

JONAH

THE RELUCTANT PROPHET

STUDY TWO

Resistance of a Racist Rebel

Jonah 1:1–12

It's the grace of God that keeps you alive, the grace of God that's brought you to this moment.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EVEN with small beginnings in Gath-hepher, Jonah developed a reputation for being God's spokesman. He knew when the Lord of Heaven addressed him. Look at what the author of 2 Kings said:

Jeroboam II recovered the territories of Israel between Lebo-hamath and the Dead Sea, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had promised through Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath-hepher. (2 Kings 14:25)

In this series, we will observe a less obedient side of the prophet Jonah. He preached only when the message and people suited his preference. He even harbored deep-seated hatred against the Ninevites, which drove him to the port of Joppa, where he set sail in the opposite direction of God's will.

However, God used one man's rebellion as an opportunity to display His own character, now recorded in Scripture for all to see. In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we will explore with Pastor Chuck Swindoll the significance of Jonah 1:1–12 to gain a clear understanding of what happens when God's persistence storms against our prejudices.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before we engage with God’s Word, we should pray that God makes it personally meaningful.

*Be good to your servant,
that I may live and obey your word.
Open my eyes to see
the wonderful truths in your instructions.* (Psalm 119:17–18)

Make this prayer your own, expressing your humble request to our Lord.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll wrote, “It takes some effort to learn how to consistently draw truth from the Bible, but it is well worth the effort. As [you] get into the process . . . you will discover how beneficial such study can be.”¹

After weeks or even months of study, how rewarding it is to see how Jesus has shaped your thinking, brought you closer to Him, and given you the grace to live by His Spirit rather than your own power.



Observation: The Resistance and the Storm

When we observe a passage, we examine:

1. The who, what, where, when, why, and how
2. What you can see, touch, taste, hear, and smell
3. The logical connections, flow of thoughts, and range of subjects
4. What’s repeated, emphasized, related, alike, and unlike

Observe [Jonah 1:1–12](#). Take it slow, and record important findings.

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Jonah 1:1–12

Bound for Tarshish

Did you see the repetition? In Jonah 1:3, what did the author mention twice to convey emphasis?

How does 1:4 relate to that emphasis in 1:3?

Contrast the sailors' and Jonah's responses to the storm.

Jonah was a racist rebel. Instead of being wide open and willing to go wherever God told him, he was a prejudiced, narrow-minded Jewish prophet who wanted nothing to do with those gentiles living in Assyria. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jonah on the Witness Stand

Often, a biblical author's use of a repeated word or phrase draws attention to his point. Contrast the captain's command to Jonah in 1:6 with the Lord's command to Jonah in 1:2. (Hint: Note the verbs.)

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How many questions did the sailors ask in Jonah 1:8–11?

How did Jonah describe his identity in 1:9, and how did his answer address the sailors' first set of questions?

What three points did Jonah make in 1:12 when he answered the sailors' second set of questions?

The Lord did not throw His hands in the air and give up on this fleeing prophet. God not only wanted the Ninevites to hear His warning, He wanted *Jonah* to announce it.



Interpretation: The Lord's "Hounds of Heaven"

During interpretation, we ask: *What meaning did the author intend to convey to the original audience?* and *What does this passage teach us about God, God's ways, and God's world?* Don't forget to consult your study tools and free online resources like the [NET Bible](#) and *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.

First consult the Bible map titled "[Assyrian and Babylonian Empires](#)" at insight.org/maps to locate Nineveh, Tarshish, and Joppa, and use your Bible dictionary to look up the entries [Tarshish](#), [Nineveh](#), and [Joppa](#). How are each of these locations significant to the story?

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Jonah 1:1–12

How did the author contrast the clear-minded, religious nature of the sailors with the stiff-necked, rebellious nature of Jonah?

The Prophet and His God

Look at Jonah's first response regarding his identity.

Jonah answered, "I am a Hebrew, and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." (Jonah 1:9)

The author used irony to convey theology through Jonah's confession in Jonah 1:9. How is God's sovereignty portrayed through the irony in 1:9 compared to 1:3 and in 1:9 compared to 1:4?

You Can Run, But You Can't Hide

"Throw me into the sea," Jonah said, "and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault." (Jonah 1:12)

How does Jonah 1:12 indicate that Jonah had a moment of clarity after the sailors questioned him? What theological significance did his moment of clarity have? What theological significance do moments of clarity have today?

Jonah actually makes a prophecy here. Jonah reassured them after he had admitted his own guilt. He didn't know what the future held, but he knew for them there would be a calm sea and he'd be out of the picture, off the ship, in the drink, at the mercy of his God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Correlation: The Sovereign God of Glory

Since we just studied about God's control of this world, we will make that topic our focus for correlation.

Psalm 89

This 52-verse psalm extols God for His power and covenant loyalty to David (Psalm 89:1–37); then the author lamented God's seeming unfaithfulness to His promises (89:38–52).

However, the psalmist knew God wasn't absent. That's why he could lament to God. God hears us even when He seems distant. Read the psalmist's confession of God's power in [Psalm 89:8–14](#). How does this passage convey God's abiding presence and control over the world?

Anticipating Jesus

A scene like Jonah 1 occurred during the ministry of Jesus. One man slept on a boat with storm-driven waves crashing all around causing fear in the other passengers. Look at what happened:

Then Jesus got into the boat and started across the lake with his disciples. Suddenly, a fierce storm struck the lake, with waves breaking into the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" Jesus responded, "Why are you afraid? You have so little faith!" Then he got up and rebuked the wind and waves, and suddenly there was a great calm. The disciples were amazed. "Who is this man?" they asked. "Even the winds and waves obey him!" (Matthew 8:23–27)

As a matter of fact, that man is the God-man, who "even the winds and waves obey." Jesus uses the same power that controls the waves of the sea for the ultimate "good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28)—a lesson in faith that Jonah struggled to grasp.



Application: Lasting Truths That Matter

Now we will personally integrate, by the Spirit's power, the truths from our study's passage.

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Do you find yourself in a storm of suffering and difficulty wondering if God even knows you need help? Take a moment to express your confidence in God's control and record your lament, like the writer of Psalm 89, because God hears you.

In his sermon, Pastor Chuck said, "Grace allows us complete freedom to disobey," and, "When we disobey, grace does not cancel the consequences." What ways are you tempted to turn away and induce a storm? Confess that below along with an acknowledgement of your dependence upon Christ to keep you strong in Him.

Spiritual clarity not only leads you to repentance, it can also keep you from doing foolish acts that require you to repent in the first place. Do you need a moment of clarity?

Not until we face and accept reality will grace bring the calm.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You are the God who rides on the storm, who feeds the ravens on the mountains, and who protects newborn cubs. Please give me the wisdom that comes from knowing Your power, Your control over this world. In the times I act unwisely and turn away, please help me to acknowledge my faults more quickly than Jonah did, to turn to You, and to receive the forgiveness and restoration You graciously offer in Jesus Christ. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 10.

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2018, 2019, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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