

Christ Church Lavender Bay

**Bible Studies**

A picture containing water, blue

Description generated with high confidence

Jonah is a rattling good tale with a dramatic plot that is full of surprises. No wonder children love it. But the writer did not write it as a story only for children. Jonah carries a vital message. The book is about mercy. Jonah has to learn that Israel’s special relationship with God does not make him their exclusive possession. God’s care and concern – his purpose to save – extends to the whole world, even the Assyrian enemy.

Reformer, Martin Luther writes, “no apostle or prophet, not even Christ himself, performed and accomplished with a single sermon the great things that Jonah did. His conversion of the city of Nineveh with one sermon is surely as great a miracle as his rescue from the belly of the whale, if not even a greater one.”

**Study 1**[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Read Jonah 1:1-6**

*Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,****2****“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.”****3****But Jonah rose 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 the fare and went down into it, 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 there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.****5****Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.****6****So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.”*

1. Read 2 Kings 14:25. What does this verse tell us about Jonah?
2. Many other prophetic books begin as Jonah does. Compare Jonah 1:1 with Joel 1:1, Micah 1:1, and Jeremiah 1:4. How does “the word of the LORD” come to us today?
3. In verse 2, God gives three commands to Jonah. What are they?
4. Compare the commands to Jonah with Matthew 28:18-20. Describe the similarities and differences between the two.
5. Jonah’s action contrasts with the prophets’ typical responses to God’s call. Read Isaiah 6:8 and Hosea 1:2–3. How did these prophets answer God’s call?
   1. Think of a time you felt God’s call to act. How did you respond?
6. Compare Jonah in verse 5 with Jesus in Matthew 26:36-45. How would you answer someone who said to you that they knew they were making a right decision about something because they had “a lot of peace” about it?
   1. Why do you think that Jonah fell asleep in the boat?
   2. Have you ever wanted to sleep instead of working for Christ? Explain.
7. Read Luke 11:30. What is so significant about the fact that in the New Testament Jesus referenced Jonah’s story?

**Study 2**

**Read Jonah 1:7-17**

***7****And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.****8****Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?”****9****And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”****10****Then the men were exceedingly 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.*

***11****Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous.****12****He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.”****13****Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.****14****Therefore they called out to the Lord, “O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.”****15****So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.****16****Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.*

***17****And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

1. Jonah attempts to get “away from the presence of the LORD” in Jonah 1:3. But as we've seen, this is completely impossible (1:4). Read Psalm 139:1–12. How does this psalm describe God’s knowledge of our actions and attitudes?
   1. Do you find that comforting or intimidating, and why?
2. Jonah’s description of God—“the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land” (Jonah 1:9)—makes his attempt to flee seem foolish. Think back to a situation where you acted in a way that now seems foolish— why did you act the way you did?
   1. How can you respond differently to similar situations you face today?

1. Think of a time in your life when God used your disobedience to advance his plans in your life or the lives of others around you? Now read 1 Corinthians 1:26–31. Why does God use the foolish and weak of the world?
2. Read Matthew’s account of Jesus’ calming of the storm in Matthew 8:24-27. How is this story similar to Jonah 1? In what ways are they different?
3. In Matthew 12:39-41, Jesus foretells of his coming death and burial with the language of Jonah. Examining these verses, what do you think he means by, “the sign of Jonah”?
4. How is the storm in Jonah 1 an act of mercy rather than judgment? How have you seen God spare no expense in his pursuit of you?

**Study 3**

**Read Jonah 2:1-10**

***2****Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish,****2****saying,*

*“I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.* ***3****For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.* ***4****Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’* ***5****The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head* ***6****at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.* ***7****When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.* ***8****Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.* ***9****But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!”*

***10****And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.*

1. After reading over Jonah’s prayer, do you think he has experienced a change of heart between chapter 1 and chapter 2?
   1. In moments of distress, is your first inclination to pray? Why or why not?
   2. What about when your distress is the result of personal sin and disobedience?
2. In verse 9, Jonah expresses thanksgiving to God for saving him while he was drowning in “the heart of the seas” (verse 3). As believers in Jesus Christ, we have been saved from sin and death. Does your life demonstrate thankfulness to God for your salvation?
   1. On your own, take a moment to thank God for saving you.
3. Whether drowning in the sea or imprisoned in the belly of the fish, Jonah was completely incapable of saving himself or compensating for his disobedience. How do his circumstances compare with our previous state as unbelievers (see Ephesians 2:1-3)?
4. In verses 6b and 9b, Jonah identifies that his salvation was the work of God alone. Compare this with Ephesians 2:4-9 and Romans 5:8. Do you understand your salvation to be entirely God’s work?
   1. How might you be tempted to think that you contribute to your own salvation?
5. Now compare 2:10 with 1:17. What do these verses reveal about God’s sovereignty over Jonah’s circumstances?
6. Jonah’s prayer contains many of the phrases in David’s psalms of lament and deliverance. Read Psalm 5, 31, and 69. How do David’s circumstances differ from Jonah’s?
   1. In what ways are Jonah and David’s prayers similar and dissimilar?
7. Consider that Jonah cries out to God in the midst of his sin, while drowning in the sea, and within the belly of the fish. Have you ever found yourself in a place where you thought God was unable or unwilling to hear your prayer?
8. Read 1 John 1:9 and 1 John 5:14-15. What do these verses promise?

