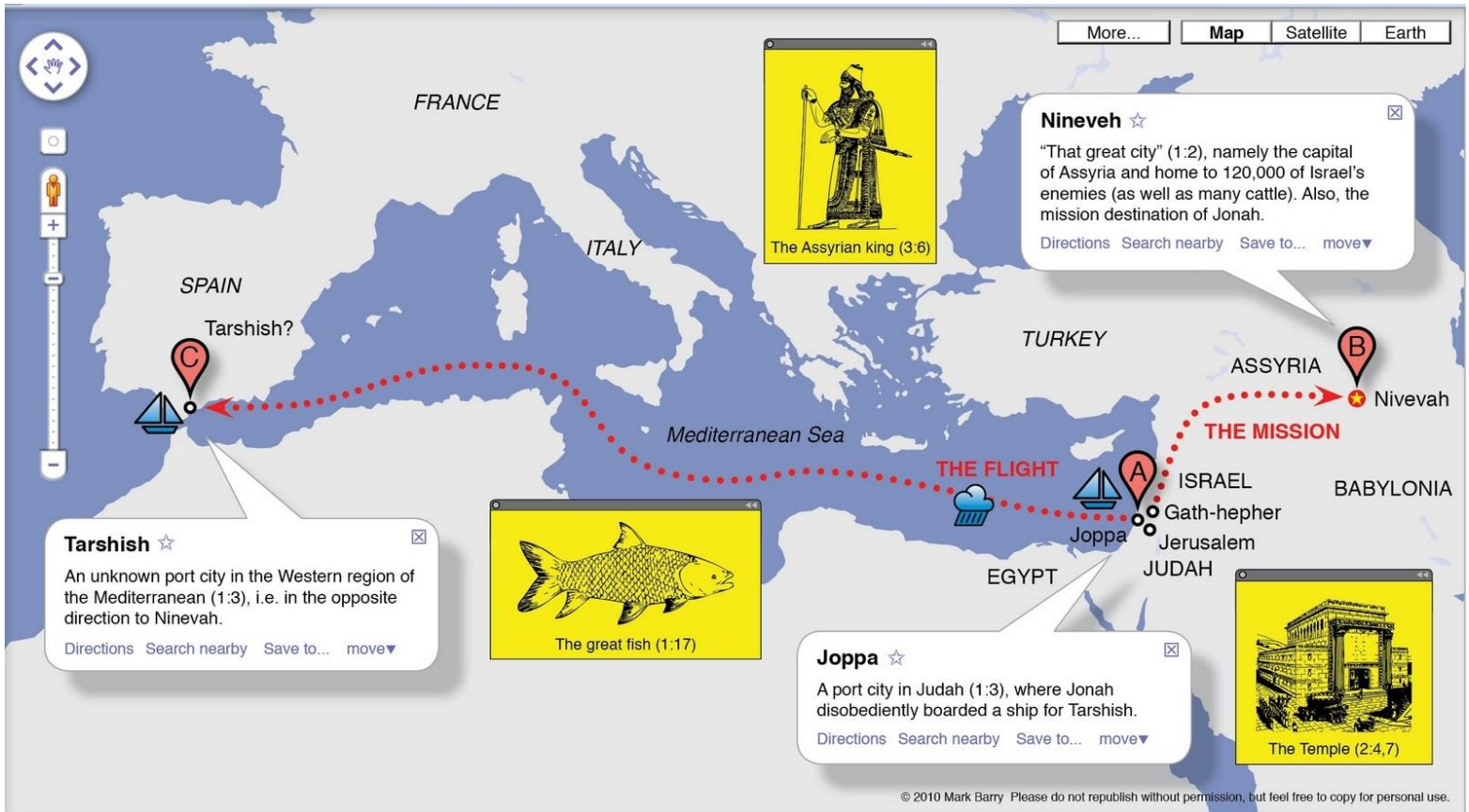


4 Studies in the Book of Jonah



DANGER
WRONG WAY
TURN BACK



Background and Setting

According to 2 Kings 14:25, Jonah came from Gath-Hepher near Nazareth. The context places him during the long and prosperous reign of Jeroboam II (circa 793-753BC) making him a prophet to the Northern tribes of Israel just prior to the prophet Amos during the first half of the eighth century BC, circa 760BC. The Pharisees were wrong when they said "no prophet came out of Galilee" (John 7:52), because Jonah was Galilean!

Historical and Theological Themes

Jonah, though a prophet of Israel is not remembered for his ministry in Israel, which could explain why the Pharisees made their erroneous claim. Rather the book of Jonah, relates the account of his call to preach repentance to Nineveh and his refusal to go. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria and infamous for its cruelty, was a historical nemesis of Israel and Judah. The focus of this book is on that Gentile city, which was

founded by Nimrod, the great-grandson of Noah (Gen 10:6-12). Perhaps the largest city in the ancient world (Jonah 1:2; 3:2-3; 4:11), it was nevertheless destroyed about 150 years after the repentance of the generation in the time of Jonah's visit (612BC), as Nahum prophesied (Nah 1:1ff).

Israel's political distaste for Assyria, coupled with a sense of spiritual superiority as the recipient of God's covenant blessing, produced a recalcitrant attitude in Jonah toward God's request for missionary service. Jonah was sent to Nineveh in part to shame Israel by the fact that a pagan city repented at the preaching of a stranger, whereas Israel would not repent though preached to by many prophets. He was soon to learn that God's love and mercy extends to all of his creatures (Jonah 4:2, 10-11), not just his covenant people (cf. Gen 9:27; 12:3; Lev 19:33-34; 1 Sam 2:10; Isa 2:2; Joel 2:28-32).

The book of Jonah reveals God's sovereign rule over humankind and all creation. Creation came into being through Him (Jonah 1:9) and responds to His every command (1:4, 17; 2:10; 4:6-7; cf. Mark 4:41). Jesus used the repentance of the Ninevites to rebuke the Pharisee, thus illustrating the hardness of the Pharisees' hearts and their unwillingness to repent (Matthew 12:38-41); Luke 11:29-32). The heathen city of Nineveh repented at the preaching of a reluctant prophet, but the Pharisees would not repent at the preaching of the greatest of all prophets, in spite of overwhelming evidence that he was actually their Lord and Messiah. Jonah is a picture of Israel, who was chosen and commissioned by God to be his witness (Isaiah 43:10-12; 44:8), who rebelled against his will (Exodus 32:1-4; Judges 2:11-19; Ezekiel 6:1-5; Mark 7:6-9), but who has been miraculously preserved by God through centuries of exile and dispersion to finally preach His truth (Jeremiah 30:11; 31:35-37; Hosea 3:3-5; Revelation 7:1-8; 14:1-3).

Miracles in Jonah

There are 10 miracles in the book of Jonah. As you read through the book of Jonah, see if you can spot them all.

Introduction

What do you already know about the book of Jonah?

God gives Jonah a job to do – to tell the people of Nineveh to repent. Jonah doesn't want to do this job; so, he runs away – hops on a boat – gets caught in a storm – gets swallowed by a big fish (sent by God) – and then gets coughed up back where he started. Jonah goes to Nineveh and the people repent. But Jonah's not happy about it!

You might not be able to answer this question right now but we'll come back to it in the final study of the series.

As you read Jonah, ponder whether he is a Christ-like figure, spending three days in the belly of a great fish before being sent to save a lost city? Or is he a disobedient sulker whom God teaches a lesson about love and mercy?

He's probably the latter. Jonah in the belly of the great fish is more of a "sign" of Christ, than Jonah being a Christ-like figure.

Study 1 – Running from God’s Will (Jonah 1:1-16)

Read Jonah 1:1-3

1. What does Jonah’s name mean?

Jonah’s name (יוֹנָתַן – Yonaw) means “dove” – a gentle term of endearment

2. Locate Nineveh, Joppa and Tarshish on the map on page 2.

Nineveh = B on the map

Joppa = A on the map

Tarshish = C on the map

3. Do some research on **Nineveh** and make some notes.

*Nineveh is notable in the Bible as the **capital city of Assyria**, a longtime enemy of Israel. Nineveh is first mentioned in the table of nations in Genesis 10:11-12.*

***Nineveh was known for its great wealth, power, and prestige.** The Assyrians were notorious for their wickedness, cruelty and idolatry (Nahum 3:19). Their capital, Nineveh, contained many temples, including one to Ishtar, the Assyrian goddess that some scholars believe was the namesake of Nineveh.*

Nineveh was likely the largest city in the world at the time of Jonah.

