

Jonah

The God of Mercy

Studies by Geoff Gertzen

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Introduction

Jonah is a peculiar little story. It is the story of a disobedient prophet being challenged by a God of immense mercy and patience. It is the story of Pagan sailors and wicked Assyrians turning to God while the Jewish prophet seems to turn away from God. It is the story of a prophet who calls people to listen to God while he himself fails to listen and instead runs in the opposite direction. Jonah moves from the bowels of a ship to the bowels of a fish...where he is forced to do business with God. His shallow repentance takes him to Nineveh where unlike most prophets he is staggeringly successful. His success does not delight him because of his prejudice; instead he gets livid, in contrast to the God who is slow to anger. And then the story ends by not ending. We are left wondering what will Jonah do with a God of mercy...?

As we read the story it will raise all manner of questions in our thinking. How can anyone survive in a fish for three days? Is it literal, is it a parable, is it an allegory? But as we read the story we will find that actually it is God who is questioning us...how do we understand him? Why are we angry at his mercy? Will we be merciful and reach others for Christ? Are we bound by our own prejudices? Are we running from God and his plan? Will we worship a God who calls us to change?

My prayer is that we may embrace the merciful God of this book; that we are staggered by his mercy to us and to our world; and that our own lives

more and more reflect him as we seek to share his mercy to a rebellious world.

These studies were stimulated by the discussions at our bi-weekly Cape Town Southern Suburbs Partnership of churches. A particular thank you to Luke Giles for leading those sessions and greatly stimulating my thinking...

Geoff Gertzen - Sept 2014

Study 1 - The Prophet Jonah

Read the book of Jonah

Discuss: Do you think the story of Jonah is fact, allegory, parable, history, myth...give reasons for your answer?

1. Find out what you can about the background to the book of Jonah. Try and find out something about
 - Nineveh

 - Tarshish

- Joppa
- The date of the book (2 Kings 14:23-27)
- Jonah himself (2 Kings 14:23-27)
- The genre of literature

Think about it: How has this background information modified your thinking about the book of Jonah? How will it help us to better understand the contents of the book?

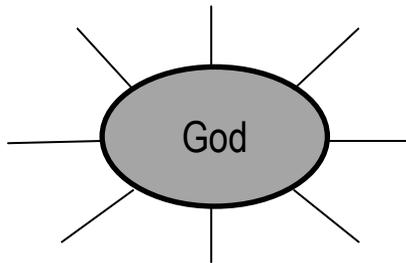
Pray the Bible

Take a verse from anywhere in the book of Jonah, write a prayer from it and then pray it to God.

Study 2 – Running from God...

Jonah 1:1-16

Complete the scatter diagram with eight words that you would use to describe God...



Read Jonah 1:1-16

1. Who is Jonah (v1)? Why is this important?

Repetition is an important tool in helping us understand a Biblical text.

Notice the repetition in

1:4

1:11

1:13

1:5

1:10

1:16

1:3

1:3 (again)

1:5

2:6

1:1

1:6

3:2

3:6

Also notice how often the word *great* is used (1:2,4,12,17, 3:1,5, 4:11)

10. How does Jonah describe God (v9)? Why is his answer odd?
Why is his behavior odd (remember v3)?

Think about it: What implications does God's creation of the world have for you? How has a widespread belief in Evolution eroded this sense of accountability?

11. As the storm progressed how did the sailors respond (v11)?
What did they try and do (v13)?

12. What does Jonah tell them to do (v12) Why?

13. What do they do when all seems hopeless (two things)(v14)?
Are you surprised by this? What happens as a result?

14. When the sailors experience the calm what happens (v16)?

Think about it: Discuss some ways in which you might be running away from God.

Think about it: Discuss how so often in our lives the problem is not the clarity of God's word but rather our obedience to it.

Think about it: Discuss how God uses Jonah's disobedience to lead the sailors to worship him?

Think about it: Chapter 1 of Jonah hints at something much bigger than a man in a fish. In the story, people who can't rescue themselves are saved by the sacrifice of a man. Discuss how we see hints (shadows/types) of Christ in this Old Testament story?

Discuss: What do we learn about the character of God from these verses?

- V1
- V2
- V4
- V9
- V15

Pray the Bible

Our Father,

Thank you that you are a God that speaks (v1).

Thank you that you are a God that desires to have mercy on us (v2).

Thank you, that you are sovereign and supremely in control of everything (v4).

Thank you that you have made everything – the sea and the land (v9).

Thank you that you sent Christ to die in our place; so that the raging storm of eternity may be quietened and that we might be at peace with you (v15) for all eternity.

Forgive us that we so often run from you.

We are slow to heed your word.