**Study 4**

**Read Jonah 3:1-5**

*Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying,****2****“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”****3****So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth.****4****Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”****5****And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.*

1. Have you ever given someone important instructions that they have entirely refused to follow?
   1. How did their actions influence your trust in them and your desire to work with them in future?
2. After Jonah’s disobedience and failed escape attempt, God asked him a second time to take His message to Nineveh. Does this surprise you?
   1. What does God’s willingness to use Jonah despite His initial failure to obey tell you about God’s character?

1. What was the message that Jonah was to bring to Nineveh?
   1. Why is it significant that this message was told to Jonah by God and was not Jonah’s own words?
   2. What does the Ninevites response tell you about the power and sufficiency of God’s word?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. What does it mean to be ambassador for Christ?
3. As Christians, we are called to make disciples by sharing the message of the gospel. Read John 20:19-21 and Matthew 28:18-20. How should the fact that it is God who sends influence your desire and willingness to share the gospel?
4. Have you ever felt the Lord telling you to share the gospel with someone who might be hostile? How did you feel? How did you respond to the Lord’s leading?
5. Read Matthew 28:18-20 again. What promises are in this passage that give you courage to share the gospel even in the face of opposition?
   1. How will you respond to these promises today?

**Study 5**

**Read Jonah 3:6-10**

***6****The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.****7****And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water,****8****but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.****9****Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”*

***10****When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.*

1. Can you think of a significant event by which the course of your life drastically changed? Was it for the better or the worse?
2. Think of someone in your life right now who could be described the same way the Bible describes Nineveh and its inhabitants (1:2, 3:8, 3:10). How would you feel if they repented and trusted Christ?

1. Repentance can be described as “a godly grief over, and turning away from sin.” What evidence do you see of authentic repentance in the king of Nineveh in 3:6-10?
2. What role, if any, does repentance play in your daily life?
   1. What practical steps can you take to increase your practice of it?
3. Now read Jeremiah 18:7-8 and compare with 18:9-10. What are the two promises contained in these verses?
4. Lastly, read 2 Corinthians 7:9-11. What do you think is the difference between “worldly grief” and “godly grief” over sin?
   1. Is there sin in your life currently that you grieve over only at the worldly level? What can you do to change this?
5. The book of Acts contains many references to repentance. Read Acts 2:37-41, 3:18-21, and 26:19-20. What other actions are called for alongside repentance?
   1. Why do you think repentance is so many times paired with other actions?
6. Is repentance the same as remorse, or being sorry for sin? Why or why not?
7. Consider how seriously the Ninevites took their sin by stopping everything in their daily lives to focus exclusively on repenting and crying out for mercy. Do you take your sin and the process of repentance as seriously? Why or why not?

**Study 6**

**Read Jonah 4:1-11**

*But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.****2****And he prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.****3****Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”****4****And the Lord said, “Do you do well to be angry?”*

***5****Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city.****6****Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.****7****But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered.****8****When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”****9****But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.”****10****And the Lord said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night.****11****And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”*

1. Think of last time you were angry about something.
   1. Why were you angry?
   2. Was it right for you to be angry?
   3. In your anger, were you primarily focused on your own needs and desires or the good of others?
2. Compare Jonah’s prayer after God showed him mercy by rescuing him from drowning (2:1-9) with his prayer after God showed the Ninevites mercy by relenting of his wrath (4:2-3). What is different about Jonah’s attitude and response?
3. Compare Jonah’s attitude in verse 1 and verse 6. What do these verses reveal about Jonah’s heart?
4. What phrase is repeated in verses 6-8? Compare this with 1:4, 1:17, and 2:10. What major theme is presented here and woven throughout the book of Jonah?
5. Now, reflect on how God continues to demonstrate grace to Jonah by appointing a plant to provide him with shade in the heat of the day. Why would God later appoint a worm to attack the plant?
   1. In what way might the worm still be an extension of God’s grace?
6. What does it mean that the Ninevites did not know their right hand from their left?
7. Read Ephesians 4:26. Is anger always sinful?
   1. How would you differentiate between righteous and unrighteous (sinful) anger?
8. Read verse 9. Is there anything in your life that you feel you could not live without? If so, in what ways might this reveal idolatry in your life?
9. Read John 8:34, 2 Corinthians 4:4, and Ephesians 2:1-4. How will you pray for the unbelievers in your life in light of these verses?

1. I am indebted to Global Learning Partners for the inspiration for these studies. Used with permission from Global Learning Partners, Inc. www.globallearningpartners.com. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)