4. Do some research on **Joppa** and make some notes.

*Joppa, **one of the oldest cities in the world**, is mentioned several times in both Old and New Testaments. Joppa is **known today as Jaffa** and was most likely part of the land allotment given to the tribe of Dan, although it doesn’t seem the Danites ever took possession of it (Joshua 19:40–48). **Located between 30 and 40 miles northwest of Jerusalem**, Joppa perches on a high cliff overlooking the Mediterranean Sea and served as the **primary port city for Jerusalem**. Its low ledge of rocks hangs out over the sea and forms a small harbor.*

It was through Joppa that the timber for Solomon’s temple arrived from the forests of Lebanon (2 Chronicles 2:8–9, 16). Joppa was also the port through which timber came for the rebuilding of God’s temple, authorized by King Cyrus of Persia and overseen by Ezra and Zerubbabel (see Ezra 3:7). The cedar trees were harvested in Lebanon and

the trunks lashed together in large rafts that were then floated south to the port of Joppa.

*In the New Testament, Joppa is notable as the **home of Simon the tanner**. Simon the tanner housed Peter while Peter ministered to believers in Joppa (Acts 9:32–43). Most likely, Simon the tanner chose to work in the seaport of Joppa to more easily receive the pelts coming in and to ship the finished product out. His house was “by the sea” (Acts 10:6), probably at some distance from the rest of the community, to allow the offensive smells related to his work to dissipate. It was on Simon’s rooftop that Peter had his vision of unclean animals being lowered from the sky in something like a sheet. Joppa was also the home of Tabitha, also called Dorcas, whom Peter raised from the dead (Acts 9:36–43). When the Roman centurion Cornelius sent a delegation to find Peter, they found him in Joppa.*

Read the following OT passages: Exodus 3:1-4:17; Isaiah 6 and Jeremiah 1:1-10
(these passages record God calling some key prophets to their ministry)

5. Compare the way Jonah interacts with God in Jonah 1:1-3 with the way Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah interact with God in the other passages.

a. How are they the same?

- i) God spoke directly to Jonah, Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah*
- ii) They all have doubts. Jonah demonstrates his doubt by running whereas the others verbalize it: Moses – can’t speak, send someone else. Isaiah – I’m unclean; Jeremiah – I do not know how to speak; I am too young!*
- iii) God touches both Isaiah and Jeremiah’s mouths – to put words in their mouths*
- iv) All of them are told what to say*

b. How are they different?

- i) Jonah ran away.*
- ii) Moses was reluctant and questioning but he still obeyed.*
- iii) Isaiah felt unworthy (a man of unclean lips) but he volunteered to go and he had to preach to people who would NOT listen; but he still went.*

- iv) *Jonah didn't question God; he just ran away. Because Moses questioned God; he received some reassurance from God. Because Isaiah stated his uncleanness, God cleansed him. Because Jeremiah expressed some doubt, God reassured him.*
- v) *Jeremiah was appointed as prophet in the womb!*

Read Psalm 72:10; Jeremiah 10:9; Ezekiel 27:12, 25 and Isaiah 66:19.

6. Why do you think Jonah may have chosen Tarshish as the place to flee to?

*In Psalm 72:10 – Tarshish is described as a **distant shore***

*In Jeremiah 10:9 – Tarshish is **a place where silver can be found***

*In Ezekiel 27:12, 15 – Tarshish is **a place of great trading** – trading in silver, iron, tin and lead – and has **many cargo ships**.*

*In Isaiah 66:19 – Tarshish is mentioned here in connection with the restoration of Israel and the gathering of the nations. Tarshish is often seen **as a representative of Gentile nations or the distant nations of the world**.*

Some in summary, Jonah, saw Tarshish – as far away from Israel/Nineveh and God's calling as he could possibly go. Tarshish was a busy business hub and port and Gentile – so perhaps Jonah figured he could hide there, from God!

Read Jonah 1:4-16

7. Note down the different attitudes of the sailors and Jonah to:

a. The Storm

The sailors

- *The sailors were afraid and each cried to their own god (v5)*
- *They threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship (v5)*
- *The sailors sensed that someone was "responsible" for the storm; so, they cast lots to see who brought this calamity upon them. When the lot fell on Jonah, they interrogate him: who is responsible? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you? (vv7-8)*

- *When the sea got rougher and rougher, they asked Jonah what they should do to make the sea calm? (v11)*

Jonah

- *Jonah went below deck and fell into a deep sleep (v6) – he doesn't seem too concerned.*
- *Jonah knows the storm is his fault (v12)*

b. The gods/God

The sailors

- *The sailors cried out to their own gods (v5)*
- *Captain wants Jonah to wake up and pray to God – in case Jonah's God "listens" (v6)*
- *The sailors are terrified because they knew Jonah was running away from his God (v10)*
- *Instead of listening to Jonah's request to throw him overboard, they tried to row back to land – but the sea grew wilder. So, they cried out to the Lord (Jonah's God) – "please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you have done as you pleased" (vv13-14)*
- *When they threw Jonah overboard and the storm calmed – they greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice and made vows to Him" (vv15-16)*

Jonah

- *Jonah describes his God as the "God of Heaven, who made the sea and dry land" – in other words, God is in control of everything (v9)*
- *Jonah knows that if the sailors throw him overboard, the storm will calm (v12)*

8. Find all references to 'fear' or 'being afraid' in the passage (the same Hebrew word lies behind each reference). Who claims to fear God and who expresses that fear appropriately?

*V5 – All the sailors were **afraid** and each cried to his own god.*

*V10 – They were **terrified** (when they heard about Jonah's God and that he was running away)*

*V14 – They **cried out** to the Lord – that they wouldn't be held accountable for Jonah's demise*

*V16 – The sailor **greatly feared** the Lord*

Notice: Jonah doesn't seem to fear God; he just runs away – and then when the storm comes, even though he knows it's his fault, he goes below deck and sleeps.

Whereas the sailors, initially in fear they cry out to their own gods – who can do nothing to help. Then, when they are terrified (v10) – they fear Jonah's God, the Lord God, appropriately and respond appropriately in prayer and sacrifice.

Think it through:

9. Choose one of these situations that you have experienced yourself or seen someone experience:

- A time when a person first caught a glimpse of God's holiness and their own sinfulness
- An occasion when God's word about Jesus came to someone with full conviction (e.g., through reading the Bible or hearing it preached)
- A time of reading God's word when it became clear that he wanted you to change your life or actions in some way in response to his word

Share these experience(s) in your group...

a. When I read the Bible for the first time, from cover to cover, and saw the sin of great men, like Moses, Saul, David, the Apostle Paul – and how God a) dealt with their sin; and b) how God still used these men, despite their faults. I realized my sin but also that because of Jesus' death, I was forgiven, and

God could still use me. Then Romans 8:31 hit me – “if God is for us, who can be against us?”

- b. When I first read and understood John 3:16 – something that was not taught or explained to me as a Roman Catholic boy.*
- c. When I felt the Lord calling me into ministry – Luke 9:62 hit me many times – as I kept looking back to my “old” life*

Read Matthew 28:16-20

10. How does this passage relate to Jonah 1:1-16?

Jonah is not the only one being called to preach repentance.

In Matthew 28:16-20 – Jesus calls His disciples (which includes us – by definition – we are a disciple of Jesus) to “go” and “make disciples of all nations”, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” and “teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded”.

This is a COMMAND not a suggestion!

11. **Read Mark 4:35-41.** How does it relate to Jonah 1:1-16?

Mark tells the story of the disciples in a boat in a storm (Greek word lailaps can mean whirlwind, squall, a tempestuous wind or storm) – Jesus was asleep in the boat – and He when woken up – He calms the storm – simply by speaking “Quiet! Be Still!”. The story has similarities to Jonah 1:1-16: a boat in a storm, crew who are helpless, someone in the boat asleep, one person has the power to stop the storm – Jonah knows His God can stop it – and Jesus (as God) can stop the storm.

12. **Read Romans 10:13 & Acts 4:12.** How do they relate to Jonah 1:1-16?

Romans 10:13 – for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Acts 4:12 - Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

In the situation of the storm in Jonah – there is only ONE who can stop the storm and save them. Similarly, there is only ONE who can give us salvation – forgiveness of our sins and eternal life – and that is our Lord, Jesus!

13. **Read Mark 8:35 & 1 Corinthians 6:19.** How do they relate to Jonah 1:1-16?

