

# HEARING THE WORD



NIGEL BARGE

Jonah  
Leader's guide

# Hearing the Word      Jonah      Leader's Guide

Copyright © Nigel Barge, 2009-14

*Email:* [info@hearingtheword.org.uk](mailto:info@hearingtheword.org.uk)

*Website:* <https://hearingtheword.org.uk>

The copyright of this booklet, and of the 'Hearing the Word' tool and study materials, rests with the author, Nigel Barge. Unless otherwise indicated, its contents are licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International Licence](#) (CC BY-NC-ND). Please see the full legal terms there by clicking on 'License'.

**Simplified version:** Under this licence, you may copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format on the condition that: you credit the author, do not use it for commercial purposes and do not distribute modified versions of the work. When re-using or sharing this work, ensure you make the licence terms clear to others by naming the licence and linking to the licence text. Please seek permission from the copyright holder for uses of this work that are not included in this licence or permitted under UK Copyright Law

## Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Phil and June Malloch, whose tireless editing, reviewing and pulling together of materials has enabled the *Hearing the Word* resource to be shared with the wider church.

*Nigel Barge, October, 2011*

Scripture Quotations taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society

Used by permission of Hodder and Stoughton Ltd

A member of the Hodder Headline Plc Group.

All rights reserved

"NIV" is a registered trademark of International Bible Society

UK trademark number 1448790

## Resources

The *New Bible Commentary* 21<sup>st</sup> century edition.

A one-volume commentary on every book of the Bible, published by Inter Varsity Press.

The *New Bible Dictionary* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, IVP

[www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org)

# *Hearing the Word: A tool for Bible reading*



## **LOOK** – What does it say?

- 1) The Text
  - a) What questions does it raise -  
*Who, What, When, Where, Why, How?*
  - b) What surprises you?
- 2) The Context?
  - a) the surrounding text
  - b) the Book of the Bible
  - c) the whole Bible
  - d) the place in the Bible Story



## **LEARN** – What does it mean?

- 1) What type of writing is it?
- 2) Answer the questions
- 3) Summarise the passage



## **LISTEN** – What is the message?

- 1) Which is the main point?
- 2) Which is the key verse?



## **LIVE** – How should we respond?

- 1) What does it show about God, (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) :
  - a) His nature and character?
  - b) His grace\*
  - c) Jesus / his salvation\*\*
- 2) What should I do?

\* God's undeserved generosity is evident throughout the Bible, and it is perfectly expressed in Jesus.

\*\* The Bible, from 'the fall' onwards, describes God's plan of salvation through his Son. Thus, *all* the Scriptures speak in some way of Jesus (Luke 24:27).

## READING ‘PROPHECY’ IN THE BIBLE

Whatever we read, we adjust to its style, sometimes without noticing. We don’t approach a newspaper, a car manual, a cookery book, a poem, a scientific report and a Shakespeare play in the same way. We take into account the purpose for which it was written and the way in which the writer uses words. Since the Bible also has many styles – law, poetry, history, wisdom, prophecy, letters and visions – we need to allow for the style if we are to discern what God is saying. Jonah is ‘Prophecy’. To approach it correctly, keep in mind the following principles:

### 1) The Word of God

In the original language (Hebrew), ‘prophet’ comes from the word to call. Prophets were people whom God called to speak on his behalf. It is described thus - ‘the Word of the Lord came to ..’ (Jeremiah 1:1; Jonah 1:1). They spoke from God, inspired by the Spirit (2 Pet 1:20)

These ‘Words’ were spoken to specific people in a certain situation and applied to them, addressing their situation. Some prophecies were recorded and, under God, they are included in the written Word of God – the Bible. By this means, it is God’s intention to speak through such prophecies to people of all times. In this way the prophets are the Old Testament equivalent of the writers of the Letters in the New Testament.

Their words were never original, in the sense that they were always simply a restatement of the terms and conditions of the covenants God had made with his people.

### 2) The Covenants

To fulfil his purposes God made binding agreements, ‘covenants’, with man. In the first instance these were for all mankind - Adam and Noah, then for the Hebrews, his chosen people, through Abraham, Moses and David. These were later superseded by the New Covenant, in Jesus, which is for all people.

These covenants were mirrored in contemporary treaties between emperor and subject. In both of the covenants, the ‘ruler’ assures the people of both his benevolence to them and his faithfulness to his word, and then describes the behaviour that is required of his subjects.

