

“Keeping God to Yourself?”

A four-part study through the Book of Jonah

Study #1 → Jonah rejects God

Study #2 → Jonah prays

Study #3 → Jonah reconsiders

Study #4 → Angry with God

Jonah Rejects God's Mission

Jonah 1, Study #1 in the series, *Keeping God to Yourself?*

Jonah was called by God to go and prophesy to the people of Nineveh, which was at that time the capital of Israel's greatest enemy, Assyria (see 2 Ki 18:9-16, Nah 3:1-4). Nineveh was located at the site of present day Mosel, the second largest city in Iraq, on the east bank of the Tigris River, just a few kilometers south of the Kurdish mountains. Nineveh was a Gentile city which was transformed from being one of the four major metropolitan areas in Assyria (among Asshur, Calah and Arbela) to being the capital of the entire country and empire at the time of Jonah's prophesy (see Isaiah 37). Although the date of this book is not known conclusively, it was most likely written by the prophet himself near the end of the 8th century B.C. It was also during this time that Israel was politically secure, having reached new political and military heights (see 2Ki 14:3-15:7, 2Ch 26). With this security also came spiritual smugness and a time marked by luxurious living, corruption and immorality. Amos was a contemporary of Jonah, so reading the book of Amos can shed light on the situation in Israel in Jonah's time. The book of Jonah is the only prophetic book in the bible that comes to us in the form of a narrative about the prophet rather than the usual collection of prophetic outcries from the prophet.

Getting Started...

1. How would you react if God called you to be a missionary among the Al Queda in Afghanistan? Or among the Nazis in the 1930's?
2. What was your reaction when your parents asked you to do something you didn't want to do, say clean up your room, or do your homework before you go out with your friends? Why did you react that way?

Studying the Text...

3. Read all four chapters of Jonah.
4. What is God asking Jonah to do? (1:2) Why was Jonah unwilling to do it? (4:2)
5. How do the sailors react to the storm? What conclusion do they come to after their gods don't settle the seas?
6. After the sailors discover that Jonah is the one who has brought them into this predicament, they "rowed hard to bring the ship back to land" before they threw Jonah into the sea. How would you compare Jonah's compassion on the pagan nation of Assyria to these pagan sailor's compassion on Jonah? Who demonstrates more godliness?
7. Jonah was running from God. What do you suppose he was thinking as he fled? Did he really think he could evade God?
8. God was asking Jonah to do what Christ asks all of us to do in Luke 6:27-28 – "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." Nineveh was a Gentile city; not only that, but the capital

- of the worst hated nation of the Jews. God commands Jonah to “cry out against it.” How was this message to Nineveh one of love?
9. In what ways can you relate to Jonah in this situation? How are you running from God?
 10. Think of someone in your life who has mistreated you and not apologized or repented. This must be how Jonah was feeling toward the Ninevites. What does your gut tell you to say to that person(s)? How do you believe Jesus would respond to the same injustice that’s been done unto you?
 11. How does this passage challenge you in terms of who God calls his nation (then Israel, now Christians) to share the good news with? Is there any person(s) that you believe God is calling you to spend time with that makes you uncomfortable?

Jonah Prays

Jonah 2, study #2 in the series, ***Keeping God to Yourself?***

Breaking the Ice...

1. What's the worst weather you've ever been in? What was it like?
2. Watch *Finding Nemo* ch. 21 (1:08:23) through ch. 22 (1:13:10)
3. When Marlin and Dori are hanging on for their lives on the whale's tongue, Marlin asks Dori, "how do you know nothing bad isn't going to happen to you?" What does Dori say? Who do you identify the most with in this scene? Are you risk averse or do you enjoy taking risks?
4. As Marlin is lying on the whale's tongue having lost all hope, he says to Dori, "I promised I'd never let anything happen to Nemo." What does Dori say in response?

Studying the Text...

5. What is Jonah's response to being thrown out to sea? What do you learn about Jonah from his response?
6. Verse 1 reads, "I called to the LORD out of my distress, and he answered me." How does this demonstrate a change in Jonah's heart from when God first called him?
7. Sheol is the land of the dead and Jonah prays "out of the belly of Sheol." What is Jonah's view of his current situation?
8. Verse 4 reads, "I am driven away from your sight; how shall I look again upon your holy temple?" What emotion is behind this statement?
9. Verse 3 says that God cast Jonah "into the deep, into the heart of the seas." Whose responsibility was it that Jonah was cast into the sea? Why might Jonah be placing blame on God? Do you relate to Jonah's casting blame here? Explain.
10. There are many parallels to be drawn between Jonah's experience and the experience of Jesus' death and resurrection. What are they? See Mt. 12:39-41.
11. What are some characteristics of Jonah's prayer? What do you learn about how you can pray from Jonah's example here?
12. Consider the similar language Jonah uses to that of the Psalmists. Jonah was likely familiar with the Psalms and perhaps had them in mind when he prayed. Reading the Psalms can help us pray, express our emotions, concerns, triumphs, anger, etc. For more on using the Psalms to pray, read Eugene Peterson's *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer*.

