



Jonah

the Prophet

4 Studies on Jonah, the Prophet

Study 1 Jonah flees (from the Lord)

- *1 what is your favourite part of the Book of Jonah, and why?
- *2 think of your own story.....what are 4 things that people would not necessarily know about you but which are an important part of your story? (Perhaps you could share some of them, if appropriate, in the group.)
- *3 read Jonah 1:1-17. What strikes you about this passage as you read it today?
- *4 what is your Tarshish & your Ninevah? What do they stand for?
- *5 what circumstances lead you to turn away from the face of God?
- *6 have there been times when the storm has hit and you have struggled to pray?
- *7 as we think about the sailors, what does this passage say to you about the nature of God's calling and your response to it?
- *8 read Psalm 139:1-12. Can we ever hide from God? Does the darkness ever surround us?
- *9 what encouragement do you get from Jonah 1?

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Study 2 - Jonah's Prayer

Last week, we read that Jonah's attempt to flee from the Lord out of fear, greatly failed! We see his plans came to an end through divine intervention and we pick up from where we left it, with Jonah in the belly of a whale/big fish. The psalmist writes 'Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.' (Psalm 139:7-8). In Jonah 2, we are reminded of God's great omnipresence the psalmist speaks of. In Jonah's attempt to flee from God, he only seems to draw closer to Him, allowing God to work on Jonah's heart, preparing him to go and do what he was called to. A school of thought argued that when Jonah sunk to the bottom of the sea and seaweed was wrapped around his head (2:5) that this implied that Jonah actually died and was resurrected. (From 'Jonah, Rescued From The Depths' study guide. Christopher Brearley). Whether he died or not, one thing is certain – he was rescued by the omnipotent and gracious God.

Read Jonah 2. 1-10

1) Initial reactions - How does the story of Jonah so far, make you feel about him? What are your feelings towards him/can you relate to him in any way? Has God led you on an unexpected journey because of your disobedience?

2) In Jonah's distress, he called to God and God answered him. Think of a time when you were in distress and you called to God, and he answered you.

3i) What, if anything, do we learn about Jonah's character based on his prayer?

3ii) What do we learn/notice about God through Jonah's prayer, how is God portrayed?

4i) Anything can be an idol in our lives today, what kind of worthless idols do people worship? (v8)

4ii) If we know the love, grace and mercy of God are readily available to us, and we know we are called to worship Him in Spirit and in truth, why do people often go back to worshipping idols, and how do we stop ourselves from worshipping such idols?

5) Jonah 1:9, Jonah says he worships the Lord, and in Jonah 2:9, he says he will offer sacrifices to God. His sacrifice was in the form of singing praises, as Christians and worshippers of God, sacrifice will inevitably be a part of our faith journey. Read Hebrews 13:15-16.

As we have walked with God, think about how often your sacrifice is in the form of praise. Then discuss what other things you have sacrificed to God? (E.g. perhaps we sacrifice time, sleep, friends, relationships, dreams, plans, money etc.)

6) Jonah's prayer are words which have been used in some of the Psalms, they are not fresh or original. (e.g. Ps 3:8, 18:4-6, 103:8...) Whether pain or confusion, there are times when we simply do not have the words to utter to God. In times like this, we can find strength in using the words of others. What are some words that you find yourself coming back to time and time again, whether from the Bible or another person?

7) Notice that Jonah does not ask God for forgiveness or says he will surrender and go to Nineveh. Why do you think this is? Does Jonah not think he has done wrong?

8) In verse 10, Jonah is vomited out onto dry land, why do you think God decides to save Jonah in this way. What do we learn from God in this verse?

9) Jonah's response of thanksgiving, as he is stuck in a big fish is similar to Job who loses everything, and immediately worships God. Read Job 1. 20-21. Their prayer and worship is counter-intuitive, they are in seasons of despair and disillusionment yet their stance is to give thanks and to worship. Does this give you hope? How are you encouraged by Jonah's prayer, and other people in the Bible like Job whose response to crisis is worship? How quick are you to respond in prayer to a situation? Do their acts challenge you?



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Study 3 - Jonah in Nineveh

*1 who are the hardest peoples or groups to connect with in your situation? (Who are the most open?) What do you find difficult about relating to them?

*2 read Jonah 3:1-10. Take time teasing out the meaning behind v1-2. What does this tell you about Jonah? God? & (maybe) yourself?

*3 imagine you are either God – Jonah – the people of Nineveh. What does chapter 3 say to you (in that role)? How do you (God, Jonah or the people) feel about the events described?

*4 as a Christ-follower, what do the numbers 3 & 40, v3-2, make association with?

*5 do you find it helpful to understand this episode in the light of the biblical importance of events connected with these numbers?

*6 why does the king of Nineveh react as he does in v6? What, do you imagine, is going on within his heart?

*7 v7-9 describe the king's decree. What does it say about animals? Is this a profound theological point being made about God's view of beasts?

*8 what do you feel about a God who changes his mind, v10? Does this passage tell us that God is inconsistent? Can we live with such a God?

*9 what encouragement do you get from Jonah 3?



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Study 4 - Jonah's Anger - God's Compassion

1. Before reading today's passage spend some time as a group recapping the story of Jonah so far. What do we think of Jonah, how do we feel about him as a person and as a prophet to this point (end of Ch3)? (Many of you will know how Chapter 4 goes but try not bring that into discussion yet)

Read Jonah ch4

2. Has your attitude towards Jonah changed in the light of chapter 4? How? Why? Why not? What sort of person do you think Jonah was?

3. Have your attitudes/feelings/thoughts about God changed in the light of chapter 4?

4. Why was Jonah angry at God? (v.1, 4, 9) ... Why does God's compassion disturb him so much?

5. How do you think you would have responded to Nineveh's repentance and God's compassion had you been in Jonah's situation? Even if you disagree with his reaction, do you understand it?

6. Are there situations in life where you desire to see God's vengeance rather than his compassion? (perhaps perpetrators of certain crimes or atrocities)

7. What do we learn about God from the fact that he used the vine/worm/wind (v6,7,8) to teach Jonah a lesson? What was the lesson? What lesson had Jonah not yet learned (10-11)?

8. We see the book of Jonah echoed in Jesus parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15). In Chapter 1 Jonah is like the younger son but here in chapter 4 he is like the older son. How is the father's reaction similar and different to that of God's with Jonah?

9. Is it ok for a person who follows Jesus to react like Jonah? Compare Jonah's reaction to the reactions of the people in Jesus parables in Luke 15. Especially Luke 15.10 when Jesus speaks of the reality of what takes place amongst the angels

10. How should reading Jonah 4 affect our dealings with God and with other people?

11. The book of Jonah ends with God asking Jonah a question, but we do not know how Jonah responded so the story is left unfinished and the question is left hanging for us, the reader to respond. Before finishing the session spend some time reflecting either as a group or on your own to God's question. Do we show concern for all those who have not accepted Christ's offer of salvation? Do we rejoice over any sinner who repents? Do we proclaim god's message to the world....?