Conformity led to ‘blessings’ (cf Deuteronomy 28:1-14). The expectations of the ruler were not ‘too difficult’ (cf Deut 30:11-14). There was room for shortcomings and failure. However the key to such a relationship was **loyalty**:

if subjects were *disloyal*, then cursing would inevitably follow (Leviticus 26:1-39; Deut 4:15-40; 28:15ff).

Prophets always spoke within the context of covenants. They were the ‘enforcers’, calling God’s people to adhere to their commitment to God with the promise of forgiveness and restitution, but warning them of their fate if they ignored it.

The end point, God’s eternal purposes, is inevitable, but the way it is realised depends on the response of those involved. Thus the outworking of the prophecy is dependent on its hearers’ reaction – if they repent, God might relent and the ‘curse’ may not fall. (e.g. 2 Chronicles 12:5-7).

### 3) The application

When we read the prophets, and apply their Word to our lives, we need to recognize the two forms of prophecy

#### a) ***Forth*** telling

God’s Word was spoken into a particular situation to reveal Himself and change the behaviour of His people – just like the Letters in the New Testament. To apply this to ourselves, we need first to discern what He meant for the people to whom he originally spoke, and then seek how the Spirit might use this in our lives today. ‘Forth-telling’ accounts for most of Biblical prophecy.

#### b) ***Fore*** telling

God predicts events. Such Words are often embedded within a prophet’s message of ‘forth telling’ to the people of their day, and they may not necessarily be in chronological order. They may apply at different levels:

##### (i) to contemporary events

- e.g. extension of the borders under Jonah (2 Kings 14:23-25)
- e.g. the return from exile in Babylon (Jeremiah 29:10)

##### ii) to the coming of Jesus

- e.g. His birth (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22)

##### iii) to end of time

- e.g. return of Jesus, judgment day (Daniel 7:9ff)

This accounts for a small proportion of prophecy. Its main application to us is not to enable us to work things out in advance, but rather to cause us to wonder, in retrospect, at God’s preparation for and sovereignty over all things.

# JONAH

## The Prophet

Jonah, the son of Amittai, is mentioned (in 2 Kings 14:25) as the prophet who predicted the expansion of the boundaries of the northern kingdom under Jeroboam II, at the expense of the Syrians. Jeroboam ruled Israel from 793 to 753BC. Jonah was a contemporary of Hosea and Amos.

## The people to whom it was addressed

After the death of King Solomon the 12 tribes divided into two kingdoms - *Judah* (Judah and Benjamin, capital Jerusalem) in the south, *Israel* (the other 10 tribes, capital Samaria) in the north. By the time of Jonah, Israel was prosperous and politically successful. Spiritually, however, they were idolatrous and hypocritical. (Amos 5:21-23)

Assyria (capital Nineveh) to the north was an ongoing threat to Israel. At this point they were pre-occupied elsewhere but in 721BC they would defeat Israel and take them into exile (as predicted by Amos).

## Jonah's contemporaries

The prophet Amos spoke against the injustices within society in Israel and the hypocrisy of their religion.

The prophet Hosea spoke against idol-worship by Israel, likening it to adultery; and affirmed God still loved them, despite this idolatry.

## Jonah's message

Israel is rightly aware of her privileged position as the chosen people, loved by the Lord (Deut 7:6-10). However, they are wrong in that:

- a) *They are ignoring His decrees* (Deut 7:11). Their kings and people are doing 'evil in the eyes of the Lord' (2 Kings 14:24; 1 Kings 14:9 ff)
- b) *They have forgotten His purposes*. He intends to include all nations (Isaiah 2:2) and his people will be a blessing to the world. (Gen 12:3)

The Lord did choose Israel as his special people (Deuteronomy 7:6,7). The salvation of God was first to the Jews (Romans 1:16), not at the expense of other nations, but to be the means of transmitting the blessing (Exodus 19:6) (cf Jesus ironical treatment of the Canaanite woman (Matt 5:26). Israel was to be the father serving food at the head of the table of nations, rather than the self-indulgent male in a pride of lions!

God's love has always been for the world (John 3:16) and his purpose was always that the Gentiles too should come to share his light (Genesis 12:3; Psalm 67; Isaiah 2:2; 42:6; 49:6,22; Acts 9:15)

The book of Jonah is included in Scripture not just as a story about a prophet but as a prophecy - the Word of God to Israel in the 8<sup>th</sup>C BC

It would appear that Jonah tells the story 'against himself' to the nation of Israel. Though he himself is the subject of the book, it is spoken to the people of the day. In hearing it, they should have applied it to themselves, recognizing themselves in the person of Jonah.