Psalms	Jonah
120:1, In my distress I cry to the LORD, that he may answer me.	2:1, I called to the LORD out of my distress and he answered me.
42:7b, All your waves and your billows have gone over me.	2:3b, all your waves and your billows passed over me.
31:22a, I am driven far from your sight.	2:4a, I am driven away from your sight
142:3, When my spirit is faint...	2:7a, As my life was ebbing away...
31:6, You hate those who pay regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the LORD.	2:8-9a, Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you.
3:8a, Deliverance belongs to the LORD	2:9b, Deliverance belongs to the LORD!

13. When you are in a desperate situation, what is your first response? For example, when your car needs repair and you don't have the money to fix it or when your parents got a divorce? What do you do? Who do you go to? How do you approach God in times of distress? Do you tend to look to God or avoid God in those times? Explain.

14. What hope do you find in Jonah's story? How does this encourage you?

Jonah Reconsiders**Jonah 3, Study #3 in the series, *Keeping God to Yourself?***

1. What are the differences between God's call in Jonah 1:1 and God's call in 3:1? Do you think the difference is significant? Explain.
2. What is the affect of God's punishment on Jonah?
3. What does repentance look like for Jonah? Define repentance.
4. Forty days is a long time for a righteous God to delay judgment, but it is a short time for a huge city to change its ways. What does the quick reaction by the Ninevites reveal about their hearts?
5. God sent many people to Israel, but only one prophet to Nineveh. That one prophet came with no words of restoration or promised blessings as many of the Israelite prophets did; yet the people of Nineveh repented and Israel did not. What does this reveal about God's heart and the Ninevites' hearts?
6. How does the king of Nineveh describe the ways of the Ninevites? What evidence do you see, if any, that the Ninevites and their king thought they deserved God's judgment?
7. Read verse 10 again. Are we dealing with a God who can't make up his mind? Explain God's motives for threatening judgment and his reason(s) for not following through. See Joel 2:12-14, Jer 18:7-9, Gen 18:20-33, 19:12-17.
8. Some people say that the Old Testament is not about grace, what does this chapter have to say about that? How does God display his grace in this passage to both Nineveh and Jonah?
9. Read Matthew 12:38-41. What was Jesus' view of the people of Nineveh? What does the book of Jonah add to your understanding of Jesus?
10. Read Luke 15:11-31. How is Jonah like the older son and how are the Ninevites like the younger son? Read Matthew 20:1-16. Compare the workers with Jonah and the Ninevites.
11. What does true repentance look like according to this passage?
12. How did the Ninevites come to know of their need to repent? How do you know when you need to repent?
13. What specific area in your life has God sent a Jonah to speak against? Spend time praying for God to make this area clear and for the courage to repent.

Angry with God**Jonah 4: study #4 in the series, *Keeping God to Yourself?***

1. List the possible reasons for Jonah's anger when God spared Nineveh?
2. What would it say about Jonah if God repented from destroying Nineveh? To whom is Jonah pledging allegiance? To what degree do you put your own image and interests above God's?
3. Jonah says, "I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing." (4:2) How did God demonstrate these qualities to Jonah?
4. What are your feelings toward Jonah as you read of his anger toward Nineveh? How are you either similar or different from Jonah in this regard?
5. After Peter was criticized by Jewish Christians for eating with Gentile Christians, he responded by saying, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on [the Gentiles] as he had come on [the Jews] at the beginning. So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" (Acts 11:15, 17) What did Peter understand that Jonah did not?
6. What's the significance of the shady plant provided for Jonah in this story? What point is God trying to make with Jonah?
7. Recount Jonah's conversation with God. How does this demonstrate God's patience with Jonah? What evidence in your life is there that God has been patient with you?
8. What does God mean when he says the Ninevites didn't know their right hand from their left? What, if any, significance is there in God's mention of the animals of Nineveh?
9. Read Ezekiel 18:21-29. Do you believe God's actions in the book of Jonah are just? Why or why not?
10. Have you ever been angry at God? Why? What was that experience like?