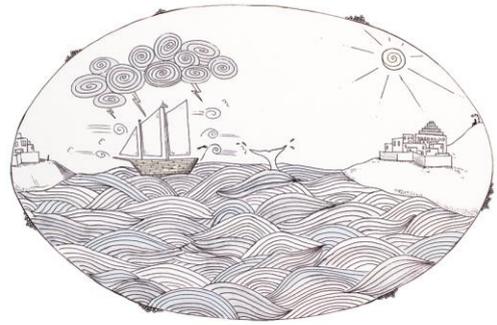


# JONAH

When God loves people more than you do.



## Setting the Scene

The book of Jonah is the 5<sup>th</sup> book in the list of 12 minor prophets, found in the Old Testament, and is named after the book's main character, Jonah, son of Amittai. His ministry as prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel was during the reign of King Jeroboam II, around 760BC. This particular time in Israel's history was marked by God's compassion in that they enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity, even though Jeroboam and the previous kings had not kept God's laws. At this time the Assyrians, who would later gain control over Israel, were not an immediate threat to them.

When we think of the story of Jonah, we tend to think about a man sitting inside the tummy of a "whale", because that is what most of us learned in Sunday school. But the story of Jonah is really fascinating and teaches us so many things about God and about human nature. As we dig into the narrative we will notice that the writer does not paint a neat and tidy picture of what it looks like to be *called* by and to *follow* God, but equally it does not try and solve the tensions that are presented either. It just tells us what happened, and in fact it leaves us with some unanswered questions.

One of the questions we should start with when studying any Bible book, is "what genre is it?" This makes a big difference to the way in which we interpret the book's meaning and how we should apply it to our lives. For example, the way in which we read a New Testament letter will be completely different to how we would read and interpret the Psalms. Their purpose for writing was different, as was their audience. While there are varying perspectives out there on what type of literature Jonah is, we still hold the position that the story of Jonah is a prophetic, historical narrative. Of course, this then means then that the giant fish was real and that the other events in the narrative actually happened. This should not be too hard for us to believe though, for the Bible says "*...nothing is impossible for God*" (Matthew 19:26).

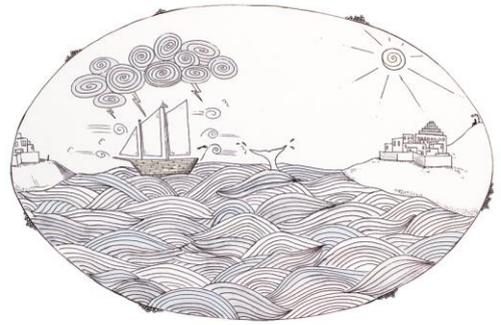
To get the most out of this series, take time to read each chapter in detail and take note of what happens in each scene, and then discuss some of the intricacies with your GC group. You will love doing this together and you will glean a lot more than if you just skim over it. God's beauty is found in the details.

As you read through the book, also look out for some of these key ideas:

- A powerful and clear picture of sin and grace
- God's unrelenting love for and pursuit of big, bad cities
- There is no "us" & "them"
- Big God - little me

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## Week One - Our “NO” to God’s “Go”

**Text: Jonah 1:1-3**

### 1 GOD CALLS THE MOST FALLEN PEOPLE

- Read Jonah 1:1 & 4:2

Jonah was a recognised and revered prophet in Israel, so much so that Jesus referenced him hundreds of years later. Most Old Testament prophets had the awful task of warning the Israelites of God’s judgement should they not turn from their wicked ways. But this time God gave Jonah a different mission. He was to take God’s message to Israel’s dreaded, violent and brutal enemies, the Assyrians, in the great city of Nineveh. Jonah wanted nothing to do with the task and in chapter 4, we see why; he didn’t want God to be kind and merciful to his enemies. It is so tragic how Jonah, like so many of us who suffer from religious snobbery, realised his desperate need of grace and mercy and yet had no desire to extend that same grace to others. God could have chosen anyone to deliver his message, but he chose self-righteous Jonah in order to change him, and to teach us.