Thus the book is a prophetic word from God to his people, who, despite his warnings and the ongoing threat from Assyria, are ignoring God's word and his wider purposes to include all nations under his blessing.

### **Jonah, Jesus and the whole Bible**

In a sense, the book of Jonah could be described as the 'centre-piece' of Scripture! This is because:

- a) Jesus explicitly and uniquely identifies himself with a type in the Old Testament and draws parallels with himself in
  - i) The sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:39-41, Matthew 16:4) Jonah was 3 days 'dead' in the fish. According to Jesus this is an Old Testament anticipation of his death and resurrection.
  - ii) The response of Nineveh (Matthew 12:39-42; Luke 11:29-32) They repented at the preaching of Jonah, in contrast with people of Jesus' day who were rejecting him, even though Jesus was 'one far greater than Jonah'.
- b) It is the only book where we find together
  - (i) the sacrificial principle, an innocent substitute saving others from death (1:12-14) *see also* Isaiah 53:4-6
  - and (ii) anticipation of Jesus' death and resurrection (2:6) *see also* Matthew 13:40, Luke 24:46-47
  - and (iii) it expresses the purpose of God to bring all nations to know himself through his chosen people / chosen one (1:2; 3:2,10; 4:10-11) *see also* Gen 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; Ps 67, Ps 72:17, Isaiah 11:12, 19:25, 56:1-8; Acts 3:25; Rev.5:9; 7:9.

## Reading plan

		Page
1:1-17	Jonah's resists God's call to bring His Word to Nineveh	7
2:1-10	Jonah submits to God	11
3:1-10	Nineveh receives the Word, repents and is saved	15
4:1-11	Jonah resents God's grace and compassion to others	19

Each study explains matters that would have already been known to the original hearers but not to readers today. The 'Bible Connections' show the kind of data often found in Bibles with 'cross references'.



## Jonah's routes



From Joppa, Jonah set out to sail 1,500 miles *west* to Tarshish in Spain, instead of trekking 500 miles *east* to Nineveh on the R Tigris in Assyria

# Study 1

# Jonah 1:1-17

## Look, God loves the world

### Word List

1	<i>Nineveh</i>	Capital of the Assyrian Empire. Harsh and oppressive; bitter enemies of Israel
3	<i>Tarshish</i>	Port in Spain? Western end of Mediterranean i.e. opposite direction from Nineveh
	<i>Joppa</i>	Port on eastern coast of Mediterranean, modern day Jaffa, near Tel-Aviv
5	<i>threw cargo overboard</i>	Made boat more buoyant and less likely to sink in storm
7	<i>cast lots</i>	Method used to determine will of God cf Joshua 18:6; Nehemiah 11:1; Acts 1:26
9	<i>Hebrew</i>	Israelite/Jew
10	<i>the LORD</i>	Hebrew name of God; too holy to be spoken. Scholars think it was 'Yahweh', which mistakenly used to be written, 'Jehovah'.
16	<i>offered sacrifice</i> <i>made vows</i>	Admission of 'debt', sign of gratitude Binding promises of commitment

### Bible Connections

1	<i>Joppa</i>	2 Chronicles 2:16. Ezra 3:7, Acts 8:36,10:5
3	<i>fleeing from God</i>	Psalm 139:7-10
4	<i>God's control of sea</i>	Psalm 24:2; 33:7; 89:9 Mark 4:39-41
5	<i>supernatural sleep</i>	Genesis 15:12; 1 Samuel 26:12 Matthew 8:24
7	<i>use of lots</i>	Leviticus 16:8; Joshua 7:14-18; Proverbs 16:33
17	<i>three days and nights</i>	Hosea 6:1-2; Matthew 12:39-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32;

# LOOK

## 1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

1 *Who was Jonah?*

*Where was Nineveh and in what way was it a ‘great city’ ?*

2 *Why did God want Jonah to ‘preach against it’ ?*

3 *Why did Jonah run away from the Lord in response to this?*

*Where was Tarshish?*

5 *Why did they each have their own gods?*

*Why did they throw their cargo over the side?*

*How was Jonah able to sleep so deeply in middle of a storm?*

7 *What were the sailors expecting to happen as they cast lots?*

8 *How did the lot fall to Jonah?*

10 *Why were they ‘terrified’ when they heard that Jonah was a Hebrew?*

*Why do they ask him what he has done, if they already know he is running away from the Lord?*

12 *Why did Jonah think throwing him overboard would calm storm?*

*Why didn’t Jonah repent – death better than turning to God?*

*Why did Jonah not throw himself overboard?*

13 *Why did the men not do what Jonah suggested immediately?*

14 *What did they mean ‘innocent’? (Jonah had told them he was running away from God)*

16 *Why did they fear, what was the sacrifice for, and what were their vows?*

What surprises or confuses you?

