JONAH.

THE DEPTHS OF GRACE.

Jonah

The Depths of Grace

The book of Jonah is one the most well-known stories in the Bible—and for good reason! It involves a runaway prophet, pagan sailors, stormy seas, a repentant city, and of course, a big fish. But there is far more to this amazing story than just the amazing details. In fact, the story is not ultimately about the big fish or even Jonah; it is ultimately about our amazing God. It is about the depths of His grace towards both 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Join us as we explore the story of Jonah and discover the depths of God's amazing grace.

Sermons

Runaway Prophet — *Jonah 1*
Miracle in a Monster — *Jonah 2*
The Repentant City — *Jonah 3*
When God Loves Your Enemy — *Jonah 4*

Resources

Man Overboard! The Story of Jonah by Sinclair Ferguson
Jonah: The depths of grace by Stephen Witmer
Jonah by The Bible Project
NIV Zondervan Study Bible
ESV Study Bible

The Book of Jonah

The following is from the *ESV Study Bible* and the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*:

Theme

God's concern and grace for all people. The Lord is a God of boundless compassion not just for "us" (Jonah and the Israelites) but also for "them" (the pagan sailors and Ninevites).

Outline

Jonah 1 — Jonah's Call and Flight to Tarshish
Jonah 2 — Jonah's Prayer in the Fish
Jonah 3 — Nineveh's Response to Jonah's Message
Jonah 4 — Jonah's Accusation and God's Response

Purpose

The primary purpose of the book of Jonah is to engage readers in theological reflection on the compassionate character of God, and in self-reflection on the degree to which their own character reflects this compassion, to the end that they become vehicles of this compassion in the world that God has made and so deeply cares about.

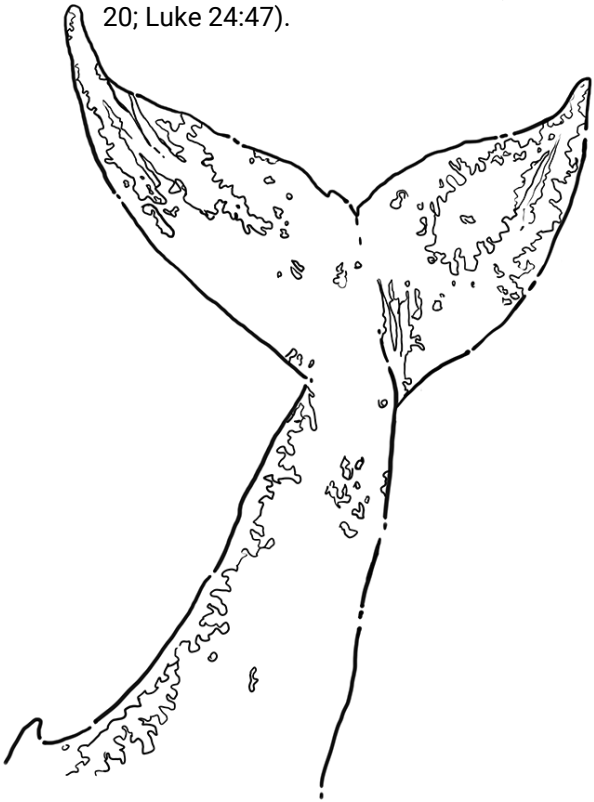
Historical Setting

To appreciate the book's message, readers need to have some understanding of its historical context. 2 Kings 14:25 identifies Jonah as an eighth-century BC prophet originating from the village of Gath Hepher in the Galilee region. Unlike his contemporaries Amos and Hosea, Jonah grew up in the northern kingdom of Israel and appears to have been loyal to his homeland, prophesying that its borders would extend under King Jeroboam II. But all was far from well within Israel, and the nation continued to move further and further from serving God during the eighth century BC.