Mark 8:35 - For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

Jonah wanted to save his life (from the Ninevites) as he thought he would be doomed going there (the Ninevites were wicked people), so he ran away – and then faced losing his life. Then when, he realized he couldn't run away and that the storm was his fault – he was prepared to lose his life – and be thrown overboard. But as we'll see next time, by losing his life by being thrown overboard – he will be saved!

It's a matter of forgetting self and forgetting fear and trusting God in all things!

1 Corinthians 6:19 - Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;

Jonah needed to realize that his body is a temple of the Holy Spirit – and that He is not his own – He belongs to God!

14. What are the different ways you have responded to God's command?

- *Believed*
- *Obedied*
- *Feared*
- *Complained*
- *Objected*
- *Disobeyed*

15. Is/was your response more like that of Jonah or that of the sailors?

My response is sometimes like Jonah – running away, ignoring God's command – and bearing my head in the sand – thinking I can resist the change God wants for my life. Other times, like the sailors – initially looking for help in the wrong places – until coming to the Lord, in heartfelt prayer and supplication.

16. What miracles did you spot in this chapter?

V4 – The Lord sent a great wind

V7 – The lot fell upon Jonah (see Proverbs 16:33)

V15 – The raging sea grew calm

17. **Ponder:** Where is Jesus in Jonah 1:1-16?

- *Jonah is a prophet sent to deliver a message of salvation to those lost from God – Jesus is the ultimate prophet sent to not only deliver the message of salvation but to purchase salvation*
- *Jonah's sacrifice for the sake of the sailors (1:12) is a foreshadowing of Jesus' once and for all sacrifice*

What's the **BIG IDEA** of **Jonah 1:1-16**

You can't hide or run away from God! (See Psalm 139:7-12)



Give a **light globe** moment you experienced in this passage?

Jonah is a good example of wanting to save your life and losing – and then wanting to lose your life and saving it!



How does this passage **apply to your life**?

- a. We can't run and hide from God who is all-knowing, all powerful and ever-present
- b. Are we running away from God's calling?
- c. God is sovereign in all things!
- d. No one is too wicked (like the Ninevites) that they can't repent and be saved.
- e. Don't write ANYONE off!
- f. Embarrassingly - sometimes unbelievers can show us what we are doing wrong as Christians
- g. Sometimes we try to fix the problem ourselves – by “throwing the cargo overboard” so to speak!
- h. Are we asleep – like Jonah – when the storms of sin in this world rage around us? Are we sleeping Christians?
- i. Are we hiding our identity as a Christian from others – like Jonah hid his faith in the Lord God YHWH? Do people know we are different?
- j. It's not good enough to say – God is in control – He can make people like the Ninevites repent – Jesus expects us to be His Church
- k. Are we prepared to be thrown overboard – and let God use us as He pleases?

- l. God works things out – DESPITE our sin and disobedience and wrong choices – NOT BECAUSE of them!
- m. Jesus calls us – like Jonah was called – to preach to those lost from God – to repent and believe!

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

Finish in prayer: Pray for each other and your responses to God's leading. Pray for those you know who at this time seem to be ignoring God's calling and leading

Study 2 – Submitting to God’s Will (Jonah 1:17-2:10)

For starters

Do you find it hard to believe that God is loving and kind?

Why/Why not?

Beliefs about God's nature, including whether God is loving and kind, can vary among individuals due to personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, religious teachings, and philosophical considerations. Some people find it easy to believe in a loving and kind God based on their faith and the fact that God is a Holy God and humans are not.

Some people might find it challenging to reconcile the concept of a loving and kind God with the existence of suffering, pain, and injustice in the world. This perspective raises questions about why a loving God would allow or tolerate such things. Some people find solace in Biblical explanation on the existence of evil and free will, while others may struggle with these concepts and find it difficult to accept the idea of a loving God in the face of suffering.

Read Exodus 34:6-7.

1. What does this reveal about God’s character?

According to this passage, God describes Himself as compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. It emphasizes God's capacity for forgiveness and His commitment to maintaining love and faithfulness towards His people. At the same time, the passage also acknowledges that God does not leave the guilty unpunished, and there may be consequences for sin that extend to future generations.

This passage highlights a combination of divine attributes, including love, mercy, justice, and the consequences of human actions. It provides a glimpse into God's nature and His relationship with humanity, expressing both His compassion and His expectations for righteousness and accountability and justice.

The Hebrew word for love in v6 and v7 is *hesed*. It has a number of translations in English, such as ‘mercy’, ‘loving kindness’, ‘steadfast love’, ‘goodness’, ‘favour’, and ‘love’.

It is one of the favourite words to describe God's character and actions towards his people, and probably lies behind such important words as 'grace' and 'love' in the New Testament. It is also a word used in 2 crucial places in the book of Jonah in 2:8 and 4:2.

Read Exodus 32:1-34:9

2. It is clear that the sin of Israel depicted in this passage is great and deliberate and provocative. Is there any indication of repentance within this passage?

In Exodus 32, the Israelites, while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments from God, grew impatient and asked Aaron to make them a golden calf to worship. This act of idolatry was a violation of God's commandments, and it provoked His anger. Upon witnessing this, Moses interceded on behalf of the people and pleaded with God not to destroy them. Moses displayed his own repentance by showing his commitment to God's covenant and his concern for the people's spiritual well-being. The people themselves did not show any indication of repentance. In response to Moses' intercession, God relented from destroying the Israelites entirely. However, there were consequences for their disobedience. In Exodus 32:33-34, God declared that He would punish the guilty and plague the people, yet He promised to lead them to the Promised Land and send an angel to guide them.

3. What is God's initial response and what is his proposed long-term responses? Would such a response have been justified (cf. Exodus 20:4-5)?

Initial Response:

When God saw the Israelites engaging in idolatry and worshipping the golden calf, He was deeply angered and considered destroying them. Exodus 32:9-10 states, "I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them."

Moses' Intercession:

Moses interceded on behalf of the people, appealing to God's mercy and reminding Him of His covenant with their ancestors. Exodus 32:11-14 records Moses pleading

with God not to destroy the Israelites. Moved by Moses' intercession, God relented from destroying them: "Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened" (Exodus 32:14).

Immediate Consequences:

Although God relented from destroying the Israelites, there were immediate consequences for their sin. Moses burned the golden calf, and God sent a plague among the people as a form of punishment (Exodus 32:20-35).

Long-Term Response:

In the long term, God continued to lead the Israelites towards the Promised Land, but His presence would no longer go with them personally. Exodus 33:3 states, "Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way."

Moses pleaded for God's presence to be with them, recognizing their dependence on Him. In response to Moses' request, God promised to send an angel to guide them on their journey (Exodus 33:14). Additionally, Moses requested to see God's glory, and God passed by him and revealed His name, proclaiming His attributes of mercy and compassion (Exodus 34:6-7).

Overall, God's initial response was anger and the desire to destroy the Israelites, but Moses' intercession resulted in God relenting from His initial plan. However, there were still consequences for their actions, and God's presence would no longer accompany them in the same way. Yet, He remained faithful to His covenant and provided guidance and forgiveness to the Israelites in the long term.

Based on the commandment in Exodus 20:5-6 – God says He is jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation...God would have been justified to punish them, but his compassionate and mercy prevailed.

4. Does God carry out the sort of response indicated by Exodus 20:4-5? According to Exodus 32-34, what stops him carrying out his long-term response?

*What stops God is that He remains faithful to His **covenant** with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and His promise "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give your descendants all this land I promised them" (Exodus 32:14)*

The God of *hesed*

The story of the Old Testament is one which clearly indicates that although God has been faithful to his people, they had been grossly unfaithful to him. He had been a lover of his people but they responded to his love by acting like prostitutes and going after other gods (e.g., Hosea 1-3; Jeremiah 2; Ezekiel 16). They can continually break the covenant that existed between them and God, and it was recognized by the prophets that God would have been fully justified in walking away from the relationship. Passages like Micah 7:18-20 celebrate that God did not do the justified thing. Instead, he acted in surprising and unobligated mercy, kindness and love, as he did in Exodus 32-34.

What about the NT?

Read Romans 3:9-31.

5. According to this passage, what is the universal human condition?

The universal human condition described in Romans 3:9-31 emphasizes that all people are sinful and fall short of God's standards. It affirms the need for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, who offers forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation with God to all who believe.