3 *How did Jonah think it was possible to escape the Lord’s presence?*

## 2) The Context

a) surrounding passage

2 *Nineveh was a very important city three days were required for a visit. (3:3)*

*Preach against it meant warning of His judgement of it. (3:4)*

b) individual book,

16 *The Ninevites put on sack cloths (3:5) - they feared the Lord.*

c) whole Bible,

- 1 *The Word of the Lord (Genesis 15:1; Hosea 1:1; Amos 7:16)*
- 2 *c.f. the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:20)*  
*God's promised to bring blessing to all nations (Genesis 12:2-3)*
- 3 *Where can I flee from your presence? (Ps 139:7)*  
*The man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. (Genesis 3:8)*  
*Joppa-OT – cedar logs from Lebanon (2 Chronicles 2:16; Ezra 3:7)*  
*NT –Dorcas' healing, conversion of Cornelius (Acts 9:36-11:13)*
- 5 *Each crying out to his God – 'the Lord our God, the Lord is one'*  
*(Deuteronomy 6:4)*  
*Jesus fell asleep in a storm (Luke 8:23)*
- 6 *May not perish cf (John 3:16)*
- 9 *God of Heaven - an unusual term? (Genesis 24:3,7; Ezra 1:2; 5:11; 6:9*  
*7:12; Nehemiah 1:4; 2:4; Revelation 11:13; 16:11)*
- 10 *The Lord, the creator (Genesis 1)*
- 16 *Feared the Lord (Exodus 14:31)*
- 17 *3 days and 3 nights - Jesus and sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:39-41)*

d) Bible story

*God has created a world that has rejected Him but God has chosen a nation.*

*The Law has been given to that nation to show God's requirements but everyone falls short of these.*

*God has a plan to redeem for Himself people from not only that nation but the whole world.*

# LEARN

1) What type of literature is this?

*Prophecy*

2) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?

- 1 *A prophet in Israel shortly before its exile to Assyria.*  
*Capital of Assyrian empire – large and powerful.*
- 2 *Because God cared for them and wanted them to repent.*
- 3 *Jonah didn't care about Nineveh and wanted them destroyed. (4:2)*  
*Tarshish was in Spain, i.e. in opposite direction.*
- 5 *The multinational crew each had their own god.*  
*They were sinking, so wanted to lighten the load.*  
*It was God-induced sleep (not a clear conscience!)*
- 7 *Sailors expected to be shown by the god of the storm who was to blame for the storm.*
- 8 *The lot fell on Jonah because God ordained it.*
- 10 *The crew acknowledged that the Lord was supreme.*  
*They believed God was at work and on Jonah's case.*
- 12 *Jonah believed anger of God against sin removed by death.*  
*Jonah believed too late – sin committed, death required.*  
*Sacrifice needs to be offered for benefit to be transferred.*
- 13 *Crew cared for Jonah or feared consequence from his God.*
- 14 *God's view - had to be innocent to be an effective sacrifice?*
- 16 *They feared God's judgement, sacrifice for sin / thanksgiving / vows of devotion / commitment.*

3) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

*He was deluded into thinking God wouldn't notice / could do anything about Him.*

4) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

*God wanted Nineveh's people to turn to him. He called Jonah to go and tell them, but Jonah chose to run from him. God did not reject him, but pursued him, by deploying his creation – elements, people & creatures.*

## LISTEN

- 1) What is the lesson or the main point?

*God cares for **all** sinners, and wants them to repent.*

- 2) Which verse best sums up the passage's message? **v 2a**

*Go to that great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.*

## LIVE

- 1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

- a) His nature and character?

2     *God loves the world and so speaks in warning to it.*

4     *The Lord is **all** powerful.*

9     *The God of the Hebrews created Heaven and Earth.*

- b) His grace

I     *God speaks to and through undeserving people.*

- c) Jesus / His salvation

12    *Jonah's command to hurl him into the sea, one on behalf of all, is like Jesus' sacrifice, for nations of world.*

15    *Through Jonah /Jesus the sailors /world, are spared.*

17    *Jonah's 3 days and nights in the fish are like Jesus' in the earth*

Now underline the application of the Main Point

- 2) What should I do?

