

## Jonah Discussion 1

# Escape Artist

### INTRODUCTIONS

*When did you first hear the story of Jonah?*

*Did you hear this story as a child? If so what impression did it make?*

### BACKGROUND ON THE BOOK OF JONAH

Jonah is the fifth of the Minor Prophets in our English Bibles. The Minor Prophets are called the Book of the Twelve in the Hebrew Bible. Jonah is unique among the Latter Prophets (in Hebrew: Isaiah through Malachi) in that it is almost completely narrative (story).

Jonah's name means "dove / pigeon" – easily deceived and senseless (Hosea 7:11).

*What does your name mean? What's in a name?*

When this happened Jonah son of Ammitai was possibly already famous as a prophet. He had brought prophetic news about Israel in 2 Kings 14:25. What kind of news? But now he had to bring the opposite!

*Have you ever delivered bad news? When? How do you give bad news?*

Notice now the story starts with "The Word Of The Lord came to..." This is how most of the books prophecy in the Bible start. It has a very special and important meaning. It signifies the 'commissioning' of a prophet. To become a prophet you had to have 'the Word of the Lord' come to you. It also has something to do with Jesus Christ (there's a riddle for later!).

*What do you see in this phrase 'The Word of the Lord came to...' ?*

## WHAT KIND OF BOOK IS THIS?

Frederick Buechner suggest that some Bible stories we only read to children. We seem to ignore these ones as adults but they are favourites in those 'Children's Bibles'.

*Can you identify some Bible stories that we seem to give to children?*

*Buechner says that these stories have uncomfortable things to say to adults.*

*What do you think?*

## ESCAPE OR SALVATION?

Nineveh was the capital of an empire called Assyria. This great empire was known for its brutality and was a place where methods of torture and war were invented. The Assyrians invented crucifixion! Nineveh was hated by Israelites. In 722BC the Northern Kingdom Of Israel was destroyed. The Assyrians wiped North Israel off the map and took many of its people and sent them into 'exile' to live in other parts of the empire. This was their way of increasing control over their conquered territory – by dispersing people throughout so no strong national groups could remain.

No wonder Jonah avoided Nineveh and instead fled the opposite direction to Tarshish.



*How has God called you to go the opposite way to what you expect or desire?*

*What is your Tarshish?*

*What is your Nineveh? (Or who are your Assyrians?)*

*In what ways are we like Jonah - running away from God's call?*