

JONAH: THE RELUCTANT PROPHET

STUDY FOUR

Finally . . . Jonah Connects the Dots

Jonah 2:1–10

Prayer is the most natural thing in the world.

—Charles R. Swindoll

WHY do we even study the Old Testament? After all, it consists of documents written thousands of years ago, in languages you and I don't speak, and to people who have never heard of a lightbulb. It discusses strange events like an ax head that floated in water (2 Kings 6:1–7), a Babylonian king whose hair grew “as long as eagles’ feathers” (Daniel 4:33), and two million people who walked through an aquatic corridor (Exodus 14:21–22). In fact, the apostle Paul tells us why we still study this book:

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4 NASB)

In this study, we will focus on one of those strange events—written for our instruction and hope—in which God taught Jonah how to pray in the strangest of chapels: *the belly of a fish!* We will join Chuck Swindoll to see Jonah's divinely inspired epiphany which will teach us how to pray no matter the place or time . . . because God is everywhere, always.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Speaking of prayer, it is best to pray before communing with God through His Word. So take a moment to quiet your mind and ask Jesus to incline your heart to His and to increase your understanding of His will for you as you study His Word.



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YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As you may recall, we ended our last study of Jonah with this verse:

Now the LORD had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights. (Jonah 1:17)

What would you do if you found yourself inside a fish for three days and three nights? *Pray!* That is exactly what Jonah did, and it is recorded for us in the second chapter of the book that bears his name. The gastric juices made Jonah connect the dots about God and our universe: “Actually, I can’t run from the presence of the Lord because He’s everywhere. I think I’ll see if He can hear me.” And God did hear him.

Prayer is always reassuring. It reminds us that we’re never alone. Never. It results in our being less fearful as boldness replaces weakness and reluctance. —Chuck Swindoll



Observation: Jonah Prayed

Begin with a slow reading of *Jonah 2*. Perhaps read it a few times in multiple translations.

While it is easy to discover twenty, fifty, or even two hundred observations, we should eventually prioritize them. So take a moment to list your top ten observations below. Look for contrasts and comparisons, metaphors, vivid descriptors, and words or thoughts that repeat.



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What actions did the Lord perform according to:

- 1) *Jonah 2:2* _____
- 2) *Jonah 2:3* _____
- 3) *Jonah 2:4* _____
- 4) *Jonah 2:6* _____
- 5) *Jonah 2:10* _____

How is the Lord related to Jonah according to:

- 1) *Jonah 2:1* _____
- 2) *Jonah 2:6* _____

What does the Lord possess according to:

- 1) *Jonah 2:3* _____
- 2) *Jonah 2:4* _____
- 3) *Jonah 2:7* _____

What two benefits do humans receive from God according to:

- 1) *Jonah 2:8* _____
- 2) *Jonah 2:9* _____

How valuable it is that we can call on God for whatever may be our need. —Chuck Swindoll



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Interpretation: God Listened to Jonah

During interpretation, we discover the passage's meaning by studying the passage's historical context, literary features, and theological teaching. The poetry of Jonah 2 states explicitly what the narrative of Jonah simply implies.

Hebrew writers commonly used a poetic device called *parallelism*—a method that connects one statement with the preceding one. Parallelism helps us discern the author's meaning because it shows us how he connected his ideas. Parallelism frequently occurs in three ways:

- 1) *Synonymous*: two statements of the same idea or image
- 2) *Contrasting*: two statements with contrasting ideas or images
- 3) *Synthetic*: two statements where the second develops the first

*You threw me into the ocean depths,
and I sank down to the heart of the sea. (Jonah 2:3)*

Notice in verse 3 how the author's second statement developed the thought of the first. It is synthetic parallelism.

Reread Jonah 2 and record the parallelisms you can find. Then review them and explain how the connections enhance the meaning of the text.



