



**JUST
FOR
FEBRUARY**

2023 Study Guide

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Jonah 1

Before You Read: This familiar story has a lot of twists and turns. Jonah is an unlikely prophet and we are about to learn why. The fish in the story may be the star in our childhood imagination, but God is the One who steals the show.

Read Jonah 1:1-6

1. What do you think is the role of a prophet? What do they do and how should they act?
2. How does Jonah break the model of a typical prophet?
 - a. Is he the protagonist or the antagonist in this chapter? Why does that matter?
3. We are not informed why Jonah ran in the opposite direction and are left to guess for ourselves. Why do you think he ran away?
 - a. Why would anyone run away from God when He calls them?
4. Chasing after a Dream: Tarshish was a faraway land, a “grass is greener on the other side” kind of place where Jonah could be safe from his problems (or so he thought). Can you think of a similar place or situation such as Tarshish in your life? Was it a certain place, a particular job, a relationship, etc.? What did you learn about yourself in the process?
5. Reflect on a moment in your life when you felt God was calling (or nudging) you in a particular direction. How did you respond? Could there be a little Jonah in all of us?

Read Jonah 1:7-17

6. Compare and contrast the faith of the sailors to that of Jonah. What is the author trying to teach us?
7. God sent the fish to save Jonah from his watery grave. In what other ways does God act in this chapter? What does this teach us about the nature of God?
8. Is it comforting or concerning to know that we cannot hide from God? Why? You might find it helpful to read Psalm 139:7-12.
9. After looking closely at this familiar story, what have you discovered to be surprising about this passage?

Concluding Thought: God is great enough to even use disobedience to spread His Word.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, your loyal love never ceases, even to weary and disobedient sheep like us. You call us out of our fear and faithlessness to trust in your saving grace, for there is no place in Heaven and on Earth that we can be separated from you. May your love consume us just as Jonah was consumed by the fish. May you teach us to daily walk in your commandments and respond in faith when you call us by name. Amen.

Jonah 2

Before You Read: Finally, Jonah is about to pray. We have seen the faith of the sailors and the obedience of the fish and now, this prodigal prophet is about to reckon with God. It is as if this came straight from the Book of Psalms, and it is a hidden jewel within this magnificent story.

Read Jonah 2:1-10

1. This chapter is very different from Chapter 1. Why do you think this prayer was included? What does it teach us about Jonah?
2. What verse stands out to you and why?
3. This is a baptism of sorts. Paul reminds us that baptism is our womb and our tomb (Col 2:12, Rom 6:4). We die with Christ and are reborn through the power of His resurrection. Jonah had a conversion experience while in the fish, and it appears that he is a new man. Can you think of a time when you had a transformation or conversion of the heart? What was that like?
4. In his prayer, Jonah reflects on the past and looks to the future. An important aspect of prayer is the act of remembering God's faithfulness in the past and the promise of faithfulness in the future. Has this idea played a part in your prayer life?
 - a. How do past events and future hopes shape your faith and prayers?

5. Simultaneously, God has allowed Jonah to be in this dire circumstance while saving him from certain death. We pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done," but God also allows our will to be done. What does this passage teach us about ourselves, God and this important idea of freedom?

Read Psalm 88:1-12

6. What similar themes do you see between this psalm and Jonah's prayer?
 - a. How do they help you read both passages?

Read 2nd Corinthians 1:8-10

7. How can Jonah help us interpret this passage, or at the very least, how does it enliven what Paul says?
8. Are there any other passages in the Bible that we could use Jonah as a lens to interpret?
9. Do you have any final thoughts? What can be taken away as a lesson from this chapter of Jonah?

Concluding Thought: Jonah is saved through God's grace — which just happens to be a fish! We, too, are saved like disobedient Jonah.