6. Given that God is holy, what would be his entirely justified response?

Given that God is holy, His entirely justified response to sin is to uphold His justice and righteousness by condemning and punishing sin. The holiness of God implies His absolute moral perfection and separation from all that is impure or sinful. Sin, which is the transgression of God's law and a violation of His holy nature, stands in opposition to His perfect character.

God, being perfectly just, cannot overlook or condone sin without compromising His holiness and justice.

7. How does God act in response to this universal human condition?

***Justification by Faith:** God offers a solution to humanity's sin problem through justification by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul emphasizes that righteousness comes through faith in Jesus to all who believe, both Jews and Gentiles, as there is no*

distinction (Romans 3:22-24). This means that God provides a way for people to be declared righteous and justified before Him through faith in Jesus Christ, rather than through their own works or observance of the Jewish Law.

Redemption and Atonement: *Paul highlights that believers are justified by God's grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24). God's response to sin includes providing redemption and atonement through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus paid the price for sin and reconciled humanity to God.*

Demonstration of God's Justice: *God's response to sin also demonstrates His justice. In Romans 3:25-26, Paul explains that God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement to demonstrate His righteousness because, in His forbearance, He had passed over the sins previously committed. Through Jesus' sacrifice, God's justice is upheld, and the penalty for sin is paid.*

Exclusion of Boasting: *Paul emphasizes that God's response to sin nullifies boasting, as no one can boast in their own righteousness or accomplishments. Salvation is solely based on faith in Jesus Christ, not on personal merit or adherence to the law (Romans 3:27-28). This highlights God's grace and removes any grounds for human pride.*

Read Luke 15:1-32

8. What in essence are the Pharisees and the older son grumbling about?

In essence the Pharisees and older son are grumbling about Jesus'/God's forgiveness, compassion and mercy.

9. Can you think of ways that people act or speak that indicate they find God's *hesed* difficult or objectionable?

Rejecting God's Grace: *Some individuals may struggle with the concept of receiving unconditional love and grace from God. They may find it difficult to accept that God's love is freely given, regardless of their actions or deservingness. This can lead to resistance or skepticism towards the idea of God's *hesed*.*

Focusing on Judgment: *Some people may place more emphasis on God's justice and judgment rather than His *hesed*. They may be uncomfortable with the idea of a God*

who shows mercy and kindness, as it might conflict with their perception of justice and punishment for wrongdoing.

Questioning the Existence of Evil: *The existence of evil and suffering in the world can challenge people's belief in a loving and kind God. They may find it difficult to reconcile the presence of pain and injustice with the notion of God's hesed. This can lead to doubts or objections regarding God's character.*

Struggling with Personal Experiences: *Negative personal experiences or traumas can cause individuals to question or doubt God's hesed. If they have gone through hardships or have witnessed injustices, it may be challenging for them to reconcile those experiences with the belief in a loving and kind God.*

Misunderstanding God's Purposes: *Sometimes people misunderstand or misinterpret the intentions and purposes behind God's actions. They may view certain events or circumstances as evidence against God's hesed, rather than considering the bigger picture or trusting in God's ultimate plan.*

10. In what ways do you find God's *hesed* a difficult concept? Why?

Personally, when I look at the sin in my life, past and present, it is difficult for me to accept that God would send Jesus to die for me and remove the punishment I deserve. Why would He do that?

11. What great comfort can we find in God's *hesed*?

God's hesed brings comfort because it means we have:

- a. Assurance that God's love for us remains steadfast and unchanging*
- b. Forgiveness and redemption, no matter what we've done.*
- c. Faithfulness: God's hesed continues to surround us in all circumstances of life*
- d. Hope for the future. God's hesed will lead us to a glorious future in Heaven and eternal life.*
- e. An intimate relationship with God. We are never alone but always embraced by God's boundless love.*

Read Jonah 1:17-2:10

12. List the key things that Jonah says about God in his 'psalm'

- *Jonah cried out and God answered*

- *Even though Jonah was sinking to the depths of the ocean – God brought his life up from the pit and lifted him up*
- *Jonah acknowledges God’s salvation*
- *Jonah commits and promises to “make good” for God’s salvation*

13. At what point in the ‘psalm’ does Jonah say that his attitude to God changed? What caused that change? How does God respond to this change?

*The **change in Jonah's attitude** is prompted by his desperate situation of being swallowed by the great fish and his subsequent cry for help to God. While in the belly of the fish, Jonah recognizes his own folly and disobedience. He acknowledges that he had turned away from God's love by attempting to flee from God's presence and by clinging to his own will instead of obeying God's command to go to Nineveh.*

*The **experience of being trapped in the fish's belly and facing imminent death humbles Jonah and leads him to repentance.** Jonah realizes the futility and emptiness of idolatry and the consequences of turning away from God. **This change in attitude reflects a genuine transformation of heart** as he acknowledges his disobedience and the error of his ways.*

*In response to Jonah's change of heart, **God shows His mercy and compassion.** God commands the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land, giving him a second chance to fulfill his mission of preaching to the people of Nineveh. God's response demonstrates His willingness to forgive and restore Jonah despite his previous disobedience.*

The change in Jonah's attitude and God's response highlight the theme of repentance, forgiveness, and second chances. Jonah's transformation leads to a renewed commitment to obey God, and God responds with an opportunity for Jonah to fulfill his calling. It illustrates God's patience and His desire for His people to turn to Him in genuine repentance and obedience.

14. In verse 9, Jonah says ‘**Salvation comes from the Lord**’. The verb ‘to save’ literally means ‘to deliver or rescue from things that confine or constrain’. Read the following OT passages and write down what it is that God saves *from*.

- Exodus 14:13 (cf. 15:2)

God saves them from the Egyptians

- 2 Samuel 3:18

God promised David that He would rescue His people of Israel from the Philistines.

- Job 5:15

God saves the needy from murderous plots

- Isaiah 38:20 (cf. verse 9)

God saves Hezekiah from illness

- Ezekiel 34:22

God saves His own flock (people)

15. In what ways has Jonah experienced salvation? What has he been saved from?

Here are the ways in which Jonah has experienced salvation:

Physical Deliverance: *Jonah has been saved from the immediate danger of drowning in the sea. After being thrown overboard by the sailors and swallowed by the great fish, Jonah's life is spared. He is kept alive in the belly of the fish, protected from drowning in the deep waters.*

Spiritual Awakening: *Jonah's time in the belly of the fish serves as a transformative experience for him. It becomes a period of reflection, repentance, and spiritual renewal. Through this ordeal, Jonah is saved from his rebellious and disobedient state of mind. His spiritual awakening leads to a change of heart and a renewed commitment to follow God's commands.*

Salvation from the consequences of his disobedience: *Jonah has been saved from the consequences of his flight from God's presence. By attempting to flee to Tarshish instead of obeying God's call to go to Nineveh, Jonah was placing himself in danger and risking the wrath of God. However, through God's intervention, Jonah is saved from the consequences of his disobedience.*

Deliverance from the Power of Sin: Jonah's experience in the fish's belly represents a metaphorical journey from darkness to light, from rebellion to obedience. Through this trial, Jonah is saved from the grip of sin and its destructive consequences. His time in the fish serves as a means of discipline and correction, leading to his repentance and restoration.

Overall, Jonah has experienced salvation from physical peril, spiritual blindness, the consequences of his disobedience, and the power of sin. The narrative emphasizes God's deliverance and His willingness to extend mercy and give Jonah a second chance to fulfill his mission. It highlights the transformative power of God's salvation, both physically and spiritually

16. Read Matthew 12:38-42 & 16:1-4. How do they relate to Jonah 1:17-2:10? *Matthew 12:38-42 and Matthew 16:1-4 both relate to Jonah 1:17-2:10 through the mention of Jonah as a sign or a type of Christ's resurrection.*

In Matthew 12:38-42, the scribes and Pharisees demand a sign from Jesus to prove His authority. Jesus responds by referencing the sign of Jonah, saying, "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). Here, Jesus compares His impending death and resurrection to Jonah's experience in the belly of the fish. It signifies that Jesus will triumph over death and be raised to life after three days, just as Jonah was delivered from the fish after three days. This connection highlights Jesus' divinity, His power over death, and the significance of His resurrection as a sign of His authority and identity as the Son of God.

In Matthew 16:1-4, the Pharisees and Sadducees ask Jesus for a sign from heaven. Jesus responds, saying, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah" (Matthew 16:4). Again, Jesus refers to Jonah as a sign, alluding to His own death and resurrection. This reference emphasizes the importance of recognizing and understanding the significance of Jesus' resurrection as the ultimate sign of God's redemptive plan. It serves as a warning to those who fail to recognize the signs of the times and the fulfillment of God's purposes through Jesus.

