



S2.Lesson 13: God & Our Attention – Jonah Part 1

Middle School Lesson Plans

Supplies Needed: Journals; Handout; tv or laptop to show movie clip (movie clip link is available at rfour.org/curriculum.html); 15 pencils/pens (not for writing); a way to share/show the map that is in this lesson plan (print it out to pass around or show it from a laptop)

OPENING PRAYER

INTRO

- Today we begin a new session.
- This session is entitled "God and our Attention"
- We're going to look at two stories during this session that will help us think about why we would pay attention to God.

TELL

- There's a simple activity that we're going to start out with today.
- It's called "pickup sticks."
- The goal is for you, the students, to beat us, the teachers.
- Think you can do it?
- This is how we play it:

EXPLAIN OPENING ACTIVITY

- There are 15 items/pencils on the table. There will be two contestants, a teacher and a student.
- The object of the game is to NOT pick up the last item/stick.
- Either contestant can start first.
- A turn for a contestant consists of taking one, two or three items off the table.
- Any questions?

[**For teachers only.** How to win: your goal is make sure you pick up items 2, 6 and 10 and not beyond. So if the first player picks up 3, then you pick up 3 to get to 6. If the first player then picks up 1, then you pick up 3 again to get to 10. If you get the 10th item, then you've won for sure. If you go first, you'll win every time (always start with picking up 2). If the other person goes first, there's a possibility that they'll win, but they'll have to hit 2 or 6 and then 10 by accident/luck. Whatever you do, do your best to not let the students win.]

DO Activity: "Pickup Sticks"

ASK

- So why do think the teachers are so good at this game?
- Would you like to know the real reason for why the teachers are so good at this game?

TELL

- As teachers, we used the strategy of picking up items 2, 6 and 10. Once we picked up item #10, there was no way you could beat us. Picking items 2 and 6 helped ensure that we'd get to item #10.
- Feel free to try this out on your parents at home!
- Because the teachers had more information than you did, they therefore had an advantage.
- The same thing is true of God – God knows more than we do and therefore has an advantage over us.
- One reason why we might choose to pay attention to God is because God knows more than us.
- In the story we're going to read now, God tells the prophet Jonah to do something.
- Let's see what Jonah's response is.

READ Jonah Chapter 1

1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, 2 "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." 3 But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. 4 But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. 5 Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep. 6 The captain came and said to him, "What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish." 7 The sailors said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, so that we may know on whose account this calamity has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 Then they said to him, "Tell us why this calamity has come upon us. What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?"

9 "I am a Hebrew," he replied. "I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." 10 Then the men were even more afraid, and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them so. 11 Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea was growing more and more tempestuous. 12 He said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great storm has come upon you." 13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more stormy against them. 14 Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, O Lord, we pray, do not let us perish on account of this man's life. Do not make us guilty of innocent blood; for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you." 15 So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the Lord even more, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. 17 But the Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

