

## The Higher Patriotism

**Lesson Scripture:** Jonah 1-4

**Focus Scripture:** Jonah 1:1-3; 3:1-5; 4:6-11

*Key Verses: The Lord said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh...?" Jonah 4:10-11a*

JONAH 1:1-3; 3:1-5; 4:6-11 (NRSV UE)

### Jonah 1:1-3

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.

### 3:1-5

1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying,

2 "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you."

3 So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across.

4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

5 And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

### 4:6-11

6 The Lord God appointed a bush and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort, so Jonah was very happy about the bush.

7 But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so

JONAH 1:1-3; 3:1-5; 4:6-11 (KJV)

### Jonah 1:1-3

1 Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

### 3:1-5

1 And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

### 4:6-11

6 And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

that it withered.

8 When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die."

10 Then the Lord said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night.

11 And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left and also many animals?"

7 But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

8 And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

9 And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

10 Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

**KEY TERMS**

- **Nationalism** – Strong feelings of pride and loyalty toward one’s own nation or country, often with beliefs that the nation is better than others, which can lead to an “us vs. them” attitude.
- **Nineveh** – An enemy city to which God called the prophet Jonah; also, the capital of the ancient Assyrian Empire, known for its size, power, and wickedness.
- **Patriotism** – Love or loyalty to one’s country, often shown through pride, service, and a desire for it to uphold core values like free-

dom, equality, democracy, and human rights.

**INTRODUCTION**

Jesus commanded us to “love (our) enemies and pray for those who persecute (us)” (Matthew 5:44). Do you ever struggle to follow this commandment, especially when the person has deeply hurt you and might do so again? Jesus didn’t just teach this; he lived it. As he was dying, he prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Is there someone you need to ask God to soften your

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**TELLING THE BIBLE STORY****Jonah Tries to Run From God, Jonah 1:1-3**

Jonah was an Israelite prophet who chose to disobey God rather than go and preach in Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, which was a fierce enemy of Israel. Assyria was known for being a violent, cruel, and oppressive nation. Militarily, their brutal conquests often gave them unmatched power over other nations, and in 722 BCE, they destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, known as Judah. Explaining that Nineveh's wickedness had come to his attention, God summoned Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and "cry out against it immediately." Jonah loved God, but he was reluctant to accept this mission. One reason for Jonah's reluctance was that the Ninevites were violent enemies of Israel, and he did not want God to forgive them if they repented. Perhaps Jonah questioned why he should help Israel's enemies when, in his view, Assyria deserved God's judgment for its wickedness (Nahum 3:1-4).

National pride and personal pride seemed to override Jonah's desire to obey God in this instance. So, instead of heading east to Nineveh, Jonah fled west toward Tarshish, as far away as possible from God's command for him (Jonah 1:3). To escape, Jonah boarded a ship at Joppa heading to Tarshish. Jonah failed as God intervened to make him obey his instructions (Jonah

1:4–2:10), by causing him to be thrown overboard from the ship and being swallowed by a large fish. Jonah might have found reassurance in Psalm 139:7-10, which concludes that God is everywhere – no matter where you go, He is there.

**Jonah Preaches and Nineveh Repents – Jonah 3:1-5**

After spending three days in the fish's stomach, Jonah decided to obey God. He obeyed when God instructed him a second time to go

to Nineveh and deliver the message he had for them. The message, which Jonah delivered, was brief but powerful: "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (v. 4b). The Ninevites believed, and the entire city, starting with the king, repented (v. 5).

**Jonah's Anger – Jonah 4:6-11**

Instead of joy, Jonah reacted with intense anger. He complained to the Lord for doing exactly what he had predicted he would do. Jo-

nah was so angry that he asked God to take his life (Jonah 4:1-4)! Still expecting punishment for the city, Jonah made a hut for himself outside Nineveh and waited. He was glad when God provided a bush for shade but became very angry when a worm caused the bush to wither. As God continued to increase Jonah's discomfort with wind and scorching sun, Jonah again asked to die, stating "it is better for me to die than to

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live" (v. 8). God gently used Jonah's anger over the bush to help him see how insignificant the loss of the bush was compared to the potential loss of more than one hundred twenty thousand Ninevites and their animals, which would have occurred without God's compassion and mercy. A key message for Jonah was the fact that God's love extended beyond the nation of Israel (vs. 9-11).

