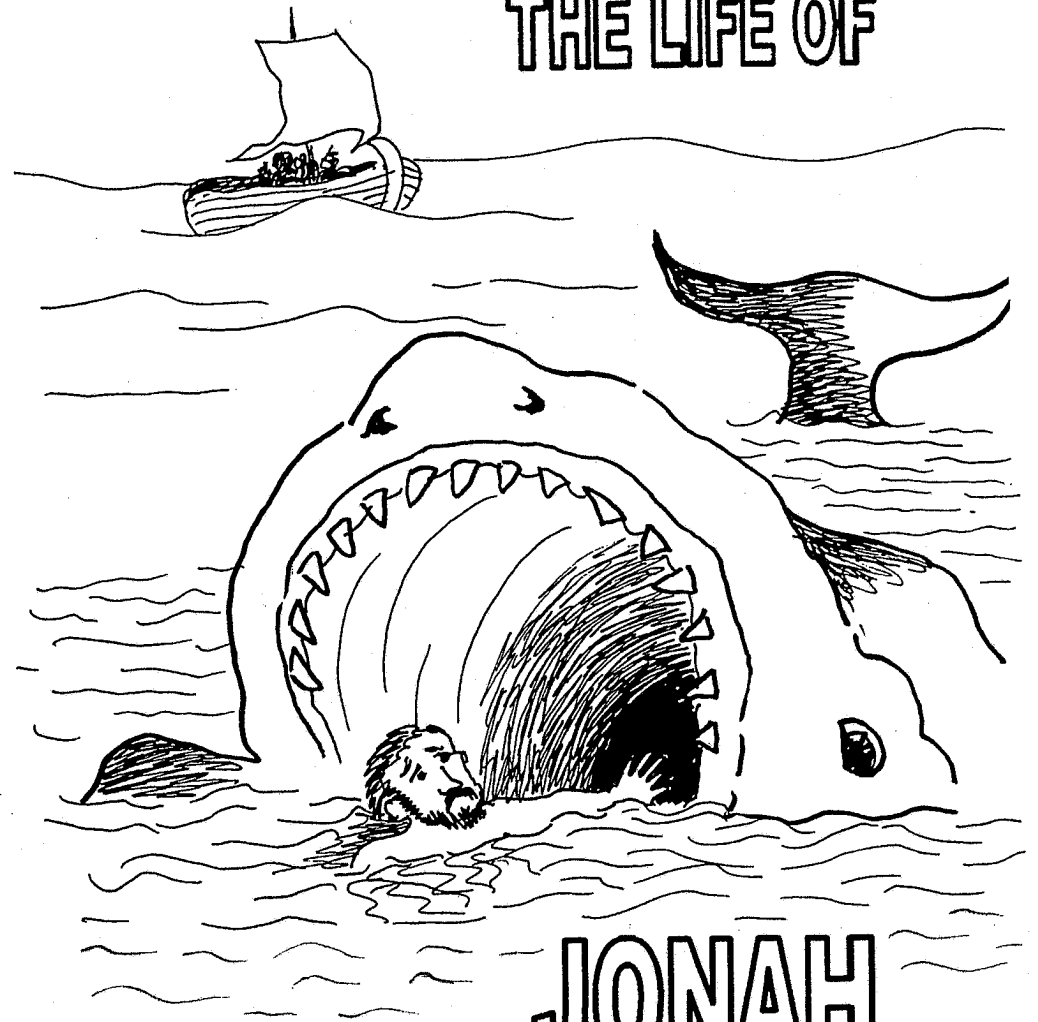
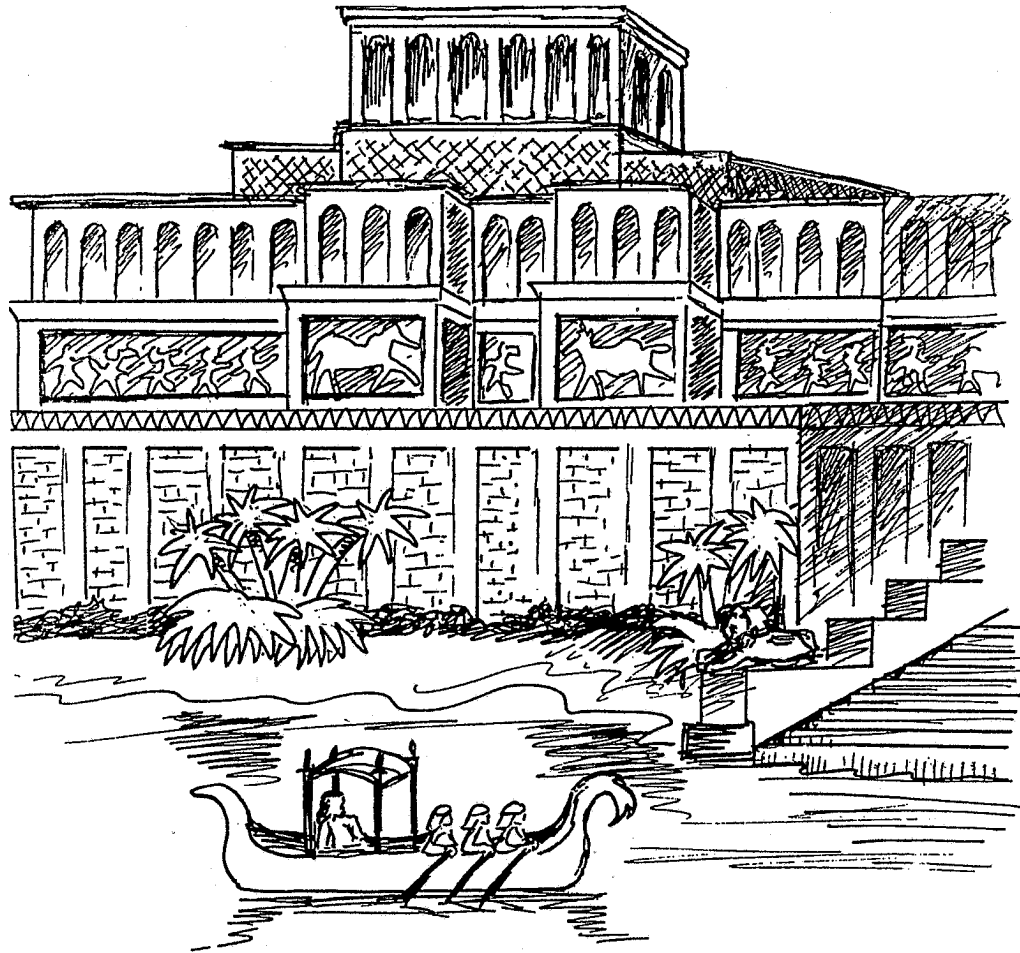