I     *When God says 'Nineveh' – don't go to Tarshish!*

2     *God commands His people to warn the world of His coming judgment of it.*

4     *Resolve to live in the presence of the Lord.*

6     *Note - When the 'chips are down', men believe there is a God.*

7     *Note – there is expectation of judgement in man.*

9     *Note – to be one of God's people is to fear Him.*

- 12 Acknowledge your guilt before God and man.
- 13 Discern the good intentions of heathen'.
- 16 Respond with devotion to what God has given through Jesus.

Now underline the application of the Main Point

## Study 2

## Jonah 1:17 - 2:10

### Turn and believe in the Saviour

#### Word List

1	<i>grave</i>	Hebrew ‘Sheol’ means the place of the dead
3	<i>the deep</i>	sea, associated with evil and forces that fight against God
4,7	<i>Holy Temple</i>	Jerusalem, where God was among his people
8	<i>idol</i>	false god, made by man

#### Bible Connections

2	<i>calling to God in distress</i>	Psalm 18:6; 118:5; 120:1
	<i>the grave</i>	Psalm 18:5; 30:3; 86:13
3-5	<i>God’s discipline</i>	Psalm 39:9-10; Hebrews 12:5-13
4	<i>banished from God</i>	Psalm 31:22; Mark 15:34
5	<i>the ‘drowning’ experience</i>	Psalm 88:7; 69:1-2, 14-15

# LOOK

## 1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 1 *How could he be alive and in the fish?*
- 2 *Why the past tense though still in fish?*  
*Why did he speak of 'grave' – was he dead?*  
*Why help and not request for salvation?*
- 3 *Why 'you' hurled? – Was it not the men at Jonah's instigation?*
- 4 *What does 'looking again to His holy Temple' mean and when would he do it?*
- 6 *Why does he address him as 'my God'?*
- 8 *What does he mean by 'grace'? How is it forfeited?*
- 9 *What is he thankful for?*  
*What did he vow? / Why no mention of Nineveh?*  
*What does salvation 'mean'.*
- 10 *How did God communicate with the fish?*

What surprises or confuses you?  
*Jonah never says he is sorry?*

## 2) The Context

- a) surrounding passage,  
1 *the Lord His God (1:9)*
- b) individual book,  
8 *Let everyone call on God. Who knows God may yet relent.*  
*(3:8b,9a)*
- c) whole Bible,  
3c *calling to God in waves of death ...cords of grave (2 Sam 22:5-7)*  
6 *I waited patiently for the Lord. He lifted me up out of the mud and mire.'*  
*(Psalm 40:1,2)*  
*'The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation.'*  
*(Exodus 15:2)*  
*Jesus is God's salvation for us. (Luke 1:69; 2:30; 3:6)*

9 *Salvation belongs to the Lord. (Psalm 3:8)*  
10 *He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. (John 11:25)*

d) Bible story,

See Study 1.

## LEARN

1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?

1 *God miraculously sustained his life*  
2 *It was a sign of faith – he believed he would receive it.*  
*He reckoned himself dead. (an expectation of resurrection?)*  
*Jonah trusted God's benevolence*  
3 *Jonah knew storm was from God as a judgment on him – his death was inevitable. He was going into the water one way or the other.*  
*The crew were only saved because they separated themselves from Him.*  
4 *It means coming into God's presence through prayer (7). This was enabled in the Temple through sacrifice*  
*His intention is now – a sign of repentance?*  
6 *It is a sign of commitment. He embraces the Covenant of God and His people.*  
8 *He understands that he deserves nothing but judgement, but looks for mercy.*  
*It is forfeited if we 'run' and do not believe in /trust God*  
9 *He is thankful for the fish – though 'dead', he is not lost.*  
*His vow is connected to salvation – If you save me, I will .." and it may have been to obey and go to Nineveh.*  
*Salvation must mean life not death.*  
10 *He spoke (cf creation) Jesus & demons, sickness, wind & waves. It had to! God's word accomplishes His will. (Isaiah 55:11)*

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

*He turned (repented) and went the opposite way back to Nineveh (Action speaks louder than words!)*

3) Give an overall ‘picture’ of the passage in a few sentences.

