



the depths of grace

JONAH

by Stephen Witmer

the depths of grace
the good book guide to Jonah
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CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Why study Jonah?	5
1. Running away Jonah 1 v 1-3	7
2. Judgment and mercy Jonah 1 v 4-16	13
3. Jonah's fishy faith Jonah 1 v 17 – 2 v 10	19
4. Repent, relent, rage Jonah 3 v 1 – 4 v 4	25
5. Lesson learned? Jonah 4 v 5-11	33
6. Jonah and Jesus Matthew 12 v 38-42	39
Leader's Guide	47

introduction: good book guides

Every Bible-study group is different—yours may take place in a church building, in a home or in a cafe, on a train, over a leisurely mid-morning coffee or squashed into a 30-minute lunch break. Your group may include new Christians, mature Christians, non-Christians, mums and tots, students, businessmen or teens. That’s why we’ve designed these *Good Book Guides* to be flexible for use in many different situations.

Our aim in each session is to uncover the meaning of a passage, and see how it fits into the “big picture” of the Bible. But that can never be the end. We also need to appropriately apply what we have discovered to our lives. Let’s take a look at what is included:

- ↔ **Talkabout:** Most groups need to “break the ice” at the beginning of a session, and here’s the question that will do that. It’s designed to get people talking around a subject that will be covered in the course of the Bible study.
- ↓ **Investigate:** The Bible text for each session is broken up into manageable chunks, with questions that aim to help you understand what the passage is about. **The Leader’s Guide** contains **guidance on questions**, and sometimes ☑ additional “follow-up” questions.
- 🗨️ **Explore more (optional):** These questions will help you connect what you have learned to other parts of the Bible, so you can begin to fit it all together like a jig-saw; or occasionally look at a part of the passage that’s not dealt with in detail in the main study.
- ➔ **Apply:** As you go through a Bible study, you’ll keep coming across **apply** sections. These are questions to get the group discussing what the Bible teaching means in practice for you and your church. 🗨️ **Getting personal** is an opportunity for you to think, plan and pray about the changes that you personally may need to make as a result of what you have learned.
- ↑ **Pray:** We want to encourage prayer that is rooted in God’s word—in line with His concerns, purposes and promises. So each session ends with an opportunity to review the truths and challenges highlighted by the Bible study, and turn them into prayers of request and thanksgiving.

The **Leader’s Guide** and introduction provide historical background information, explanations of the Bible texts for each session, ideas for **optional extra** activities, and guidance on how best to help people uncover the truths of God’s word.



why study Jonah?

The story of “Jonah and the whale” is one of the most famous in the whole Bible: but the *message* of Jonah is one of the most ignored.

There’s so much more to this story than a big fish. It’s also a story of storms and sailors, rebellion and rescue, preaching and protest; a story full of cliffhanger endings.

It’s a story about one man, the prophet Jonah, and his experiences of living among and speaking to pagans who knew next to nothing about the God he worshipped. It’s the story of the most reluctant evangelist in the Bible.

And so the book of Jonah has great relevance for Christians today. Local churches increasingly find themselves existing in pagan cultures, where the truth about God is not much more than a distant memory. In the workplace, in the friendship group and even in the family many believers feel alone, isolated, and ill-equipped to survive as Christians, let alone to speak out about God.

This short book encourages us as we see the effect of Jonah’s preaching on pagan sailors and city-dwellers. But as it reaches its last, climactic cliffhanger of a question, it also challenges us about how we view those who don’t know God, and about our own attitudes to evangelism.

Most of all, though, this is a story about God Himself. In it we meet the God of great grace towards “outsiders”, and of great patience with “insiders”. We discover the God who is the most committed evangelist of all. We meet the God who, as Jesus, lived as a man, and who pointed back to the experiences of Jonah to explain the gospel significance of His own death and resurrection.

These six studies hardly mention the “big fish” at all! But they will help you to open up the book of Jonah, to discover more of the amazing character of God, and to be encouraged to share the heart of the greatest evangelist—the Lord Himself.