While the Assyrians had been an aggressive enemy against Israel a century earlier, by Jonah's time their power had waned. However, all this was about to change. In 722 BC the Assyrians would capture Samaria, the capital of Israel, and deport over 27,000 inhabitants before repopulating the region with foreigners. Early readers of Jonah, aware of Samaria's downfall, likely associated Jonah's reluctance to go to Nineveh with this traumatic event. Jonah possibly knew from Hosea's preaching that the Assyrians were a threat to the future well-being of Israel (see Hos. 9:3; 10:6; 11:5). Conscious from the outset that God would pardon the Assyrians of Nineveh and not destroy their city, Jonah tried to prevent this from happening. By fleeing from God's presence, he hoped to secure the future safety of Israel. To this end, he was willing to sacrifice his own life rather than be the prophet whose message would cause the Ninevites to repent.

Bigger Picture

Jonah's rescue from death provides an analogy for the resurrection of Christ (Matt. 12:39–40). The repentance of the Ninevites anticipates the wide-scale repentance of Gentiles in the era following the ministry of Christ (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 24:47).



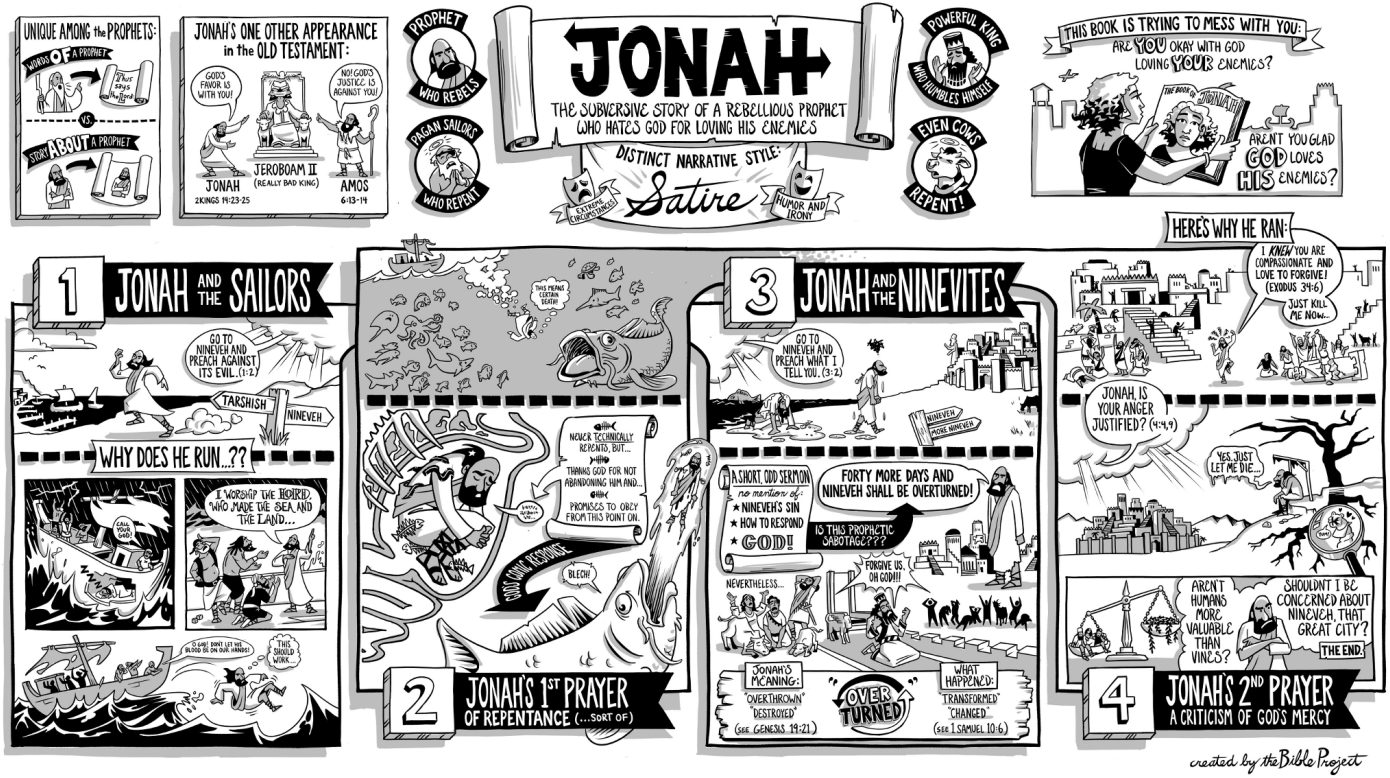
Relevance

Why does the book of Jonah matter for the church today? For one thing, because it points us to the central realities of the gospel: the death and resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 12.38-42). But also, because it punctures our pride. It's remarkable that in this book, the pagans come off so much better than the prophet. The pagan sailors do their best to save Jonah's life. The pagan Ninevites repent immediately, whereas Jonah still hasn't repented at the end of the book – sure, he's gone to Nineveh, but it's still not clear his heart is in the right place.