*Jonah prayed to the Lord from inside the fish saying that the Lord had heard his cry from ‘death’ and had despite his complete ‘lostness’ had raised him up and given him hope given hope of a relationship with God. (1-6)*

*God grace transformed him. He praised God, and vowed to obey Him in response to being saved. (8,9)*

*So the Lord delivered Him from death. (10)*

## **LISTEN**

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

*God graciously saves us from death / separation from Him, in response to repentant faith.*

2) Which verse best sums up the passage’s message? **v 10**

*And the Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.*

## **LIVE**

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

2 *God is merciful – he hears our call of distress.*

3 *God is sovereign over ALL situations – (you cast me..).*

10 *God is in control of ALL things.*

b) His grace

6 *God brings us up ‘from the pit’.*

8,10 *God is gracious and does not treat us as we deserve.*

c) Jesus / His salvation

10 *In Jesus, though we die, we are born again – ‘vomited onto dry land’!*

Now underline the application of the Main Point

2) What should I do?

2 *In distress, call out to God.*

4 *Note - Repentance begins when we recognised that our sin has separated us from God.*

6 *Note – effective prayer addresses a Holy God in His Holy Temple*

8 *Disregard vain idols and look to the hope of steadfast love.*

9 *Be thankful - Those who receive God's salvation show their appreciation.*

10 *Rejoice that you are alive and on 'dry land'!*

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

## Study 3

## Jonah 3:1-10

### God has compassion on ALL repentant sinners.

#### Background and Word list

3	<i>three days</i>	i.e. God is at work – His purposes are about to be revealed.
4	<i>forty days</i>	Extended period. God is in control.
5	<i>fast</i>	Going without food and drink as a sign of penitence
	<i>sackcloth</i>	Sign of sorrow and repentance
7	<i>decree of the king</i>	Binding law for all his subjects
9.10	<i>compassion</i>	Pity/mercy (withholding what is deserved)

#### Bible Connections

4	<i>destruction of city</i>	Genesis 19:21, 25, 29
	<i>evil ways of Nineveh</i>	Nahum 3:19
10	<i>God ‘changing his mind’</i>	1 Samuel 15:11-29

# LOOK

## 1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 1 *Why did God speak to Jonah again?*
- 2 *Why the present tense 'give' – did he not know till he got there what he would say?*  
*What difference is there in the two messages?*
- 3 *Why did it require three days to visit Nineveh?*
- 4a *Why forty days?*
- 4b *'Nineveh will be overturned' – was it inevitable?*
- 5a *What is significance of 'believed God' not 'believed Jonah'? And why DID they believe? Did any evidence confirm message?*
- 5b *What does universal sack cloth and ashes mean?*
- 6 *What was the news and what was the significance of the King responding last?*
- 7 *Why does the King 'proclaim'?*  
*Can the King command repentance / faith?*
- 9 *On what basis did the King hope for salvation?*
- 10 *Why did God respond to their actions?*

What surprises or confuses you?

- 5 *They responded to Jonah's preaching even though it was insincere.*  
*(4:2)*  
*They **all** repented.*

## 2) The Context

a) surrounding passage,

- 10 *God responds graciously to repentance. (2:8; 4:2)*

b) individual book,

- 1 *Arise and go to Nineveh .... (1:2)*
- 2 *Jonah obeyed c.f. Jonah ran away (1:3)*
- 3 *the Word of the Lord (1:2)*

### *Three days (1:17)*

c) whole Bible,

- 1 message / sign and preaching of Jonah (Matthew 12:39-41).
- 3 3 days - Darkness in Egypt (Exodus 10:22); Jesus lost by parents (Luke 2:46), Jesus dead in tomb (Mark 10:34), Saul blind (Acts 9:9)
- 4 40 days Noah in ark (Genesis 8:6); Moses on Matthew Sinai (Exodus 24:18); Spies in Canaan (Numbers 13:25); Goliath taunts (1 Samuel 17:16); Jesus tempted (Matthew 4:2)
- 5 Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3)
- 7 proclamation of King c.f. Darius' response after Daniel in the lions' den. (Daniel 6:25).

d) Bible story,

See Study 1.

## **LEARN**

1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?