- ❖ Q: Why did Jonah not want to go to Nineveh to deliver God’s warning?
- ❖ Q: Why do you think God sent Jonah, knowing that he did not want to go?
- ❖ Q: What similarities do we have with Jonah in his attitude towards God’s grace reaching out to “bad” people?
- ❖ Q: What does this teach us about God’s grace for those we have lost hope for?

### 2 GOD CALLS THE MOST FALLEN OF PEOPLE *TO GO*

- Read Jonah 1:2

God didn’t just leave people to die ignorantly in their sin. He purposefully chose prophets and sent them with a message of warning, calling them to repentance. God chooses and sends in order to redeem. He sent Jesus into the world to save us, he sent the Holy Spirit to empower us, and he continues to send the church to take the message to the world. God has always been a sending God and he continues to ask us to “go”.

- ❖ Q: What was a prophet’s main role in the Old Testament?
- ❖ Q: How is this account of being sent to Nineveh a little different to the usual mission?
- ❖ Q: Why is it encouraging for us to know that God chooses to send imperfect people to go on mission for him?
- ❖ Q: Has God ever called you to go somewhere? How did you respond and what was the outcome?

### 3 GOD CALLS THE MOST FALLEN TO GO TO *THE WORST OF CITIES*

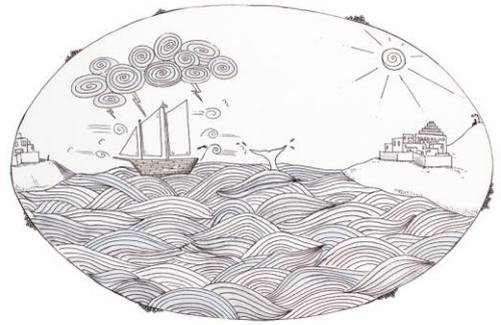
- Read Jonah 1:3

Nineveh was an incredibly evil and arrogant city, where folks were executed by being buried up to their necks in the desert. Because the Ninevites were living in opposition to God, God opposed them and justly planned to destroy them for their sin. But before doing that, God sent Jonah to warn them so that they would have an opportunity to repent of their ways and turn to him.

- ❖ Q: Why was God so angry at the Ninevites?
- ❖ Q: Based on this text, do you think that God would have destroyed the Ninevites because of their sin, had they not repented?
- ❖ Q: Why is it important for us to see that God cared enough to send a prophet to the vilest city around?
- ❖ Q: What are some of the parallels between Nineveh and Jo’burg?

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## 4. RUNNING FROM GOD'S CALL IS LIKE RUNNING FROM GOD'S PRESENCE

- Read Jonah 1:1

The text makes it clear that Jonah had no intention of obeying God and instead chose to go in the opposite direction. In sinning against God, he exited the presence of God and found himself without God's Spirit. His wilful disobedience did not result in God stopping him from trying to flee. No, God allowed him to run for a while and he thought he got away with it.

Many of us live in wilful disobedience to God. He calls us and positions us to take his message, and we turn around and go the other way. We so often feel as though God is distant and that we cannot sense his voice or his spirit, but this is usually the result and consequent of our wilful disobedience.

- ❖ Q: Why was Jonah's decision to not obey God's call to go to Nineveh, actually sin?
- ❖ Q: Why do you think the text says that Jonah chose to flee the presence of the Lord?
- ❖ Q: What do you think Jonah hoped would happen as he got onto the ship headed for Tarshish?
- ❖ Q: In what ways do we as Christians reject God's call?
- ❖ Q: Have you personally ever rejected God's call, knowing he was asking you very specifically to say something to someone? Explain the situation, how you knew it was God, and what happened once you chose not to obey? How did you feel and what ramifications did that have on your faith?

*Personal Reflection Q: What is the one big take-away that God wants me to apply to my life from the message this week?*