The book of Jonah reminds the church that God has a passion for reaching unlikely people and sinful people. It indicts us for the prideful boundaries we raise that prevent people from hearing the gospel (e.g., 'that' person or 'that' group is beyond God's grace). The book of Jonah ends with a question asked by God himself ('Should not I pity Nineveh?'). That question is meant to hang in the air and pierce our hearts. Do we care for those around us? — **Stephen Witmer**

If you have ever attended church, Sunday school, or bedtime story sessions as a child, you have likely heard about the story in the Book of Jonah at some point. But, the prophet Jonah's account of remarkable experiences with storms at sea, being eaten by a fish, and plants that miraculously grow and die in a day have lessons that go much deeper than what is on the surface.

Through Jonah's perspective, we have the opportunity to perform a spiritual check -up of ourselves. Do we truly forgive and love our enemies? Do we run away from the Lord about certain issues, afraid of being exposed? The answer is different for every individual, and yet God personally knows the answers to these questions. By examining ourselves in Jonah's story, we can learn to trust God in His final decisions and give all our concerns to Him, while knowing that He desires to save every individual on earth and reunite with them forever. No one is too far for Him to reach. — **Tim Mackie**



Source: The Bible Project (thebibleproject.com)

Runaway Believer

Jonah 1

Story so far: God calls the prophet Jonah to travel to the pagan city of Nineveh and warn them of His impending judgement. Instead, Jonah flees on a ship heading in the opposite direction. God, in His grace, sends a violent storm, which leads to a series of amazing events, including the salvation of the pagan sailors on-board and Jonah being tossed overboard and swallowed by a great fish.

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Runaway Believer

Jonah 1

Share Life

Building healthy and life-giving relationships

Spend 20–30 minutes checking in with one another. Share what has been new, challenging, or encouraging in your life recently. Share ways in which you have sensed God at work in your life.

Pursue God

Growing in knowledge of God and Christ-likeness

Read Jonah 1:1–3
The only other reference to Jonah in the Old Testament is in **2 Kings 14:23–27**. What does this passage tell us about Jonah?

How is the message given to Jonah in **2 Kings 14:25** different to the one given to him in **verse 2**?

Prophet (2 Kgs 14:25): someone given a message from God for an audience chosen by God.
Lord (v.1): the English word for the Hebrew 'Yahweh'; the name by which God revealed Himself to Israel in the Exodus (Ex. 3:14–15); the covenant name of God.
Nineveh (v.2): Nineveh was an important city in the Assyrian Empire, located about 350km north of present day Baghdad. In Jonah's day, Nineveh was Israel's most feared enemy.
Tarshish (v.3): in the western Mediterranean, possibly in Spain; in the opposite direction to Nineveh.
Joppa (v.3): a port in the south of Israel

In Jonah's day, Nineveh was Israel's most feared enemy. They had conquered Israel in the past and were threatening to do so again. How does this help us to understand Jonah's response to God in **verse 3** (see also **Jonah 4:1–2**)? What do you think of Jonah's actions?

How do you normally respond when God prompts you to do something difficult or inconvenient?

Describe a time when you disobeyed God's direction? What were the consequences?

Read Jonah 1:4–17

Who sent the storm (**v.4**)? Why is this significant?

Cast lots (v.7): throwing or rolling something (dice, sticks, coins) to discern the divine will
Hebrew (v.9): the ethnic term used to identify Israelites; the group of people descended from Abraham

What kind of 'storms' has God used in the past (or present) to get your attention? How did God use these 'storms' to change the way you think about Him and others?