Both passages in Matthew highlight the typological relationship between Jonah's experience and Jesus' death and resurrection. Jonah's time in the belly of the fish for three days prefigures Jesus' burial in the tomb for three days before His resurrection. Jonah's deliverance from the fish foreshadows Jesus' triumph over death and His victory in rising from the grave. These references emphasize the connection between the Old Testament account of Jonah and the redemptive work of Christ, pointing to Jesus as the ultimate sign and fulfillment of God's plan for salvation.

17. What miracles did you spot in this chapter?

Jonah 1:7 - the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah

Jonah 2:10 - the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

18. **Ponder:** Where is Jesus in Jonah 1:17-2:10?

- a. Jonah in the belly of the fish for 3 days/nights is the "sign of Jonah" that Jesus refers to when Jesus talks about His death and resurrection*
- b. Jonah's cry for help and acknowledgement of God as His Saviour can be seen as a foreshadowing of Jesus' role as Saviour and Deliverer*
- c. Jonah was called to preach repentance to Nineveh – Jesus' ministry emphasized the need for repentance and turning back to God*
- d. Jonah received God's grace and mercy. Jesus offers grace and mercy to all who care to repent and turn to Him.*

What's the **BIG IDEA** of Jonah 1:17-2:10?

- a. Submitting to God's Will – through repentance*
- b. God gives us a second chance – through His grace and mercy (hesed)*



Give a **light globe** moment you experienced in this passage?



How does this passage **apply to your life**?

- a. God will send a fish to swallow us up – and we'll stay there until we learn the lesson, He is teaching us and repent
- b. The Lord disciplines the one He loves and He chastens everyone He calls His son (Hebrews 12:6)
- c. The fish is not the end – God is preparing us for the work He has for us
- d. Don't neglect prayer. Pray with heartfelt attitude (as Jonah did) clearly expressing our concerns with faith that God will act.
- e. Turning away from God's love is just not worth it. How long do we want to spend in the belly of the fish?
- f. Salvation comes from the Lord only!
- g. The sign of Jonah – is not only a sign of Jesus' resurrection – but a sign of our resurrection!

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

Jonah 1:7 - the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah

Jonah 2:10 - the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Finish in prayer: Spend time praising and thanking God for his *hesed* in your life.

Study 3 – Fulfilling God’s Will (Jonah 3:1-9)

For starters

1. What are the indications of true repentance in a person’s life?
 - a. *Acknowledgement of sinful behaviour – admitting we are sinners*
 - b. *Genuine remorse over this sinful behaviour – saying sorry to God and those who have been sinned against*
 - c. *Willingness to make amends for this sinful behaviour*
 - d. *Change in behaviour (in action and words) – and wanting to please God rather than oneself*
 - e. *Accept accountability and accepting consequences of past sinful behaviour*
 - f. *Consistence behaviour over time*
 - g. *Increased empathy and understanding of the impact our actions have had on others*

Read Jonah 3:1-9

2. What do we know from the city of Nineveh from the book of Jonah itself (cf. Jonah 1:2; 3:2-3; 4:11)?

Jonah 1:2 – it is a great city – full of wickedness.

Jonah 3:2-3 – it is a great city; so large, it takes 3 days to walk around it.

Jonah 4:11 – population of 120,000 who cannot tell their right hand from their left – and also many animals.

3. Nineveh was a ‘3-day visit city’. How long did it take Jonah before he began to respond to God?

Jonah spent 3 days in the belly of the fish, before he prayed to God (see Jonah 2:1).

When God gave Jonah a second chance, he went to Nineveh and after one day’s journey into the city, Jonah preached possibly the shortest sermon ever: “Forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4)

4. **Read Jeremiah 18:7-10.** Although written sometime after Jonah, can you see a pattern of how God interacts with a pagan nation? List the elements of that pattern in terms of what the nation does and what God does...

The pattern is:

- a. *God announces that the nation is to be judged (i.e., uprooted, torn down or destroyed)*
 - b. *If the nation repents – then God relents of this judgment*
 - c. *Likewise, if God announces that a nation will be built up and planted*
 - d. *And then that nation does evil in God's sight and disobeys Him; then God will reconsider the good He promised to that nation.*
5. How does the Judean king, Jehoiakim respond to the prophetic word in Jeremiah 36:9-31? How does the King of Nineveh respond in Jonah 3?

- Jehoiakim

In this passage, Jehoiakim displayed a complete disregard for God's message and an unwillingness to repent or change his ways. Instead of humbling himself and heeding the warnings, he reacted with hostility and attempted to destroy God's words. This response demonstrated Jehoiakim's defiance and refusal to accept the consequences of his actions.

- The King of Nineveh

Unlike Jehoiakim, the King of Nineveh's response in Jonah 3 demonstrates a true repentant heart, both individually and collectively. He recognized the seriousness of their sinful behavior, humbled himself, and called for the entire city to repent. This resulted in God showing them mercy and withholding the judgment He had proclaimed.

6. What is the catalyst for the repentance of the Ninevites?

Jonah's message was the catalyst and served as a wake-up call for the King of Nineveh and the entire city. It made them aware of their sinful ways and the consequences they were about to face. The king's response shows that he understood

the gravity of the situation and recognized that repentance was the appropriate response.

It's important to note that the King of Nineveh's repentance was not solely based on fear or self-preservation. The king and the people genuinely acknowledged their wrongdoing and expressed a desire to change their behavior. Their repentance was characterized by humility, mourning, fasting, and a sincere turning away from their evil ways.

7. What are the signs of repentance that are displayed by the Ninevites in the following areas:

- How they thought

*They recognized the gravity of their sins and the need to change their ways. They understood that their actions had provoked God's anger and that they were deserving of judgment and so **they believed** in the message Jonah delivered, acknowledging the authenticity and authority of God's warning.*

- What they said

They openly acknowledged their wickedness and violence. They proclaimed a fast throughout the city, indicating their commitment to abstain from food and engage in a period of reflection and repentance. Led by the King, they thought and said "Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

- How they acted

The people, led by the king, demonstrated their repentance by physically displaying signs of mourning and humility. They dressed in sackcloth, a coarse garment used as a symbol of mourning and repentance, as an external representation of their internal change. They sat in ashes, which further emphasized their sorrow and acknowledgment of their sinful state.

The Ninevites urgently called upon God and engaged in a collective act of turning away from their evil ways. They made a concerted effort to abandon their wicked behavior and the violence they had been involved in.

8. Are there any indications within the text as to why they repented as they did?
- They believed Jonah's message from God that in 40 days they would be overthrown (vv4-5)*
 - They listened and obeyed the decree of the King and the nobles to fast and mourn their wickedness (vv7-8)*
 - Fear of perishing (v9)*
9. Read the following passages that describe repentance or acts of repentance. Put together a 'profile' of a repentant person from one or all of these passages.

- 2 Kings 22-23

Genuine grieve and sorrow shown by King Josiah when the book of the Law is found, acknowledging the nation's disobedience of God.

Josiah humbled himself before God and resolved to make drastic changes to bring the nation back to obedience to God.

Josiah and the people cleansed the land from idolatry.

Josiah and the people renewed their covenant with God, turned away from their sinful practices; and recommitted to obeying God's commandments.

- Ezra 9-10

Ezra, a priest and scribe, learned that some of the people of Israel, including priests and Levites, had intermarried with the surrounding pagan nations. This was a direct violation of God's commands to maintain separation from idolatrous practices.

*Upon hearing this news, Ezra was **deeply distressed and tore his garments and pulled out his hair in mourning.** He recognized the seriousness of the sin and the need for repentance.*

*Ezra fell on his knees before God and **confessed the sins of the people, acknowledging their unfaithfulness, disobedience, and the severity of their transgressions.***

*Ezra, as a spiritual leader, **called the people to repentance. He urged those who had committed intermarriage to separate themselves from their foreign wives and children, recognizing the need to put away their idolatrous practices and align themselves with God's laws.***

*A large assembly of the **people** of Israel came together in unity, **recognizing the gravity of the situation. They agreed to follow Ezra's counsel and promised to repent by separating from their foreign wives.***

*Over a period of three months, the people carried out **the process of repentance.** Those who had married foreign wives willingly divorced them and sent them away, along with any children born from these unions.*

- Daniel 9:1-19

Daniel, having studied the writings of the prophet Jeremiah, realized that the time of Israel's captivity in Babylon was coming to an end. He understood that God had promised to restore the nation after seventy years.

