to Nineveh and then God had mercy on them, it would seem like he had helped Nineveh. It would seem to all Israel that he had betrayed them. Jonah did everything he could to avoid going to Nineveh, but he could not get away from God. God was after a man's heart. This is often the most difficult mission to undertake. Have a look into your own heart today, examine your motivations and fears and your unwillingness to obey God. Do you harbor resentment and hard feelings toward a specific person or group of people?

We are much like Jonah. We want to receive God's forgiveness, but we are not always willing to extend it to others. When God gave us grace, we received something we did not deserve. Think of someone in your life who does not deserve grace and be intentional about showing it to them. This can be a family member, co-worker, neighbour, or even someone in your group!