Give us hearts that seek to be obedient; hearts that desire to embrace your mercy; hearts that love you.

In Christ's name we pray...Amen

Study 3 – Death and Life

Jonah 1:17-2:10

Can God do anything?

Read Jonah 1:17-2:10

1. What happens to Jonah (v17)? Do you think it was a whale that swallowed Jonah?

2. Is the great fish an act of mercy or an act of judgment (see the clue in v17)? What does Jonah deserve? Why?

Think about it: When death comes for you, will you cry out to God in the way that Jonah does and with the confidence that Jonah has?

8. What does God do in response to Jonah's prayers? (v2,6,10)?
What does this teach us about God?

Read Matthew 12:39-41

9. What can we learn about Jonah from Jesus (v40)?

10. How does Jesus understand Jonah's life (v40)?

Think about it: How does Jesus' understanding of these events help us to know whether the story of Jonah is a myth or factual history?

Think about it: Chapter 2 of Jonah hints at something much bigger than a man in a fish. In the story, a dead man is brought back to life after three days. Discuss how Jonah's experience hints at Jesus' experience. List some ways in which Jonah's experience is different to Jesus' experience.

Discuss: What do we learn about the character of God from these verses?

- V2
- V6
- V9

Pray the Bible

Pray a prayer thanking God for the hope of resurrection using 1 Corinthians 15:42-57

3. What was Jonah's message (v4)? Surprised?

Think about it: How do you reconcile Jonah's message to Nineveh with what we have learnt about the character of God in earlier studies?

4. How did the people of Nineveh respond (three things) (v6)?

5. How did the king respond (v6-9)?

6. How did God respond to their response (v10)? What does this continue to teach us about the character of God?

Think about it: Respond to this statement: God changes because he is unchanging. (Jeremiah 18:7,8).

Think about it: How does God have mercy on Nineveh? What does this teach us about the way God will have mercy on our world (Romans 10:14,15)?

Think about it: How do the actions of the people of Nineveh model the appropriate response to God?

Pray the Bible

A Prayer for Continual Repentance

O God of Grace,
You have imputed my sin to my substitute,
And imputed his righteousness to my soul,
clothing me with a bridegrooms robe,
decking me with jewels of holiness.

But in my Christian walk I am still in rags;
my best prayers are stained with sin;
my penitential tears are so much impurity;
my confessions of wrong are so many aggravations of
sin;
my receiving the Spirit is tintured with selfishness.

I need to repent of my repentance;
I need my tears to be washed;
I have no robe to bring to cover my sins,
no loom to weave my own righteousness.
I am always standing clothed in filthy garments,
and by grace am always receiving change of raiment,
for you always justify the ungodly;
I am always going into the far country,
and always returning home as the prodigal
always saying, "Father forgive me."
And you are always bringing out the best robe.
Every morning let me wear it,
every evening return in it,
go out to the day's work in it,

be married in it,
be wound in death in it,
stand before the great white throne in it,
enter heaven in it, shining as the sun

Grant me never to lose sight of
the exceeding sinfulness of sin,
the exceeding righteousness of salvation,
the exceeding glory of Christ,
the exceeding beauty of holiness,
the exceeding wonder of grace.

Amen

Bennett: *Valley of Vision* p76

Think about it: Do you think of God as gracious, patient, compassionate and abounding in love? Describe some occasions when you have forgotten this. Read Matthew 18:21-35 for Jesus condemnation of this sort of thinking.

3. Describe how angry Jonah is (v3). Does his behavior surprise you? Why do you think he is angry?

Think about it: Are there some people you don't think God should be merciful to?

4. What does God provide for Jonah in his anger (v6)?

Think about it: What does God's provision of a vine teach us about the character of God?

5. What does God do to the vine (v7)?

6. How does Jonah respond (v8,9)?

7. Why does God destroy the vine (v10,11)? What is God trying to teach Jonah (and us) about his character?

Think about it: Why has Jesus not returned yet? 2 Peter 3:9

Think about it: How does God's merciful character influence you

- *At work*
- *When you have an argument with a loved one*
- *With your employees*
- *In your prayers*
- *In the content of your conversations*
- *What you do with your money*

Pray a prayer thanking God for his mercy to you!

Pray the Bible

Pray this early prayer used by Gentile Christians (between AD 150 and 248) (Nixon:21)

O Master God, accept the requests on the lips of your people, who have come out of the Gentiles, who call on you in truth, even as you received the gifts of the righteous in their generation:

Daniel in the hole of the lions;

Jonah in the belly of the whale;

The three children in the furnace of fire;

And now, therefore receive the prayers of your people, offered up with full knowledge to you through Christ in the Spirit.

Amen

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