

Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from
God's love for them. Jonah 2:8



JONAH

*A story of God's
mercy and compassion.*

Salvation to the LORD Jonah 2:9



JONAH

PAGE 8

God sends Jonah to Nineveh, but when Jonah flees, God pursues him through a storm and redirects him toward obedience.

PAGE 11

From inside the fish, Jonah cries out in repentance, and God delivers him, showing mercy in response to his prayer.

PAGE 14

God sends Jonah again, Nineveh responds with widespread repentance, and God spares the city from judgment.

PAGE 17

Jonah resents God's mercy toward Nineveh, and God confronts him, revealing His compassion for the city and its people.



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.

Jonah prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23–28), who ruled in Israel (the northern kingdom) from 782 to 753 B.C.

Jeroboam was the grandson of Jehoahaz, who ruled in Israel from 814 to 798 B.C. Because of the sins of Jehoahaz, Israel was oppressed by the Arameans (2 Kings 13:3). But because of the Lord's great compassion (2 Kings 13:4, 23), Israel was spared destruction and delivered from this oppression (2 Kings 13:5). This deliverance came through a saviour (2 Kings 13:5), who may have been Adad-nirari III (810–783 B.C.), king of Assyria.

CHAPTERS

Jonah Chapter 1

Jonah flees from God's command to go to Nineveh, but God pursues him through a divinely sent storm. The chapter shows God's sovereignty over nature and His commitment to His mission, even through human disobedience. The pagan sailors end up fearing the Lord, showing God's mercy extending beyond Israel. God is not thwarted by Jonah's resistance.

Implication: God's purposes cannot be escaped, and He works through even our disobedience.

Jonah Chapter 2

Inside the fish, Jonah prays a psalm of repentance, acknowledging God's judgment and salvation. He recognises that deliverance belongs to the Lord alone. God hears and responds by commanding the fish to release him. The chapter highlights God's mercy toward the repentant.

Implication: No place is too far for God's grace when there is genuine repentance.

Jonah Chapter 3

Jonah obeys and preaches judgment to Nineveh, and the city responds with widespread repentance. From king to commoner, they humble themselves, and God relents from disaster. This reveals God's compassion and readiness to forgive. His mercy extends beyond Israel to the nations.

Implication: God desires that all would repent and turn to him.

Jonah Chapter 4

Jonah is angry at God's compassion toward Nineveh, exposing his limited and self-centred understanding of grace. God uses a plant and a worm to teach Jonah about misplaced compassion. The Lord declares His concern for the great city, full of people who do not know Him. The tension between human prejudice and divine mercy is laid bare.

Implication: God is compassionate to us- can we shown compassion to others

OVERVIEW

Genre: Literary Features

The book of Jonah is a literary masterpiece. While the story line is so simple that children follow it readily, the story is marked by as high a degree of literary sophistication as any book in the Hebrew Bible. The author employs structure, humor, hyperbole and irony in his message with great rhetorical power. The first example of this sophistication is seen in the outline of the book (see below).

The main category for the book is satire—the exposure of human vice or folly. The four elements of satire take the following form in the book of Jonah:

1. The object of attack is Jonah and what he represents—a bigotry and ethnocentrism that regarded God as the exclusive property of the believing community (in the OT, the nation of Israel);
2. The satiric vehicle is narrative or story;
3. The satiric norm or standard by which Jonah's bad attitudes are judged is the character of God, who is portrayed as a God of universal mercy, whose mercy is not limited by national boundaries;
4. The satiric tone is laughing, with Jonah emerging as a laughable figure—someone who runs away from God and is caught by a fish, and as a childish and pouting prophet who prefers death over life without his shade tree.



CONTEXT



The Setting of Jonah

c. 760 B.C.

Jonah prophesied during the politically prosperous time of Jeroboam II of Israel (2 Kings 14:23–28). During this time the Assyrians were occupied with matters elsewhere in the empire, allowing Jeroboam II to capture much of Syria for Israel. The Lord called Jonah to go to the great Assyrian city of Nineveh to pronounce judgment upon it. Jonah attempted to escape the Lord's calling by sailing from the seaport of Joppa to Tarshish, which was probably in the western Mediterranean. Eventually he obeyed the Lord and traveled overland to Nineveh at the heart of the Assyrian Empire.