*Daniel **deeply identified with the sins of the people of Israel and their ancestors. He acknowledged that they had acted wickedly, disobeying God's commandments and rejecting His prophets. He recognized that their exile and suffering were a result of their unfaithfulness.***

*Daniel **humbled himself before God and confessed the sins of the nation. He acknowledged their guilt, their failure to listen to God's words, and their rebellion against His commands.***

*Daniel **pleaded with God for mercy and forgiveness. He acknowledged God's righteousness and the justness of the punishment they were experiencing.***

*Daniel **appealed to God's character of mercy, asking Him to show compassion and forgiveness to the people.***

*Daniel **implored God to restore Jerusalem and the temple, which lay in ruins. He expressed a heartfelt desire for God's glory to be manifested in the restoration of the city and the people's relationship with Him.***

- Luke 18:9-14

The Pharisee approached his prayer with a self-righteous and prideful attitude. He boasted about his religious observances, thanking God that he was not like other people, including the tax collector. His focus was on his own righteousness and superiority.

*In contrast, the tax collector **stood at a distance, not even daring to lift his eyes to heaven. He recognized his own unworthiness and the depth of his sin. He beat his chest in humility and desperation, crying out to God for mercy.***

*Jesus emphasized that it was the tax collector, not the Pharisee, who went home justified before God. **The tax collector's humble and repentant attitude allowed for forgiveness and reconciliation with God.***

Think it through:

10. Think back to the last time you heard or read God's word and were confronted by your need to change your thinking or actions. How did you react? That is,

- How did you think?

My thoughts included sadness at my behaviour and acknowledgement that my actions had been totally contrary to God's word and a poor Christian example.

- What did you say (even if it was only to yourself or God)?

I prayed to God: confessing my sinful heart and behaviour; asking God to forgive me; and committing to turn away from that sinful behaviour in the future; and asking God to help me with this.

- How did your actions change as a result?

Through God's help and strength; there has not been a repeat of this behaviour.

11. If you have not been convicted by the need to change for some time, why do you think this might be and what can you do about it?

Perhaps: a) a lack of time spent in God's Word; b) a lack of time in examining our hearts; and c) a lack of time praying, especially in confession and asking God to help us be more like Jesus, in thought, word and deed.

12. Write down some practical steps that you might take to help yourself and others to follow through better on repentance and to make it more enduring
- a. *Take time to regularly self-reflect on our thoughts, words and actions. Be honest with ourselves about the areas in our lives where we fall short of God's holy standards and the need to repent – Psalm 139:23-24 is a good prayer for this!*
 - b. *Take responsibility for our actions and words – own up to them – and seek forgiveness from those we have hurt/offended – with genuine remorse and understanding of the hurt caused.*
 - c. *Actively seek forgiveness*
 - d. *Cultivate humility*
 - e. *Journal our prayers in this area – and write down when they were answered, so we can see progress in our lives.*

Now read 2 Cor 7:5-13, how does Paul describe the repentance of a group of Christians?

Paul acknowledges that his previous letter had caused them sorrow but he did not regret the letter because it led them to a godly grief and led them to deep remorse and sorrow over their actions and attitudes.

Paul explains that their sorrow had produced in them a repentant attitude. They had a change of heart and mind, recognizing their wrongdoing and committing themselves to turning away from their previous behavior.

Paul commends them for their earnestness in making amends for their past actions. He highlights how their repentance motivated them to take action and address the issues that needed correction.

Paul also notes that the Christians' repentance resulted in a renewed zeal for holiness and righteousness. They desired to live in a manner that was pleasing to God, actively striving to align their lives with His will.

Paul emphasizes that their repentance had brought about reconciliation and restoration in their relationship with him. Their repentance demonstrated their love for Paul and their commitment to restoring the bond they had.

13. Read Matthew 12:41 & Luke 11:32. How do they relate to **Jonah 3:1-9**?

In Matthew 12:41 and Luke 11:32 – Jesus rebukes the Pharisees, teachers of the law and the people for their reluctance to repent – and says that the people of Nineveh will even stand in judgment against this current Jewish generation because the people of Nineveh repented at the (reluctant) preaching of Jonah, and this current Jewish generation have the greatest prophet (Jesus) and they refuse to repent! What a stark contrast – God’s chosen people (Israel) refuse to repent but Gentile wicked Nineveh do repent!

14. Read Ephesians 2:1-10. How do they relate to Jonah 3:1-9?

- a. *In Ephesians 2:1-10, the passage focuses on the **transformation** that occurs when believers are saved by grace through faith. It describes how we were dead in our sins but are made alive in Christ. Similarly, in Jonah 3:1-9, the people of Nineveh experienced a **transformation** from their wicked ways to repentance and God's mercy, sparing them from destruction.*
- b. *Both passages highlight **God's grace and mercy**. In Ephesians 2:4-5, it is emphasized that God, out of His great love, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our sins. In Jonah 3:9, the people of Nineveh express hope in God's mercy, acknowledging His compassion and ability to relent from bringing disaster upon them.*
- c. *In Jonah 3:5-9, the people of Nineveh **responded** to Jonah's message with immediate repentance and fasting. They believed the word of God and turned from their evil ways. Similarly, in Ephesians 2:8-9, it is emphasized that our salvation is not achieved through our own works but is a gift from God. We **respond** to His grace and mercy by placing our faith in Him.*
- d. *Ephesians 2:10 highlights that believers are **God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works**. It emphasizes the importance of living out our faith through acts of love and service. While Jonah 3:1-9 does not specifically address good*

*works, the people of Nineveh **demonstrated their repentance through their actions**, turning away from evil and seeking to do what is right in God's eyes.*

15. What miracles did you spot in this chapter?

3:10 - When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

16. **Ponder:** Where is Jesus in **Jonah 3:1-9**?

- a. **Jonah as a foreshadowing of Jesus:** *Jonah's reluctant obedience in delivering God's message to the Ninevites can be seen as a foreshadowing of Jesus' mission. Both Jonah and Jesus were sent by God with a message of salvation and the call to repentance. Jonah's three days and nights in the belly of the fish can be seen as a precursor to Jesus' three days in the tomb before His resurrection.*
- b. **The call to repentance and forgiveness:** *The central message in Jonah 3 is the call for the people of Nineveh to repent and turn away from their wickedness. This theme resonates with Jesus' ministry, as He also called people to repentance and offered forgiveness and salvation to all who believed in Him.*
- c. **The response of the people:** *The immediate and widespread repentance of the people of Nineveh can be seen as an anticipation of the response that Jesus' message would receive. In Jonah 3:5-9, the people respond to God's word with humility, fasting, and turning away from evil. Similarly, Jesus' ministry saw people from various backgrounds responding to His message with repentance, recognizing their need for salvation.*

What's the **BIG IDEA** of **Jonah 3:1-9**?

The transformative power of repentance and the boundless mercy of God



Give a **light globe** moment you experienced in this passage?

- ➔ How does this passage **apply to your life?**
- a. Salvation comes from the Lord
 - b. God's command is still the same as it was for Jonah: "GO!" Jonah was finally obedient; we are called to be obedient to that command to GO!
 - c. God's method of bringing the message is preaching or proclaiming it
 - d. The content of the message is **ALWAYS** God's Word
 - e. Jonah is an ordinary person – just like us
 - f. God shows mercy and compassion. He gave Jonah a second chance. He gave Nineveh a chance to repent. He gives each of us a chance to repent.
 - g. Jonah did not speak for himself or draw attention to himself – he just delivered the message. It's about God's message, not the messenger!
 - h. The message involves bringing the bad news (sin and death) and the good news (salvation in Jesus only)
 - i. The purpose of the message is to bear fruit –to bring about a response - to bring about repentance and forgiveness
 - j. Believing in the message is the difference between Heaven and Hell.

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

⁵ The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

Finish in prayer: Spend time praying for one another as we address sin in our life and learn to repent and glorify God.

Study 4 – Questioning God’s Will (Jonah 3:10-4:11)

For starters

What does it feel like to be excluded from a group? What does it feel like to then be included?

Being excluded can lead to feelings of hurt and rejection; it can make a person question their self-worth and wonder why they have been excluded.

Being excluded can lead to feelings of: sadness, loneliness, insecurity, self-doubt, anger, resentment, anxiety, stress and a deep longing for acceptance.