Compare how Jonah and the sailor's respond to the storm (**v.5**). What does this reveal?

When facing storms in life, what are the different ways that people respond (or don't respond) to God?

How does the sailor's fear progress throughout the passage (**vv. 5, 10, 16**)? What does this tell us?

Consider the sovereignty of God in this event (i.e., God used the storm to turn Jonah back to Him and to get the attention of sailors; God used the disobedience of Jonah to bring this group of sailors to faith in Him). What do you understand God's sovereignty to mean? What is your reaction to the truth of God's sovereignty? How can it change the way you view your life?

Serve Others

Valuing people outside the group and outside the faith

Who are the people or groups you easily and naturally think of as "enemies"? How can you begin to change the way you think about, and act towards, these people and/or groups? What practical steps can you take to reach out to them?

Pray Always

Devoting ourselves to prayer

Spend time praying for one another and for those in our lives who don't yet know Christ.

Miracle in a Monster

Jonah 2

Story so far: God calls the prophet Jonah to travel to the pagan city of Nineveh and warn them of His impending judgement. Instead, Jonah flees on a ship heading in the opposite direction. God, in His grace, sends a violent storm, which leads to a series of amazing events, including the salvation of the pagan sailors on-board and Jonah being tossed overboard and swallowed by a great fish. From the belly of the great fish, where he remains for three days and three nights, Jonah cries out to God in prayer, acknowledging God's grace in saving him. The fish, at God's command, vomits Jonah onto dry land.

JONAH.
THE DEPTHS OF GRACE.

Miracle in a Monster
Jonah 2

Share Life
Building healthy and life-giving relationships

Spend 20–30 minutes checking in with one another. Share what has been new, challenging, or encouraging in your life recently. Share the ways in which you have sensed God is at work in your life.

Pursue God
Growing in knowledge of God and Christ-likeness

Read Jonah 2:1–10
Why do we often view prayer as a last resort? Is this a good or bad thing? Why?

How does Jonah's prayer emphasise the desperation of his situation? What words or phrases stand out to you? Why does Jonah cry out to God? Consider **verses 4, 7, 9**.

fish (v.1): The word for "fish" (Hb. *dag*) "…is not limited to what is called "fish" today (generally cold-blooded vertebrate sea creatures with fins and gills) but is a general word for an aquatic beast, which cannot be identified further. However, a large whale such as a sperm whale could easily swallow a man whole." (*ESV,* p.1688)
temple (v.4): the building in Jerusalem where God dwelt among His people in Israel

Has there been a time in your life when you cried out to God in desperation to save you? What did you learn from the experience?

Who is the active party in Jonah's predicament (i.e., the one who cast him into the sea, the one who sent the fish, the one who rescued him, etc.)? Consider **1:17; 2:2, 3, 6, 9, 10.** What does this reveal to us about how God often works in our lives? Does this truth confront or comfort you? Why?

idols (v.8): things people trust, serve, and worship instead of the one true God
steadfast love (v.8): (Hb. *hesed*); grace, lovingkindness, the pursuing love of God

What are some idols we often cling to instead of putting our hope in God (**v.8**)? How do we forfeit the grace of God when we trust in idols?

What does it mean that: *"Salvation belongs to the Lord!"* (**v.9**)? How does this truth change the way you view your salvation? What about evangelism?

Look at Jonah's response to God's deliverance in **verse 9**. What does this reveal to us about how we should respond to God's deliverance in our lives?

For reflection: *"Do you find it easier to trust God before He's provided deliverance or after? When you're "in the belly of the fish" or when you're "on dry land"? If you're currently in a time of difficulty or crisis and in need of God's help, make a conscious commitment to trust God now, before He delivers you."* – Stephen Witmer, p.22

Read Matthew 12:38–41
How does Jonah's time in the fish point to Jesus' death and resurrection?

What can you learn from Jonah's experience?

What is revealed about God in this chapter? How will you apply this to your life?

Serve Others

Valuing people outside the group and outside the faith

Imagine a friend of yours who was once a Christian but has since stopped following Jesus. They tell you they can't come back to God because of what they've done. How could **Jonah chapter 2** help you to respond to them?