Several other major themes in the book include:

- God's sovereign control over events on the earth
- God's determination to get his message to the nations
- The need for repentance from sin
- The need for repentance from self-centeredness and hypocrisy
- The full assurance that God will relent when people repent



JONAH 1

JONAH 1

The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: ² "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

³ But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

⁴ Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god.

And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.

But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. ⁶ The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."

⁷ Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

⁹ He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

¹⁰ This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)

¹¹ The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"

¹² "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."

¹³ Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. ¹⁴ Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased." ¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. ¹⁶ At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.

Jonah's Prayer

¹⁷ Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah 1 – God pursues the runaway prophet

JONAH 1

What did God tell Jonah to do ?

Why did he run away ?

Jonah tried to get away from God's presence (verse 3). Is this possible ?

Genesis 4:16, Job 1:12, Psalm 139:7 – 12

How can we as Christians keep away from God's presence?

Psalm 51:11

What was the result of Jonah's disobedience ?

Why do you think Jonah was able to sleep through the storm ?

Can you use verse 13 to explain the term "Obedience is better than sacrifice"
(1 Samuel 15:22)

JONAH 2

JONAH 2

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. ² He said:

"In my distress I called to the Lord,
and he answered me.

From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help,
and you listened to my cry.

³ You hurled me into the depths,
into the very heart of the seas,
and the currents swirled about me;
all your waves and breakers
swept over me.

⁴ I said, 'I have been banished
from your sight;
yet I will look again
toward your holy temple.'

⁵ The engulfing waters threatened me,^[b]
the deep surrounded me;
seaweed was wrapped around my head.

⁶ To the roots of the mountains I sank down;
the earth beneath barred me in forever.

But you, Lord my God,
brought my life up from the pit.

⁷ "When my life was ebbing away,
I remembered you, Lord,
and my prayer rose to you,
to your holy temple.

⁸ "Those who cling to worthless idols
turn away from God's love for them.

⁹ But I, with shouts of grateful praise,
will sacrifice to you.

What I have vowed I will make good.

I will say, 'Salvation comes from the Lord.'"

¹⁰ And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

What is the setting of Jonah's prayer, and how does it shape its meaning?

What themes of desperation, repentance, and faith are present in Jonah's prayer?

What does Jonah recognise about God's control over his circumstances (including the fish)?

How is God's mercy shown in His response to Jonah's prayer?

What does "salvation belongs to the Lord" reveal about God's nature and work?

How does Jonah's deliverance point forward to gospel themes of rescue and new life?

When have we experienced God's discipline leading to repentance and restoration?

JONAH 3

JONAH 3

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: ² "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

³ Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. ⁴ Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." ⁵ The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

⁶ When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. ⁷ This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:

"By the decree of the king and his nobles:

Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. ⁸ But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. ⁹ Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

What has changed in Jonah’s response compared to chapter 1, and why is that significant?

What is the content and urgency of Jonah’s message to Nineveh?

How does the response of Nineveh—from king to people—reveal their understanding of God?

What does God’s response to Nineveh’s repentance reveal about His justice and mercy?

How does this chapter expand the scope of God’s compassion beyond Israel?

How does Nineveh’s repentance anticipate the gospel call to repentance and faith in Christ?

What does this chapter challenge us to believe about who is “beyond saving”?

JONAH 4

JONAH 4

But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. ² He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. ³ Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

⁴ But the Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

⁵ Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. ⁶ Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant^[a] and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. ⁷ But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

⁹ But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"

"It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

¹⁰ But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. ¹¹ And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left —and also many animals?"

What does Jonah's anger reveal about his expectations of God?

How does God respond to Jonah's complaint, and what does this reveal about His patience?

What is the purpose of the plant, worm, and wind in the narrative?

How does God define His concern for Nineveh, and what does this reveal about His heart?

How does this chapter expose the difference between human justice and divine mercy?

How does God's compassion toward Nineveh reflect the wider gospel mission to the nations?

Where might we struggle to extend God's mercy to others, and how does God challenge that in us?