Prayer: O Lord our God, salvation belongs to you. From the lush valleys to the deserted mountaintops, we cry to you; from the depths of the sea to the uttermost reaches of the sky our petitions are offered to you alone. Draw near to us even when we forget to draw near to you. Guide our thoughts, our intentions, ambitions, and dreams to accord with your divine will rather than our own. And make us always grateful for the salvation you offer to us through the great love brought forth in your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jonah 3

Before You Read: The city of Nineveh is not only “the outsider” in the biblical narrative but the enemy of God’s people. They were the bad guys of the ancient world, par excellence. If God had mercy on them then one could argue that God *could* have mercy on anyone. The implications of their repentance would send shockwaves throughout the land and force the people of God to reconsider *how* God worked and *whom* He worked through.

Read Jonah 3:1-10

1. God called Jonah a second time and the prophet finally obeyed. Why do you think God called him again rather than choose another prophet? What does this tell us about God’s character?
2. Have you ever felt God being persistent in your life? If so, how?
3. The author makes the stark contrast between the vastness of Nineveh and the smallness of this prophet walking through the city streets. Why do you think the author does that? What is the intended effect?
4. What do you believe were Jonah’s expectations when he called the city to repent? Look at the previous chapters to find answers to this question.
5. We learn that the people of Nineveh repent, including the king. This would have surprised the original Jewish audience. “How could Gentiles repent?” they might have asked. Can you think of a time when God surprised you like this?

- a. Has God ever challenged your assumptions or preconceived notions about a person or group of people? What did you learn?
6. In what ways have we limited God to fit our understanding of Him? What is the danger of putting limits on God?
7. We learn that the divine prophecy of doom was not absolute but conditional upon Nineveh's response. What does this tell us about God's grace and the nature of repentance? How might that apply to our lives today?

Read Jonah 3:1-10 (A second time)

8. What did you hear this time that you didn't before?
9. Is there something you can take from this conversation and apply to your life in the days ahead?

Concluding Thought: God works in mysterious ways, and it may be helpful to recall the words of Isaiah, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:9, NIV).

Prayer: O Lord of all, your love is limitless, and your grace transcends all cultures and boundaries. May we respond to your call for repentance and newness of life with the urgency of the Ninevites. Help us when we are tempted to be a roadblock to your perfect will and give us the courage to trust you and your amazing work of salvation. Amen.

Jonah 4

Before You Read: There are a lot of surprises in this chapter. The tables have turned: Jonah is now angry with God but for a rather strange reason. The prophet confesses all the amazing qualities of God, but with a scowl on his face.

Read Jonah 4:1-11

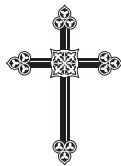
1. What reason does Jonah give for heading to Tarshish in his prayer (v. 2)? What does this tell us about him? What does this say about God?
2. What does this story teach us about repentance? How can this change our mindset about confessing our sins and receiving God's forgiveness?
 - a. What is it like to know with all your heart that you are forgiven? Have you ever felt that assurance?
 - b. What is our response to being so graciously forgiven by God? How do we live considering this abundant grace and mercy?
3. God genuinely cares about Israel's enemies; even the Ninevites are redeemable. Who are our enemies today and what does the author want to teach us about how we characterize our enemies?
 - a. What lessons about this can we bring into our lives?
4. Jonah seems to care more about one plant than he does the people of Nineveh. He who has been saved by God doesn't want others to receive the same mercy. Read Matthew 18:23-35 and compare it to Jonah's actions in this chapter.

5. Back to Jonah: the story is left open-ended for us to answer. What would you say if you had to write a conclusion to this book?
 - a. What do you think happened to Jonah? The people of Nineveh?

6. What is the biggest takeaway you have from this entire study? How can you apply it to your life in the days ahead?

Concluding Thought: Jonah is a fraught character, but we can all relate in one form or fashion. God is the true hero in this story (and every story in the Bible).

Prayer: O Lord, this is why we hastily flee to you; for we know that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O Lord, please give us your life, your Spirit, for it is better to live in your will than to live without you at all. We ask all this through your well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen.



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