### SANKOFA

The prophet Jonah, who lived in the 8th century B.C., struggled with a form of nativism, resisting God's call to help people he saw as outsiders. This same mindset has appeared throughout African American history. While nativism is often viewed as anti-immigrant, African Americans have long been treated as outsiders in their own country. From the Founding Era through Reconstruction, the Great Migration, and into the 21st century, nativist attitudes have driven laws and practices that kept black Americans from full participation in American society.

The 1790 Naturalization Act denied them citizenship, and although the 14th Amendment granted it in 1868, groups like the KKK continued nativist violence and rhetoric to marginalize African Americans. During the Great Migration, many faced hostilities in northern and western

cities, leading to redlining, housing discrimination, and race riots. Today, calls for justice are still often labeled "unpatriotic," and DEI initiatives are being reframed as "reverse discrimination."

Recognizing these patterns helps us better understand not just Jonah's resistance to God's inclusive plan, but also how nativism continues to challenge God's vision for unity in both society and his kingdom. For more information, see Joseph, Peniel E. *The Sword and the Shield: The Revolutionary Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.* Basic Books, 2020.

### CASE STUDY

#### *Christian Nationalism and Nativism*

Christian nationalism combines political and cultural beliefs that present Christianity as the core of American identity, asserting that the U.S. is fundamentally a Christian nation that should be guided by Christian values. This ideology often reflects nativist ideas by defining national identity

in exclusive terms, prioritizing native-born citizens and marginalizing immigrants and perceived "outsiders," as discussed in **Sankofa**.

Both nativism and Christian nationalism tend to gain strength during periods of social or demographic change. While nativism emphasizes native-born Americans, Christian nationalists aim to define the U.S. through a narrow, often conservative or evangelical, version of Christi-

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anity. They see secularism, pluralism, and immigration as threats to “Christian values.” Secularism advocates for separating religion from public life to promote equality among beliefs. Pluralism supports diversity and inclusion. Although immigration is frequently demonized, it simply means moving to another country to live. However, Christian nationalism considers these as dangers, linking national identity to a specific religious perspective.

In essence, Christian nationalism is a form of religious nativism that combines faith with citizenship, often excluding non-Christians and those who support secular government. This is just a brief overview, but we must recognize its threat to Christ-centered Christianity and how it distorts the inclusive message of the Gospel. For more information, see Gorski & Perry (2022), *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*.

### LIFE APPLICATION

Jonah’s story offers powerful lessons. Although he was a faithful prophet, he resisted God’s call to go to Nineveh. He chose to run away and later even asked to die. Here are some key takeaways:

**Running from God doesn’t work.** Like Jonah, avoiding God’s call or difficult situations often

leads to bigger problems. We’re called to face challenges with faith, not fear or anger.

**Turning to God brings hope.** Inside the fish, Jonah cried out to God and God heard him. Honest prayer in hard times can restore our perspective.

**We’re called to show compassion even to those we dislike.** Jonah wanted Nineveh judged, but God offered mercy. Just as God gives us second chances, he gave one to Nineveh.

“Jonah’s anger didn’t resolve anything. When we hold onto resentment, it robs us of joy, including the joy that comes from the Lord.”

**Bitterness blocks peace.** Jonah’s anger didn’t resolve anything. When we hold onto resentment, it robs us of joy, including the joy that comes from the Lord.

### Questions:

1. Do you find yourself getting angry at leaders, especially those who seem to believe they are superior to people unlike them or members of their social groups?
2. Has God ever called you to a task in the past that you hesitated to complete? What was the outcome?
3. Among all the lessons from Jonah’s experience, which one resonates most with you? Why?

### CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Song:** “Have Thine Own Way, Lord,”  
AME Hymnal #345

**Closing Prayer:** Father God, please give us clean hearts and willing spirits to do your will. Grant us peace and bless us to love and show

compassion like you did for the Ninevites. We thank you and give you praise and honor, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

May 4-10

<b>Monday</b>	Genesis 2:4a-10, 15 (God Ordains Productive Work)
<b>Tuesday</b>	Proverbs 16:1-3, 8-9 (Commit Your Work to the Lord)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Psalm 8 (Caring for the Work of God's Hands)
<b>Thursday</b>	Exodus 31:12-17 (The Sabbath Is a Perpetual Covenant)
<b>Friday</b>	John 5:8-11, 16-17 (Working and Healing on the Sabbath)
<b>Saturday</b>	Acts 20:31-35 (Supporting Oneself and Others)
<b>Sunday</b>	2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 (Work Quietly and Diligently)