- 1 *He was committed to using Jonah.*
- 2 *Jonah had to rely on God -They were to be God's words not Jonah's.*  
*The second message was more explicit.*
- 3 *Physical size or protocol - three days c.f. in fish belly.*
- 4 *40 days is a time of God's testing and trial for Jonah and the Ninevites.*
- 4b *presented as conditional '40 days (unless....)'*
- 5a *Ninevites believed that Jonah spoke God's word; did Jonah recount his own story? Three days in the fish left its mark!*
- 5b *All recognised predicament – sinful before God.*
- 6 *The news was Jonah's message and peoples response.*  
*The King was the greatest and therefore the worst.*
- 7 *He is passing on the message to his subjects for his / their well-being.*

*No, but he could command outward compliance.*

9 *He believed in God's righteous anger. He sought grace and mercy. from God trusting in his compassion.*

10 *God had compassion on them and gave them grace. (c.f. 2:8)*

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

5 *The power of preaching is in the Word of God not the preacher! This illustrates that all of the very worst of non-Jewish sinners may if they repent, receive God's mercy.*

3) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

*Jonah hears the word a second time and obeys. He reports his 'resurrection' and proclaims God's Word of judgment. There is immediate, universal repentance and God forgave them.*

## **LISTEN**

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

*God's saving grace is available to all who repent and believe.*

2) Which verse best sums up the passage's message?

*When God saw what they did and how turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster he had said he would do to them, and He did not do it.*

## **LIVE**

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

1 *God persists with His Word.*

9 *God has fierce anger towards evil ways.*

10 *God loves the **whole** world!*

b) His grace

10 *God is gracious and compassionate to all who repent.*

c) Jesus / His salvation

10 *Because of Jesus, God has not yet brought judgement on the world.*

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

2) What should I do?

3 *Act in accordance with the word of God.*

4 *Be bold in speaking the judgement of God however unlikely a response my seem.*

5 *If you believe God, repent!*

6 *No one is too great to humble themselves before God.*

8 *Bring every part of your life/rule into repentance before God.*

*Expect a miracle of grace / repentance however unlikely that might Seem.*

9 *Depend on but don't presume on God's mercy.*

10 *Be compassionate towards ALL fellow sinners.*

Now underline the application of the Main Point

## Study 4

## Jonah 4:1-11

### God expects his people to be compassionate, like He is.

This episode is included in Scripture, not just as a story about a prophet, but as the Word of God to the people of Israel of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, who were meant to see themselves in Jonah and repent.

The story of Jonah (told against himself) shows that God loves not only Israel but the whole world. He wants the whole world to repent, even their deadly enemies, the Assyrians whose capital was Nineveh, and be saved.

### Background and Word List

5	<i>east of the city</i>	Looking for judgment to come
6	<i>vine</i>	Symbol of prosperity and well-being

### Bible Connections

2	<i>compassionate</i>	Exodus 34:6
	<i>relenting from calamity</i>	Exodus 32:14; Nahum 1:3; Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13
	<i>God's concern for all mankind</i>	1 Timothy 2:3-4

# LOOK

## 1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 1 *Why the ‘but’? Why was Jonah so displeased ?*  
*Why did God pick Jonah if he knew his heart was so bitter?*
- 2 *What was his reason for fleeing to Tarshish in the first place?*  
*How can God change his mind /‘relent’ or ‘repent’ from bringing Calamity?*
- 3 *Why did he think death was better than living? (c.f. 8,9)*
- 4 *What was Jonah’s answer to ‘have you any right to be angry? (c.f. 9)*
- 5 *What was the significance of ‘east of the city’?*  
*Why did he make a shelter?*  
*If he ‘knew’ (2c) what would happen why did he ‘wait to see’?*
- 8 *What were Jonah’s reasons for wanting to die?*
- 10 *What was God’s point in the vine?*
- 11 *Why was God concerned for Nineveh?*

What surprises or confuses you?

- 3 *Why was Jonah so angry?*

## 2) The Context

surrounding passage,

- 2 *When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that He had said he would do to them and He did not do it. (3:10)*

individual book,

- 2 *I called out to my God in distress and He heard me. (2:2)*

whole Bible,

- 2 *God is gracious and compassionate. (Exodus 34:6f)*  
*Jesus sought to embrace the city that rejected him; Jonah did the opposite. (Matthew 23:37)*

Workers resentment of generosity to others (*Matthew 20:1-16*)  
 The prodigal's elder brother resented their Father's generosity to the younger brother. (*Luke 15:11-32*)

3 c.f. 'for me to live is Christ, to die is gain' (*Philippians 1:21*)!

9,10 Nineveh hoped for compassion and God showed compassion  
 c.f. Israel under pressure from Assyria and lukewarm in devotion to the Lord. (*2 Kings 14:25*)  
 God's destruction of Canaanites is not hatred of all 'foreigners' but of their sin. (*Deuteronomy 7:1-6*)  
 Jesus loved his 'enemies' who didn't know what they were doing. (*Luke 23:34*)

11 God loved the world. (*John 3:16*)  
 120,000 c.f. 120 company with the Apostles (*Acts 1:15*)

Bible story,

See Study 1

## LEARN

1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?

