

JONAH

"SHOULD I NOT BE CONCERNED FOR
THAT GREAT CITY?" 4:11

Background

Jonah is the 5th of the 12 minor prophets but the book is more narrative based in line with Elijah and Elisha rather than declaring visions and revelations. That said, it is incredibly prophetic in pointing to Jesus' burial and the future repentance on Gentiles.

Jonah is also one of the earliest prophets and contemporary with Hosea and Amos. An interesting contrast is that Amos' message to Israel resulted in no response and ultimately the scattering of the northern kingdom 30 years later; Jonah's message to Ninevah brought repentance!

Jonah comes during the reign of Jeroboam II, the third in a line of Israel's kings who did evil before God (see 2 Kings 13-14). In spite of this, God delivered Israel from the Arameans and enabled Israel to expand the territory it had previously lost. This prosperity is not the result of behaviour but God's sovereign choice to not blot out the name of his people; Israel's deliverance is therefore a demonstration of his grace. Jonah is recorded as having witnessed this (2 Kings 14:25).

Comment on format

Life Group Questions are designed to facilitate discussion over a sermon passage. The first two sections are therefore designed to be accessible for anyone regardless of their understanding of the Bible. The Observe section helps to spot things in the text; the Interpret section then seeks to understand these observations in light of wider scripture. The Reflect & Discuss questions cover areas of personal application and group discussion arising out of the text. It is hoped that through the study and Sunday sermons, everyone in the group would be able to participate and respond.

Overarching Theme

"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)." — ESV Study Bible

Key Themes

1. God's Compassion

- God's compassion towards his own people in preserving them despite their behaviour (2 Kings 13-14)
- God's compassion for people beyond those who are already his people.

2. Blessed to be a Blessing and the risk of running from that responsibility.

3. The gospel in the Old Testament

- Jonah in the fish for 3 days just as Christ was in the tomb 3 days.
- Ninevah's repentance shows that no one is beyond God's grace.
- The repentance of a pagan nation foreshadowing the gospel to the gentiles.

JONAH

WEEK 1: JONAH 1:1 - 2:10 • 24TH JAN 2016

Observe

1. What does God tell Jonah to do and how does he respond? (Jonah 1:1-3)
2. In what ways do you see (or assume) God's involvement throughout the narrative? (Jonah 1:4 - 2:1 & 2:10)
3. When Jonah cries out to God from the sea and from within the fish, where is his attention directed? (Jonah 2:4 & 7)
4. How does Jonah compare idols to God? (Jonah 1:9 & 2:8)

Interpret

5. Jonah is mentioned as prophesying during the reign Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). By way of background to the book, how would you assess the state of the nation and God's dealings with them on the basis of 2 Kings 14:23-29?
6. Jonah is told to go and prophesy against the Ninevites. How are they described by Nahum? (Nahum 1:11 & 3:1, 4 & 16).
7. The changing perspective of the sailors in chapter 1 is an interesting one.
 - Describe the transition in their perspective between Jonah 1:5-16.
 - What factors affect this transition?

8. Jonah's prayer indicates a tradition or practice of looking towards God's holy temple. This may relate to Solomon's dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. What does 1 Kings 8:35-39 suggest about what Jonah is asking when he prays this?

Reflect & Discuss

9. The situation in Israel at the time of Jonah appears to indicate God's faithfulness despite their evil behaviour. Jonah had seen God's faithfulness first hand and yet did not want respond to God's call. In what ways can we be a beneficiary of God's blessing but avoid responsibility?
10. Jonah's idol wasn't another 'god', it was trusting himself rather than God; something we can all have a tendency to fall into.
- What factors lead people to do this?
 - Where do you see this most obviously in your own life?
 - How can we guard against this?
11. One of the messages from this passage is that God can use any situation to reveal himself to people who aren't even searching for him. How have you seen God use circumstances to encounter people? How does this affect your prayers for those who don't yet know God?
12. Jonah cried out to God while drowning in the Mediterranean Sea. He knew that no matter where he was or what he had done, God could still save and restore him.
- How have you seen God respond to desperate prayers in your life? Why not share these experiences with your group.
 - If you're praying this sort of prayer right now, consider talking it through with your leader or group and praying it through together.

JONAH

WEEK 2: JONAH 3:1-10 • 31ST JAN 2016

Observe

1. Who responded to Jonah's message? (Jonah 3:5)
2. How did the Ninevites respond to Jonah's message? (Jonah 3:5-10)
3. What caused God to relent? (Jonah 3:10)

Interpret

4. What reasons do the following verses give for people fasting in the Old Testament?
 - 1 Samuel 7:6
 - Ezra 8:21-23
 - Daniel 9:1-3
5. This chapter does not just record that Ninevah repented but commends them for how they repented (Jonah 3:10)
 - What was being expressed through fasting and sackcloth in Esther 4:3?
 - What was the nature of the response that God called for from his own people in Joel 2:13-14?
 - What difference does how people respond to God make according to 2 Corinthians 7:9-11?

6. The Hebrew word nacham is translated as compassion (verse 9) and relented (verse 10) in this passage. Among other words, it is also translated as comfort. What do the following verses tell us about when and why God acts in this way?
- Psalm 90:11-13 (Compassion)
 - Jeremiah 31:13 (Comfort)
 - Jeremiah 18:7-8 (Relent)

Reflect & Discuss

7. Verse 5 shows us that the response included the least and the greatest, evidence that all are in need of God's grace regardless of wealth or social status.
- Who could be represented by 'the least' and why might it be easier for these people to acknowledge their need for God?
 - How might this affect how we pray and reach out to 'the greatest' in our society?
8. Verse 6 suggests that the king responded immediately which is consistent with how God desires everyone to respond to him. (Hebrews 3:15)
- What reasons are there for us needing to respond to God immediately?
 - How do you sense God inviting you to respond today?
9. Ninevah was trying to show God that they were mourning over their evil ways.
- How would you describe the depth of mourning and how is it expressed today?
 - Have you ever mourned over sin either in your own life or someone else's. What was that like?
10. Psalm 90:11 shows that David understood our need to see the depth of sin in order to respond in the right way.
- To what extent do you think we underestimate the consequences of sin?
 - What are the dangers of this and what can be done to prevent it?

JONAH

WEEK 3: JONAH 4 • 7TH FEB 2016

Observe

1. Why did Jonah become angry? (Jonah 3:10 – 4:1)
2. What characteristics does Jonah declare about God? (Jonah 4:2)
3. What inconsistency does God reveal about Jonah's attitude? (Jonah 4:10-11)

Interpret

4. In the following verses, why were the people angry with God?
 - Genesis 2:4-7
 - 1 Chronicles 13:7-14
5. What does James 1:19-20 teach about anger and becoming more like God in being slow to anger?
6. God reveals he sees not only the city of Ninevah but the people of Ninevah. What do the following verses reveal about the value God ascribes to people?
 - Genesis 1:26
 - Psalm 8:3-8
 - 2 Peter 3:9

Reflect & Discuss

7. In thinking about Jonah's attitude (question 3), what areas are there for you where you know your attitude is not consistent with the character of God?
8. God reveals his heart for the city of Ninevah. What do you think God's concern is for Wellington? How are you growing more towards God's concern?
9. It is easy to see the Ninevites as 'those wicked Assyrians' and yet God reminds Jonah that he sees the individual people of the city and therefore ascribes to them dignity and worth.
- In what ways do you see people today increasingly treated as objects rather than people?
 - What is the impact of this?
 - What does it take to consistently see and treat people as people?
10. What has been the key theme or challenge that has struck you in the book of Jonah and what is changing in you as a result?