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Lastly, research and explain the theological significance of Jonah 2:8–9. Consider how these verses relate *Jonah 1:5, 7, and 16*. Remember to consult your *Bible study helps*. God has worked through countless men and women across the centuries who have helped make His Word clear for His people.

Anytime you are in great trouble, prayer fits. —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Something Greater Than Jonah Is Here

Did you realize that Jesus mentioned Jonah to teach about His own identity and purpose. Read carefully the two paragraphs from the gospel of Matthew.

One day some teachers of religious law and Pharisees came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove your authority.” But Jesus replied, “Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign; but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. “The people of Nineveh will stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for they repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah. Now someone greater than Jonah is here—but you refuse to repent.” (Matthew 12:38–41)

One day the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus, demanding that he show them a miraculous sign from heaven to prove his authority. He replied, “You know the saying, ‘Red sky at night means fair weather tomorrow; red sky in the morning means foul weather all day.’ You know how to interpret the weather signs in the sky, but you don’t know how to interpret the signs of the times! Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign, but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah.” Then Jesus left them and went away. (16:1–4)



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Based on what Jesus said in the two paragraphs above, how do the events of Jonah's life and his role as a prophet anticipate and explain the person and work of Jesus Christ?

The great fish that swallowed Jonah symbolizes the specter of death that glides like a shadow beneath the surface of our lives. When Jonah entered the cold, dark tomb of the fish's stomach and descended to the depths of the sea, he had no hope for survival. But this watery grave was not the end for Jonah, and neither was the rocky tomb the end for our Lord Jesus. Like Jonah, Jesus emerged from the grave after three days. And in the name of Jesus, we cry out to God in our darkest hour—the only One who has the power to come to our aid when we have nowhere else to run.

Application: Connecting with God

Even though we are not encased in the stomach lining of a living creature, we still have reason to pray. We have reason to give thanks, to make our requests known, to intercede for others, and to exalt our Lord with the words of our mouth from the depths of our heart.

Reflect on your prayer habits. Record below where they have been strong and where they have been weak.

Remember that we pray not to earn God's favor or to place Him in our debt. Rather, we pray because it is the channel through which God has ordained to bless us, to shower His grace upon us. It strengthens us spiritually and makes our heavenly Father smile.



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Regarding prayer, Chuck would like us all to consider these four principles:

- 1) Prayer is always appropriate.
- 2) Prayer is always a priority.
- 3) Prayer is always beneficial.
- 4) Prayer is always reassuring.

Know someone enduring a trying season who may prefer to be in the belly of a fish? Take a moment to record a prayer for that person in need. Send a text message or e-mail stating you are praying for him or her.



A FINAL PRAYER

In light of Jonah's thanksgiving hymn of deliverance, it seems fitting that we close in the same spirit. Record your own prayer of praise to Jesus for delivering you from the judgment you have earned and giving you eternal hope no one can take away.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

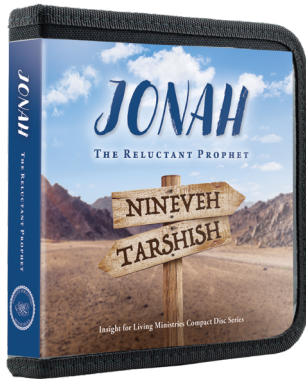
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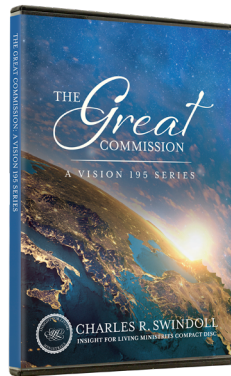
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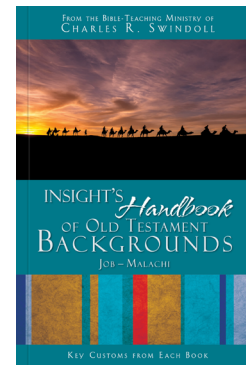
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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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