BIBLE HEROES : 15

THE LIFE OF



JONAH

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The story of Jonah is found in the books of the prophets. Jonah was quite an ordinary man, neither rich nor poor. One day God spoke to him and asked him to go to Nineveh, a great city in Assyria. He was to tell the people there that God knew how wicked they had been and forty days after Jonah arrived in the city it would be destroyed and the people die. Instead of obeying God he ran away because he knew that God was kind and if Jonah told that Nineveh would be destroyed and then God spared it, Jonah would look foolish. He started off in the opposite direction and came to the seaport of Joppa, now called Jaffa. There he found a ship that was to sail to Tarshish in Spain and decided to get as far away from God as he could by going with it. When he had paid his fare he went below for he was tired from the long journey on foot. The anchor was lifted and they set sail. Meanwhile Jonah fell asleep.

Suddenly the sky drew heavy and dark and a great storm came. Passengers and crew were afraid for their lives. Jonah still slept but everyone else was praying to their gods to help them. Still nothing happened. At last Jonah was discovered fast asleep and was woken up and told to pray to his God. He then explained that there was only one true God, his God, and that the storm was all his fault. He suggested that he be thrown over the side of the ship. The sailors didn't want to do this at first but as the storm grew worse and all other hope was lost they took Jonah and threw him into the sea.

Immediately the sea became calm again. Meanwhile God had planned that a large fish should swallow Jonah. It must have seemed very strange inside the fish, all alone in the darkness. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, which represents death. He realised all that God had done for him in the past and that he, Jonah, had done wrong. This made him pray to the Lord for help and admit his wrong doing. The Lord answered Jonah's prayer by speaking to the fish so that it vomited him up onto dry land; this

represents rising again from among the dead, a power that only God has.

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and when Jonah got there he started to preach and warn the people that they would be destroyed in forty days because of their wickedness.

At last the King got to hear of God's message. He realised that he and the people had turned to evil ways and issued a proclamation that everyone was to fast and wear sackcloth to show they were sorry and would stop their evil ways.

God saw that the people of Nineveh were truly sorry for their evil and decided not to destroy that huge city of over one hundred and twenty thousand people.

However, this made Jonah very angry because it was just what he thought would happen. He went out of the city and sat on the east side and after making a shelter, sat under its shadow. He watched to see what God would do but the sun was very hot and by nightfall Jonah was feeling the effects of the heat.

That night, God prepared a large vine called a gourd to grow up that would cover his head and protect him from the heat. Jonah was very glad to have the gourd.

Next, God caused a worm to come and destroy the vine. The following day the sun beat down on Jonah's head and an east wind made it so bad that Jonah wished he was dead. God asked Jonah if he was sorry that the gourd had withered away. Jonah said he was very sorry. God used this as an example to teach him that he should have pity on Nineveh and be thankful for all the precious lives that had been saved from destruction.