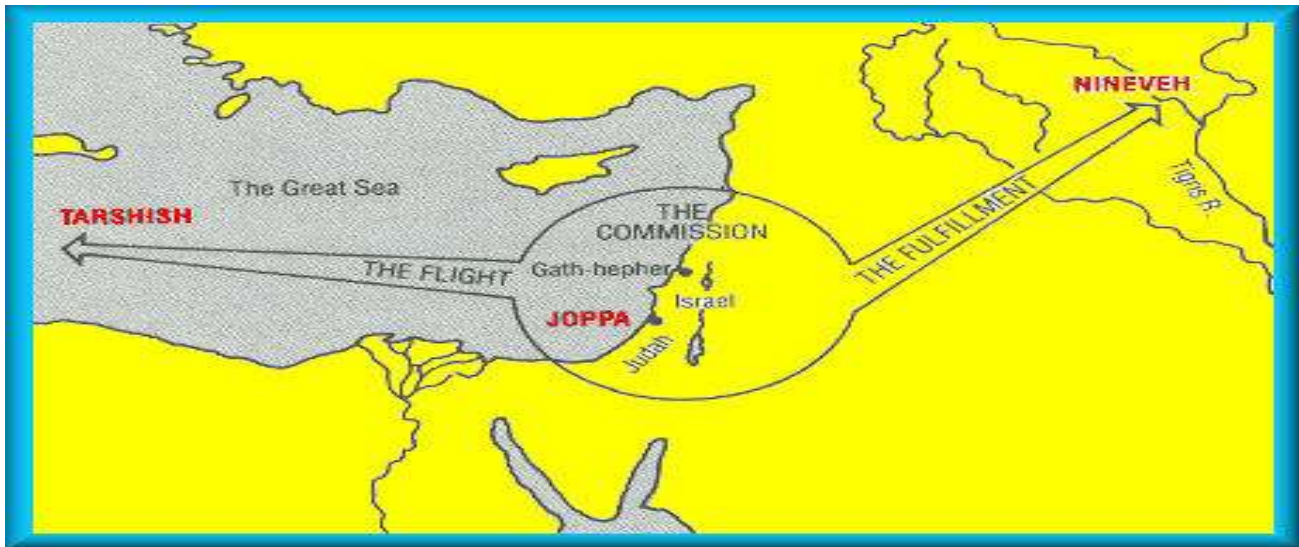
ASK

- In verse 2, what does God tell Jonah to do? (go to Nineveh)

- In verse 3, what does Jonah do instead? (goes to Tarshish)
- Why do you think he does this? (The students may not know this part: Nineveh is the capital of the enemy country (Assyria) of Israel. That's the main reason Jonah doesn't want to go there – a reason they might get: Because Jonah thinks he knows better than God does)
- In verse 4, what does Jonah experience since he does not pay attention to God? (a storm)
- What eventually ends the storm? (Jonah's thrown overboard into the storm)

TELL

- So, there's a couple of things in here that will help us understand the symbols of this story a little bit better.
- First, here's a map that shows where Tarshish is and where Nineveh is. They're in opposite directions, aren't they? Jonah went in the opposite direction that God told Jonah to go.
- If Jonah had gone to Nineveh, would he have taken a boat to get there? Nope. It's a land route. So even if there had been a storm, it would not have been such a dramatic experience for Jonah as we just read.



- Second, the Hebrew language is just the opposite of English in the sense that one Hebrew word can mean a number of different things whereas English uses a number of different words to explain the same thing. So for instance, we have many different words for rain, right? Rain, drizzle, mist, etc. But the word "sea," in Hebrew could mean, water or sea or chaos. So the people who first heard this story heard that Jonah headed in the opposite direction that God said to go and was then tossed about in water/chaos until he surrendered himself to God. Once Jonah did that, God provided a bubble of protection (the fish) for Jonah in the chaos.
- So even though Jonah is a prophet, which means he pays attention to God, he doesn't trust that God knows what God's talking about, right?
- Jonah thinks he knows better than God does.
- What do you think, does Jonah know more than God does?
- Why do you think Jonah doesn't do what God says, then?

TRANSITION to movie clip:

- We're going to watch a movie clip from the movie "Minority Report."
- In this clip, the character played by Tom Cruise is trying to rescue a woman who can see the future from the government who has kept her captive.
- She tells him to do different things that seem perplexing at first.
- Let's see what Tom Cruise's character does and what happens when he does it.

WATCH Minority Report Clip**ASK**

- Is Tom Cruise's character obedient to the instructions given to him?
- Does he hesitate sometimes?
- Do the instructions make sense later on?
- When she tells him to hold still and wait, do you think that was easy for him?
- Why do you think Tom Cruise's character is obedient to the woman?

TELL

- At the beginning of class, we saw the advantage the teachers had in the pickup game because they had more knowledge of how the game worked.
- In the movie clip, we see the woman and Tom Cruise escape because she has more knowledge of what's happening than anyone else.
- In the Jonah story, we see Jonah ignore what God tells him to do and he therefore ends up in a chaotic storm.
- So in class today, we had two examples of how having more knowledge provided an advantage to those who used it and we had one example of how ignoring someone/something (God) with more knowledge led to chaos (for Jonah).
- So paying attention to God would seem advantageous for us, yes? And yet, if you look at the state of the world today and the chaotic way that it works, we can see that for the most part, people are not seeking God's direction and then following through with it, but are instead thinking that they know best and are acting accordingly. This is just like Jonah and with the same results.
- Next week we'll look at Jonah some more and see if he comes around and trusts God.

CLOSING PRAYER