1 *Jonah was displeased because Nineveh was spared and his warning had not come true.*

*God picked Jonah to display his grace. (c.f. Saul of Tarsus?)*

2 *Jonah fled towards Tarshish because he wanted Nineveh destroyed, not because he was frightened.*

*God doesn't change his mind. (Numbers 23:19)*

3 *He wanted to die for – humiliation (3), discomfort (8) anger (9).*

4 *Jonah's answer to 'have you got a right to be angry' is 'YES'!*

5 *East of the city – Jonah had entered from the west and had traversed the whole city.*

*Shelter – ready for the long haul*

*Waiting - hoping for judgment*

8 See v 3

10 *Point of the Vine: God chose to destroy the vine He created – Jonah was angry because it suited him; God chose not to destroy Nineveh – Jonah was angry because it did not suit him.*

11 *God was concerned for Nineveh as He had compassion on the people.*

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

3 *He must have hated the Ninevites from the beginning and wanted them destroyed – hence his escape to Tarshish.*

3) Give an overall ‘picture’ of the passage in a few sentences.

*Jonah bitterly resented that God had responded with compassion to repentance of Nineveh. He told Jonah that he should respond that way too.*

## **LISTEN**

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

*God is merciful to all those who are repentant, including those who are not his chosen people.*

2) Which verse best sums up the passage’s message? **v 11**

*Should I not pity Nineveh that great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left.*

## **LIVE**

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

2 *God’s Word of Judgment is spoken from a heart of mercy.(1:2 -4:11)*

*God is compassionate to all repentant sinners.*

4,9 ‘Do you do well to be angry?’ - *God is patient with His recalcitrant, self-centred, churlish children.*

b) His grace

11 God is willing to be compassionate - treat no-one as they deserve, neither Jonah nor Nineveh.

c) Jesus / His salvation

2 The 'sign of Jonah', (Jesus' death and resurrection for mankind), is the ultimate demonstration of God's compassion for a lost world.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

2) What should I do?

1 Be careful of being angry with God!

2 Be honest in prayer to God.

*In prayer speak out what you know to be true of God.*

3 Be glad that God doesn't always give us what we ask for!

4 Listen for the Lord's questions in response to our prayers.

5 Beware 'being in a mood with the Lord.'

10 Try to see things from the Lord's 'perspective'.

11 Acknowledge God's righteous judgement and yet compassion for the whole world.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

# Sharing the Word

## Use

*'Hearing the Word'* can be used alone, with one other person, or in a group

## Preparing for a group

Time put in alone beforehand will greatly benefit time spent together.

Work through the stages - LOOK, LEARN, LISTEN, LIVE.

Write down your own questions and answers. \*

## Format

- a. LOOK - Any questions? (If answer is known or not!)  
Relevant cross references in rest of the Bible?
- b. LEARN - Answers to questions?
- c. LISTEN - Key verse and Main Point?
- d. LIVE - What does it show about God /His grace/ Jesus?  
What should I do

**n.b.** Leave plenty of time for the LIVE section!

By also eating together and a time of prayer, you will have shared something of the life of the early church! (Acts 2:42-47)

## Remember!

As we gather round God's Word -

- a) Listen to the views of others.
- b) Make room for the novice. (They can join in too when you start by listing 'Any questions'.)
- c) Don't let the 'knowledgeable' dominate. Encourage everyone to think for themselves.
- d) Try to include others, especially 'seekers', in your time together.

\* The **process** is explained and practiced in a four-hour course, suitable for all, called '**An Introduction to 'Hearing the Word'**'

<https://hearingtheword.org.uk>

## ***“I can read the Bible for myself!”***

To show that the Bible is accessible to all,  
the Rev Nigel Barge, a former minister of Torrance Parish Church,  
has devised a tool called ‘Hearing the Word’.

The Manual explains the basic principles of Bible reading,  
teaches them by means of an interactive course,  
and practices them on a single passage, Mark 10:35-45,  
Participants follow in a Workbook: *Hearing the Word - Introduction*,  
which includes the next six passages in Mark,  
so they may follow on for themselves.

As the principles apply equally to all, the course will both  
instruct the novice and refresh the ‘hardened’ Bible student!

Further Study Guides cover various genres of Bible material –  
Narrative, Poetry, Law, Letters, Prophecy etc.  
For the current list of material or to place orders, contact