Being included in a group after experiencing exclusion can be a transforming and emotionally uplifting experience. It can bring about a range of positive emotions and feelings, providing a sense of belonging and acceptance; feelings like: relief, joy, happiness, validation and empowerment.

The Bible is full of walls – real ones, and metaphorical ones.

A wall represents a division between people and places, a barrier that prevents them being united. Walls keep people apart. And the removal of walls is a very powerful symbol – e.g., the removal of the Berlin wall in 1989.

The Bible begins with a world without walls. However, within 50 or so verses this dream lies shattered. There is a wall between God and people (Adam and Eve because of their sin); people and other people (Cain murders his brother); and people and the environment (the land bears thistles and thorns).

The OT goes on to show that God has not forgotten the ideal. In fact, he works to bring about a return to Eden. However, the way he does it might seem strange to us, in that he erects a ‘wall’ around his people. Although he has the good of the whole world in mind, he brings about this good by separating one nation and calling them special (Ex 19-20). There are a few little breaches of this – like Rahab, Ruth the Moabitess, and the Gibeonites of Joshua 9.

Jews had a mindset of that they were special people of God and all others were outsiders and not worthy of God’s concern, interest or grace.

We get more than a glimpse of this mindset in the book of Jonah.

But ultimately that is not God's plan...

Read Jonah 3:10-4:4

1. Jonah 3:10 says that God **relented** and did not bring about the destruction he had threatened. Based on the context what does **relent** mean here?

In the context, God had sent Jonah with the message "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). God's intention was to wipe out Nineveh – but because Nineveh repented, God was moved to compassion and abandoned His intention to destroy Nineveh.

The Hebrew word used for relent means: to be sorry; moved to pity; have compassion; repent; rue; ease.

2. The statement that God relented can be found in a number of other key passages in the OT. What does it appear to mean?

- 2 Samuel 24:10-17

King David's decision to conduct a census was driven by pride and a lack of trust in God. By counting the fighting men, David wanted to gauge the strength of his military and find security in his own military might rather than relying on God's protection and guidance. Taking a census was not inherently sinful, but David's motives and lack of trust in God's providence made it a sinful act.

God, through His prophet Gad, confronted David about his sin. He gave David three options for punishment: three years of famine, three months of fleeing from enemies, or three days of plague in the land. David, recognizing his mistake, chose to fall into the hands of God rather than into human hands. As a result, a severe plague struck the land, and seventy thousand people died. After which, God relented.

It seems to be that God relented because of David's genuine repentance. Sin always has consequences and always deserves punishment; but God shows compassion when people repent.

- Joel 2:12-14

In this passage, the prophet Joel urges the people of Judah to return to the Lord with sincerity and heartfelt repentance. Joel points out that the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love. He responds to true repentance and is willing to forgive and show mercy to those who turn to Him with sincerity.

- Jeremiah 18:1-10

In this passage, God speaks to the prophet Jeremiah, likening Himself to a potter and humanity to clay. He emphasizes that, just as a potter has the power to reshape the clay, so does God have the authority to shape the destinies of nations and individuals. God declares that if a nation turns away from evil, He will relent from bringing disaster upon them. Conversely, if a nation does evil in His sight, He will reconsider the good He had planned for them. This passage highlights God's responsiveness to human actions and His desire for repentance and righteousness.

- Jonah 4:2

*Jonah knows what God is like! Jonah says that's why he tried to derail (forestall) God's plans and run away to Tarshish. Jonah knew that God was **"a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity"***

3. No explanation of Jonah's disobedience is given in Jonah 1. What is Jonah's own explanation in Jonah 4?

Jonah grapples with his own prejudices, nationalism and knowing what God's character is like. He disobeys God and runs away to Tarshish because in his opinion the Ninevites don't deserve to be saved and Jonah knows only too well what God is like. If he runs away, then the Ninevites don't get a chance; Jonah has written them off.

4. Why is Jonah angry in Jonah 4?

Jonah expresses his anger and displeasure and frustration at God's willingness to be compassionate and merciful to the wicked Ninevites, whom Jonah views as enemies of God's people.

So consumed with emotion, Jonah desires to die because he struggles to reconcile his sense of justice and retribution with God's compassionate nature!

Read Jonah 4:5-11. The context for Jonah 4:5-11 is set by Jonah 3:10-4:4, particularly verse 4, where we are told that Jonah is angry and where God asks if Jonah's anger is right?

5. How does Jonah express his anger?

Jonah expresses his anger to God relenting in a few ways:

1. In **thought** in v1 – “to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry”
2. In **prayer** in v2 - “Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” – Jonah knows God is compassionate. But at the same time Jonah is “playing God” and “thinking he knows better than God!”
3. In **request** in v3 **to die** – “Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live”
4. In his **request** in v8 **to die** when God sends a worm (v7) to chew the plant that was giving Jonah shade and when God sends a scorching wind to heat up Jonah (v8)

6. Does this passage give us any insight into the justification for anger? What is that justification?

There is only justification for anger if it is in line with God's plan. There is such a thing as righteous anger; but this was not what Jonah was displaying. It seems it is okay for Jonah to sin and disobey God and get a second chance; but it's not okay for Nineveh to do the same!

God's response to Jonah's anger in Jonah 4:4-11 serves as a corrective to Jonah's perspective. Through the object lesson of the plant and the dialogue with Jonah, God emphasizes His sovereignty, mercy, and concern for the people of Nineveh, even though they were considered enemies of Israel. God challenges Jonah's limited view

of justice and retribution and calls him to recognize the value of compassion and love for all people.

7. How does God *act* in response to Jonah's anger?

God patiently listens to Jonah (v4) and then provides an object lesson by causing a plant to grow and provide shade for Jonah, bring him great comfort. The next day, God sends a worm to destroy the plant and a scorching wind, causing Jonah to suffer. Through this experience, God helps Jonah see that his focus is on personal comfort and not on the lives of the repentant Ninevites (vv5-9)

8. What does God *say* in response to Jonah's anger?

God twice asks Jonah if "it is right for you to be angry?" (vv4, 9)

When Jonah says he's right to be angry about the plant in v9, God uses this to explain why He has relented over the Ninevites. As the MSG puts in from vv10-11

GOD said, "What's this? How is it that you can change your feelings from pleasure to anger overnight about a mere shade tree that you did nothing to get? You neither planted nor watered it. It grew up one night and died the next night. So, why can't I likewise change what I feel about Nineveh from anger to pleasure, this big city of more than 120,000 childlike people who don't yet know right from wrong, to say nothing of all the innocent animals?"

9. Summarize the point God is making using the plant.

God draws a parallel between Jonah's concern for the plant and His own concern for the people of Nineveh. Just as Jonah valued the plant, God values the vast population of Nineveh, including innocent children and animals. God's compassionate heart extends to all, including those Jonah considered enemies.

Through the object lesson of the plant, God teaches Jonah about the importance of compassion and love for all people, even those who have sinned in the past. God's message is one of mercy, reconciliation, and His desire for genuine repentance and salvation for all of humanity, regardless of their background or actions. The plant serves as a symbol of God's caring and nurturing nature, challenging Jonah to adopt a broader and more gracious perspective towards others.

Read Matthew 18:21-35.

10. What similarities are there between Jonah and the unforgiving servant?

- a. Both Jonah and the unforgiving servant are reluctant to forgive.
- b. Both Jonah and the unforgiving servant display a lack of compassion
- c. Both Jonah and the unforgiving servant desire retribution rather than forgiveness
- d. Both Jonah and the unforgiving servant received great mercy yet they were not willing to show the same to others. A true lesson in forgiveness.

11. What is the essential sin committed by the unforgiving servant?

*Through this parable, Jesus emphasizes the importance of forgiveness and the consequences of harboring **unforgiveness** in our hearts. He teaches that we are called to extend mercy to others just as God has shown mercy to us. **Unforgiveness is a serious sin** because it hinders our ability to love, reconcile, and reflect the character of Christ, who forgave us of our sins and calls us to do the same for others.*

12. This passage gives one way that we can be like Jonah. In what other ways can we as Christians be like Jonah?

Here are some of the ways we, as Christians, can struggle and be like Jonah:

- a. Reluctance to obey God's call
- b. Prejudice and judgmental attitude – writing people off!
- c. Resistance to showing compassion
- d. Struggle with God's sovereignty over all things
- e. Recognizing the need for repentance
- f. Understanding God's heart for all people

13. What consolation can we draw from the book of Jonah when we come up short as Jonah does?

- a. God is a God of mercy and second chances
- b. God uses imperfect people (like Jonah and like us!)
- c. There is comfort in God's presence in the midst of our struggles
- d. God lovingly teaches us lessons by humbling us and then restoring us!