Pray Always

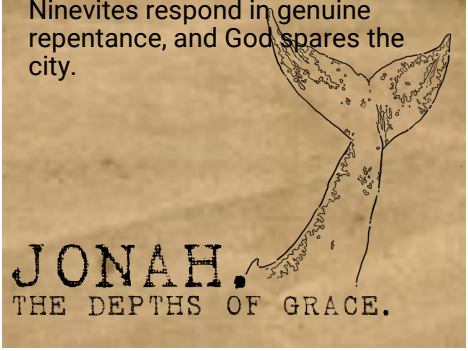
Devoting ourselves to prayer

Spend time praying for one another and for those in our lives who don't yet know Christ.

The Repentant City

Jonah 3

Story so far: God calls the prophet Jonah to travel to the pagan city of Nineveh and warn them of His impending judgement. Instead, Jonah flees on a ship heading in the opposite direction. God, in His grace, sends a violent storm, which leads to a series of amazing events, including the salvation of the pagan sailors on-board and Jonah being tossed overboard and swallowed by a great fish. From the belly of the great fish, where he remains for three days and three nights, Jonah cries out to God in prayer, acknowledging God's grace in saving him. The fish, at God's command, vomits Jonah onto dry land. Jonah is then called by God a second time to preach to Nineveh. This time Jonah obeys by delivering God's message, the Ninevites respond in genuine repentance, and God spares the city.



The Repentant City
Jonah 3

Share Life
Building healthy and life-giving relationships

Spend 20–30 minutes checking in with one another. Share what has been new, challenging, or encouraging in your life recently. Share ways in which you have sensed God is at work in your life.

Pursue God
Growing in knowledge of God and Christ-likeness

Have you ever been given a second chance? Have you ever given someone else a second chance? How did it make you feel?

What do you understand the word ‘repentance’ to mean?

Read Jonah 3:1–4
What does **verse 1** reveal to us about God? How does this truth comfort you?

For reflection: "*When God gives us a second chance to obey Him, it's tempting to think that this means God doesn't mind much whether we live His way or not. But a second chance isn't a sign of God's disinterest; it's a sign of God's mercy, giving us another opportunity to be part of His plans. Are there areas of your life where you feel God giving you a 'second' (or third or fourth) chance? Will you gratefully obey Him this time? And are you the kind of person who is like God in giving others a second (or third or fourth) chance?*" — Stephen Witmer, p.26

How does **verse 3** reveal that Jonah has changed since God's initial call to him (**1:1–2**)?

What has changed for Jonah that now enables him to obey God's call (see **2:9**)? What truth does this reveal to us? Consider **Romans 2:5 and Titus 2:11–14**. How can we as individuals and as a church come to increasingly know and experience God's life-changing grace?

Read Jonah 3:5–9

What strikes you about God's message for the Ninevites (**v.4**)? How is God's message for the world similar or different today?

What are the outward signs of the Ninevites repentance (**vv. 5–8**)?

Should there be any outward signs to accompany our repentance? Why or why not? Consider **Luke 3:8–9; Acts 26:19–20; and 2 Corinthians 7:10**

What is the significance of the animals being included in the national repentance (**vv. 7–8**)?

What suggests that the repentance of the Ninevites was also inward and genuine (**vv. 8–10**)?

In light of this story, how would you now explain what it means to repent? What should we expect to see in ourselves as evidence of genuine repentance?

***Repentance*:** to turn around; to change one's mind and actions so that they agree with God and His word

In light of **verse 9**, how are we in a much better situation than the Ninevites?

Read Jonah 3:10
God's message to the Ninevites in **verse 4** seemed quite definite. How should we make sense of the fact that God now relents and does not destroy the city?

What can we learn from God's dealings with Nineveh? How will you apply this to your life?

Serve Others

Valuing people outside the group and outside the faith

What will you do to obey God's call to share His love with the lost? Who will you begin to pray for? Who will you have a coffee with? Who will you reach out to with a helping hand? How can your Group begin to share God's love?

Pray Always

Devoting ourselves to prayer

Spend time praying for one another and for those in our lives who don't yet know Christ.

