

DISCUSSION FOCUS

Read (Primary Text): Jonah

Supporting Texts: 2 Kings 13:1-4; Matthew 12:40

MAIN IDEA: God is graciously and mercifully working in the lives of all peoples, even those we might consider our enemies.

OBSERVE

Read Jonah 1:1-4, 4:1-2 and 2 Kings 13:1-4 (*Note: Depending on what translation you are reading from, note that Aram/the Aramaeans are Syria. Nineveh is Syria's capital city*). Why did Jonah not want to go to Nineveh? These were a people Israel was continually at war with and had suffered many brutal defeats. The Syrians were also exceedingly wicked, worshipped idols and practiced child sacrifice. Jonah knew God was merciful and did not want to see God's mercy given to his enemies.

With your group read through the book of Jonah while looking for repeating words, phrases and themes in the book. Example: The phrase "maybe God will relent that we may not perish" in verses 1:6 and 3:9. (*Lots of possible answers here. A few key ones to note other than the one previously mentioned: the phrase "God appointed" in 1:14, 1:17, 4:6, 4:7, 4:8; "the Lord commanded" or "Lord's command" 1:4, 2:10, 3:3*) Discuss some of these themes and parallels. In the example given, who was speaking in each of these situations and who did they turn to? (*Examples are the themes of God's sovereignty and mercy; obedience and disobedience comparing Jonah with the pagan sailors, or Jonah with Nineveh; the theme of obedience to the will of God with the storm, the pagan sailors, the fish, Nineveh when they repented, the plants and worm; the theme of repentance with Jonah and later Nineveh*)

INTERPRET

Contrast Jonah's repentance in chapter 2 with that of Nineveh in chapter 3. *Jonah prays to a God he knows is merciful and will save versus the king of Nineveh repents hoping for mercy. Jonah's repents, but is still bitter in prideful in chapter 4 versus Nineveh repents in humility, sackcloth and ashes. Jonah seems to recognize he is deserving of death apart from God's mercy (2:3-5), yet doesn't want to extend that grace to his enemies.*

Old Testament narratives typically end with some sort of summary statement to help the reader grasp the purpose the author sees behind the events he is relaying. We see that in the last paragraph of Jonah (4:5-11), particularly in verses 10-11. What is the point the author of the book of Jonah is trying to get across? *God is graciously and mercifully working in the lives of all peoples, even those we might consider evil or our enemies.*

Read Matthew 12:40 and Jonah 1:17. Why do you think Jesus compares His death and burial to Jonah being in the belly of the fish? *Just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days and 3 nights, Jesus was buried within the earth for 3 days and 3 nights.* How does Christ's sacrifice fit thematically with the book of Jonah? *Both describe God's work to redeem people, people who are enemies of God by their own choice.*

RESPOND

How does Jonah respond to God's mercy toward Nineveh in chapter 4?

- Can you empathize with Jonah?
- Did Jonah have a right to be angry, humanly speaking?
- How did Jonah's thinking and attitude not line up with his theology?
- What real life example did God give to show Jonah the foolishness of his anger and pride?

God says that the Ninevites "do not know their right hand from their left," meaning that they do not know what is right nor do they know God or His laws. How should we, as believers in Christ and holders of the precious knowledge of the Gospel, respond toward those who do not have this knowledge? How should this impact our hearts toward them?

APPLY

Think of a time when it was particularly hard for you to forgive someone.

- Why was it hard to forgive that person?
- Did they *deserve* forgiveness?
- How might your attitudes and actions have paralleled Jonah's?
- Do you *deserve* forgiveness?
- Has anger or pride stopped you from forgiving someone?
- As recipients of the grace we have been given through Christ, what should our response be?

How should remembering that we were once enemies of God but in His abundant grace and mercy redeemed us to Himself cause us to interact with unbelievers?