14. How is this consolation confirmed and consolidated in the New Testament

Ultimately by John 3:16 – God loved us so much He sent Jesus to save us because He didn't want us to perish.

2 Peter 3:9 – God is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Read Matthew 12:38-42; 16:1-4 and Luke 11:29-32

15. List the similarities and differences between these references to Jonah

- Similarities

- a. The Sign of Jonah: In all three passages, Jesus refers to the sign of Jonah. He draws a parallel between Jonah's experience of being in the belly of the fish for three days and nights and His own future death, burial, and resurrection. The sign of Jonah serves as a foreshadowing of Jesus' own death and resurrection, which would be the ultimate proof of His identity and authority.*
- b. The People's Demand for a Sign: In each account, the people present ask Jesus to show them a sign to prove His authority or identity as the Messiah. They are looking for tangible evidence to confirm His claims.*
- c. Jesus' Response: Jesus responds to their request by pointing to the sign of Jonah as the only sign they will receive. He emphasizes that just as Jonah spent three days and nights in the belly of the fish, so will He spend three days and nights in the heart of the earth.*
- d. Warnings of Judgment: In all three passages, Jesus warns the people of the judgment that will come upon them if they fail to repent and believe in Him. He uses the examples of the Ninevites who repented at Jonah's preaching and the Queen of the South (the Queen of Sheba) who sought wisdom from Solomon to illustrate that people from the past responded to lesser signs and messages with repentance and faith.*

e. *Rebuking Unbelief: Jesus rebukes the people's unbelief and hardness of heart. He highlights that despite the signs and miracles performed in their midst, they refuse to believe in Him.*

- Differences

a. *Different context. In Matthew 12 some scribes and Pharisees demand a sign when challenging Jesus' authority. In Matthew 16, it is the Pharisees and Sadducees ask for a sign from Heaven. In Luke 11, it is the crowd who seek a sign*

b. *Slightly different details. In Matthew 12 and Luke 11 there is reference to Jesus in the earth and the Queen of the South and the people of Nineveh. In Matthew 16 Jesus mentions the weather signs and condemns the Pharisees for not understanding the times.*

16. What is the link ('sign') between Jonah and Jesus?

Jonah in the belly of the fish for 3 days and 3 nights is a link/reference to Jesus' death, burial (for 3 days) and resurrection.

Re-read Matthew 12:38-42; 16:1-4; Luke 11:29-32 and also 1 Kings 10:1-13 (cf. 2 Chron 9:1-12).

17. What similarities are there between the Queen of the South and the Ninevites? What is striking about their response?

a. *Both the Queen of the South and the Ninevites recognized and responded to the divine message presented to them.*

b. *Both the Queen of the South and the Ninevites exhibited humility in their response to God's revelation. The Queen of the South humbled herself before Solomon, acknowledging his God-given wisdom and seeking to learn from him. The Ninevites humbled themselves in response to Jonah's warning, acknowledging their sins and seeking God's mercy.*

c. *Remarkably, both the Queen of the South and the Ninevites were foreigners to Israel, yet they demonstrated a receptive heart to divine messages, even from foreign prophets and kings.*

The striking aspect of their response lies in their openness to divine revelation and their willingness to embrace God's message even as foreigners. In contrast, the people of Jesus' generation, who were part of the covenant community and had access to the Law and the Prophets, failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah and respond to His message with faith and repentance. Jesus contrasts the response of these foreign individuals with that of His own people, pointing out that the Queen of the South and the Ninevites will condemn the people of His generation for their unbelief (Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:31-32). This emphasizes the importance of humility, faith, and openness to God's revelation, regardless of one's cultural or religious background.

18. What is Jesus saying that we should learn from the book of Jonah?

Obedience to God: *Jonah's initial response to God's call to preach to the Ninevites was disobedience. He tried to flee from God's command, which led to his encounter with the great fish. Jesus emphasizes the importance of obedience to God's will in various teachings throughout the Gospels.*

Repentance and Forgiveness: *The people of Nineveh, including their king, responded to Jonah's message by repenting and turning away from their wickedness. God showed them mercy and forgave them. Jesus, too, preached about the significance of repentance and the availability of God's forgiveness for those who seek it.*

God's Concern for All People: *The Book of Jonah highlights God's concern for all nations and peoples, not just the Israelites. This theme aligns with Jesus' teachings of God's love and compassion for everyone, regardless of their background or ethnicity.*

The Sign of Jonah: *In the New Testament, Jesus makes a reference to Jonah as a sign for his own mission. Just as Jonah spent three days in the belly of the fish and then came out alive, Jesus prophesied his own death, burial, and resurrection after three days. This connection emphasizes the redemptive significance of Jesus' sacrifice.*

God's Sovereignty: Throughout Jonah's story, God's sovereignty is evident. He controls the wind, the sea, and even a great fish to accomplish His purposes. This reminds believers of God's power and control over all aspects of life.

Compassion and Mercy: Jonah struggled with showing compassion to the Ninevites, but God demonstrated His mercy by sparing them when they repented. This serves as a reminder to followers of Jesus to extend compassion and mercy to others, even to those they might consider enemies.

19. **Ponder:** Some people have suggested that the book of Jonah may not be historical but rather a form of fiction (e.g., allegory, parable, prophetic parable, satire or short story).
- Think of some arguments in favour of fiction:
 - a. *Some people question supernatural events of the book*
 - b. *The Book of Jonah is written in a narrative style, including elements of satire and humor. Some argue that these literary features are more characteristic of fictional or allegorical works rather than straightforward historical accounts.*
 - c. *Lack of historical evidence raises questions about its historicity*
 - d. *Symbolic elements; for example, Jonah's name means "dove" often associated with peace and Nineveh's name means "abode of fish" suggest a deeper allegorical meaning to the story*
 - e. *Similarities to other ancient Near Eastern myths*
 - Think of some arguments in favour of historical:
 - a. *Key argument is that it is mentioned in other books of the Bible – especially by Jesus!*
 - b. *It reads historical – with details of people, places and events*
 - c. *Real places mentioned*
 - d. *Traditional Jewish and early Christian communities regarded Jonah as a historical prophet. This historical view has been maintained by various religious traditions over the centuries.*

Back to the question from the beginning.

Having now read and studied Jonah, have you decided whether he is a Christ-like figure, spending three days in the belly of a great fish before being sent to save a lost city? Or is he a disobedient sulker whom God teaches a lesson about love and mercy? What do you think?

Jonah is a disobedient sulker whom God teaches a lesson about love and mercy?

20. What miracles did you spot in this chapter?

3:10 – God saw what they did and they turned from their evil ways

4:6 – The Lord God provided a leafy plant

4:7 – God provided a worm

4:8 - God provided a scorching east wind

What's the **BIG IDEA** of **Jonah 3:10-4:11**?

God's boundless compassion and mercy for all people, even those considered enemies or wicked



Give a **light globe** moment you experienced in this passage?

➔ How does this passage **apply to your life**?

- a. God is merciful and compassionate. He doesn't want anyone to perish but instead to come to repentance.*
- b. Don't write people off. No-one is too bad, that they can't repent.*
- c. Don't get angry at God's grace and compassion*
- d. Confess where we are only thinking of our own personal comfort and our own lives and have no concern for others!*
- e. Confess any anger we may have towards others or even towards God?*
- f. Forgive others as we have been forgiven through Jesus*
- g. Ask ourselves what would Jesus do when confronted with someone who has sinned? Does He write them off or offer them the opportunity to repent and be forgiven. What would Jesus do?*

Share the verse that had a special meaning to you in this study?

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened. (Jonah 3:10)

And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”
(Jonah 4:11)

Finish in prayer: Thanking God for His mercy and compassion in sending Jesus!

Ten Miracles in Jonah

- A. 1:4 – the Lord sent a great wind
- B. 1:7 – and the lot fell on Jonah
- C. 1:15 – and the raging sea grew calm
- D. 1:17 – the Lord provided a huge fish
- E. 1:7 - to swallow up Jonah (alive)
- F. 2:10 – the Lord commanded the fish and it vomited Jonah onto dry land
- G. 3:10 – God saw what they did and they turned from their evil ways
- H. 4:6 – The Lord God provided a leafy plant
- I. 4:7 – God provided a worm
- J. 4:8 - God provided a scorching east wind

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