When God Loves Your Enemy

Jonah 4

Story so far: God calls the prophet Jonah to travel to the pagan city of Nineveh and warn them of His impending judgement. Instead, Jonah flees on a ship heading in the opposite direction. God, in His grace, sends a violent storm, which leads to a series of amazing events, including the salvation of the pagan sailors on-board and Jonah being tossed overboard and swallowed by a great fish. From the belly of the great fish, where he remains for three days and three nights, Jonah cries out to God in prayer, acknowledging God's grace in saving him. The fish, at God's command, vomits Jonah onto dry land. Jonah is then called by God a second time to preach to Nineveh. This time Jonah obeys by delivering God's message, the Ninevites respond in genuine repentance, and God spares the city. However, Jonah becomes angry with God for His grace upon the Ninevites, and he asks to die. Twice God questions Jonah's right to be angry, before He finally reveals the point of this amazing story: the amazing depths of God's love and grace.

JONAH.

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When God Loves Your Enemy
Jonah 4

Share Life
Building healthy and life-giving relationships

Spend 20–30 minutes checking in with one another. Share what has been new, challenging, or encouraging in your life recently. Share ways in which you have sensed God is at work in your life.

Pursue God
Growing in knowledge of God and Christ-likeness

Read Jonah 4:1–4
How does Jonah react to God's grace to Nineveh (**vv.1–3**)? Why does he react this way?

How does this compare to his response to God's grace to him in **chapter 2**?

What does the difference in Jonah's reactions reveal about his heart?

Do we sometimes act in the same way as Jonah? How?

Did Jonah have any right to be angry about God sparing Nineveh?

Share a time when you, like Jonah, became angry at God or depressed over what seemed like an unjust situation? How did you resolve your anger?

Last time Jonah reacted like this he ended up in the sea, crying out to God to save him. This time, he's so angry he asks God to take his life (**v.3**). How might you expect God to respond to Jonah? How does God respond (**v.4**)? What does this teach us about God's character (**v.2**)?

Read Jonah 4:5–11
What do you think Jonah is hoping to see happen to the city in **verse 5**?

What makes Jonah angry in this passage? What makes him happy? What does this tell us about Jonah and the state of his heart?

The things that make us angry and happy reveal a great deal about our hearts and provide insight into what we really care about. What tends to make you angry? How do you normally express your anger (pout, yell, punish, withdraw, stuff it, take it out on others, become irritable, silent, etc.)? How can you grow in this area?

What tends to make you happy? Why?

Make note of the three times the word *"appointed"* appears in this passage (**vv. 6, 7, 8**). What do we learn about God from the fact that He used the plant, the worm, and the wind to teach Jonah a lesson? How can this truth change the way we approach our lives?

Did Jonah have any right to be angry about the plant (**vv. 9–10**)? Why or why not?

Are we more concerned with our comforts (i.e., our "plants") than we are with God's compassion for others? What are our "plants"? What blessings from God have we turned into idols? What in our lives, if it was taken away from us, would make us "angry enough to die"?

For reflection: *"Ask yourself these questions: Do I tend to get more emotional about sport/shopping/something else than by the fact that people around me don't know the real God? What prompts the greatest feelings of joy in me: news of someone becoming a Christian, or the promise of a fun evening out? Am I concerned about the people of my town/city hearing about Jesus? What am I doing to make sure people hear about Him?"* — Stephen Witmer, p.37

What is the right answer to God's final question in **verse 11**? What reasons does God give that suggest this is the right answer?

Unlike God's question in **verse 9**, we don't get to hear Jonah's answer to this question. Why do you think the book of Jonah ends with this unanswered question left hanging?

Serve Others

Valuing people outside the group and outside the faith

Like Jonah, we all want to receive God's forgiveness, but we are not always willing to extend forgiveness to others. Is there anyone to whom you are unwilling to extend grace and forgiveness? What can happen when we hold on to anger and unforgiveness, even when it seems justified? What are some reasons (or excuses) we use for not forgiving? How do we benefit from forgiving?

Pray Always

Devoting ourselves to prayer

Spend time praying for one another and for those in our lives who don't yet know Christ.