BIBLE TIMELINE

Where does the book of Jonah fit into the whole story of God's word?

JONAH 785-775BC

1

Jonah 1 v 1-3

RUNNING AWAY

talkabout

1. In what ways do you see the world most clearly ignoring what God says?

investigate

Let's begin by learning what we can about the prophet Jonah. We actually know very little about him. The only Old Testament reference to Jonah outside the book of Jonah is 2 Kings 14 v 25.

 **Read 2 Kings 14 v 23-27**

2. What are we told here about Jonah?

DICTIONARY

Prophet (v 25):
someone given a message from God, for an audience chosen by God.

3. Why is it significant that Jonah's prophecy about Israel's expansion was fulfilled?

4. What would we expect Jonah to do if God gives him another command?

➤ **Read Jonah 1 v 1-2**

5. What does God command Jonah to do?

DICTIONARY

Tarshish (v 3):
a city probably
in the western
Mediterranean,
possibly in Spain.
Joppa (v 3): a port
in the south of Israel.

Nineveh was an important city in the Assyrian Empire, an ancient superpower that had subdued Israel in the past and would eventually conquer Israel a few decades after Jonah's day. The Assyrian kings used various grisly forms of torture to subdue and frighten enemy nations and also required regular payments from conquered peoples.

Israel was no exception. In 841BC, 50 years before Jonah's time, Assyria demanded payment from the king of Israel. In Jonah's day, Nineveh was Israel's most feared enemy.

6. In light of all this, how do you imagine Jonah might have felt about God's command to "preach against" Nineveh?

➡ **apply**

7. Who are the people, or groups, who we easily think of as "enemies"?



- Are there any groups or types of people who might think the church sees them as “enemies”?



getting personal

How do you react when God prompts you to do something quite difficult or inconvenient? Do you tend to obey God joyfully; or follow Him grudgingly; or simply ignore Him? What excuses do you make?



investigate

▶ **Read Jonah 1 v 3**

8. How does Jonah respond to God’s command?

9. What do you think of Jonah’s actions here?



explore more

optional

Look at what happened when God called other prophets.

▶ **Read Exodus 3 v 1 – 4 v 17; Isaiah 6 v 1-13; Jeremiah 1 v 4-19**

How do these prophets respond to being called to do something hard?



The big question now is: What could possibly account for such wilful disobedience on the part of God's prophet?!

➤ Read Jonah 4 v 1-2

10. Why does Jonah want to escape from his commission to "preach against" Nineveh? How does he understand the ultimate purpose of his task?

From the very beginning of the book, we see that God's prophet hates God's plan. Jonah was happy to prophesy God's blessing for Israel (2 Kings 14 v 25). But he can't stand the idea that God wants to forgive and bless Israel's enemies.



explore more

optional

➤ Read Genesis 12 v 1-3

Abram's descendants were known as Israel.
What is God's purpose for Israel among the nations?

Jonah wants God only to bless Israel.
How does this clash with God's promise to Abram?

How should Genesis 12 v 1-3 affect Jonah's response toward God's commissioning of him?



apply

11. We may think Jonah foolish in his attempt to flee from God (and we'd be right!) But how do we sometimes live this way ourselves?





getting personal

Are there any areas of your life in which you are currently resisting God's direction and living at cross-purposes with the Lord? Think about why you're not getting on with obeying Him; what it would look like to live His way; and what exactly you need to ask Him to help you with so that you can get on board (pun intended!) with His plans.



pray

Thank God...

- that His word is so frank, showing us what God's people are really like.
- that His plan is to bless all peoples, even those, like Nineveh, who despise Him and His people.
- that He uses His people to fulfil His purposes.

Ask God...

- to help you repent over the areas of your life in which you are currently resisting Him.
- for a heart like His that yearns for all peoples to know life with Him.
- to give you confidence that there is no one you know that His grace can't reach and change.

the cliffhanger question...

Will Jonah get away with defying God?





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