

GOD KNOWS WHAT HE'S ABOUT

God Bends a Stubborn Will

Jonah 1:1–17

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Have you ever tried to run away from God? It sounds silly; where can we go that is beyond the reach of the Creator of the universe?

And yet, we try.

The account of Jonah is a perfect example of the futility of attempting to thwart God's will. Jonah thought that booking a boat ticket could put an end to God's lovingkindness toward Jonah's mortal enemies—but what is a mere boat to the Master of the sea? While reading Jonah 1, we observe Jonah move from stubborn disobedience to broken surrender . . . and it took a band of heathen sailors and the elements of nature to get Jonah's attention!

This irrational impulse to run away from God isn't at all limited to the actions of a wayward prophet who lived millennia ago—it's an instinct hardwired into our sin-natures since Adam and Eve attempted to hide from God in the garden of Eden.

But there's good news: we cannot outrun God. His love for us and His design for our lives cannot be thwarted—they're fool-proof! And God's compassion for us outruns our own stubbornness every time.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

The book of Jonah breaks away from the mold of prophetic books in some significant ways. In contrast to other prophetic books, Jonah is the only book recorded completely in narrative form. Also, while other prophets (Isaiah and Amos, for example) prophesied in *part* to Gentile nations, the book of Jonah was written *exclusively* for a Gentile nation, specifically, Assyria.

Quotable

*No will can be
more stubborn
than God's will.
You can't
out-stubborn God.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Observation: Entering the Scenes

There is a veritable treasure trove of tools to use in order to study the Bible. In observing Jonah 1, let's be sure to utilize five signals that will help us gauge the emphases in the text:

- Emphasis
- Repetition
- Related expressions
- Words that are alike—similes and metaphors
- Words that are different—contrasts and opposites

Read or listen to Jonah 1 in the NLT version. (Sometimes listening frees you up to observe different elements of the narrative.) At biblegateway.com, you can click on the sound icon to hear the text. As you do, keep a tally of how many times you see or hear these words:

- “Get up”
- “Went down”
- “Hurled”
- “Throw”
- “Caused” / “causing” or “arranged”

What themes are emphasized in chapter 1?



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Who are the characters in this chapter?

Who brings up spiritual things first?

Who is acting? Who is being acted upon?



Searching the Scriptures Tips

Just as we need tools in the kitchen to help us cook our meals, we need Bible study tools to help us feed ourselves God's Word. The tools we recommend for studying Scripture are a Bible dictionary, such as *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, and a commentary, such as *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Versions of the Bible are available at *BibleGateway.com*, and an excellent online Bible commentary by Thomas L. Constable is at *lumina.bible.org*.



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Interpretation: Understanding the Meaning

Now let's seek to interpret the meaning of Jonah 1.

It's easy to gloss over a place-name like "Nineveh" . . . but let's linger upon it to better understand why Jonah would be so utterly repelled that he would desperately run from God. Nineveh—modern-day Mosul, Iraq—was a significant city, though not the capital of Assyria.

In his message, Chuck Swindoll likens the people of Nineveh to the Nazis: "What if God had asked a group [of Jewish holocaust survivors] to go and meet with those [Nazi] officers awaiting trial in Nuremberg? And meet alone with them in their cell and offer them the hope of forgiveness, in spite of what they had put their people through?" The Ninevite comparison with Nazis is more than fair, which makes the command of God to Jonah that much more challenging for him . . . and highlights God's unfathomable mercy toward the inhabitants of Nineveh.

The Assyrians were in an adversarial relationship with Israel. King Ahab conspired with the kings of Judah and Aram to defeat Assyria—before Jonah's time (1 Kings 20:34). There is archaeological documentation that Jehu, Ahab's successor as the king of Israel (2 Kings 9, 10), *brought tribute to Shalmanesar III about 825 BC.*

The Assyrians were legendary for their cruelty. Read this quote from Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria—Shalmanesar III's *father*—taken from inscriptions on palace gates:

I flayed as many nobles as had rebelled against me [and] draped their skins over the pile [of corpses]; some I spread out within the pile, some I erected on stakes upon the pile. . . . I flayed many right through my land [and] draped their skins over the walls.¹

If you were Jonah, would you want to head to Nineveh? What would you do if the Lord sent you?



Correlation: Comparing Scripture with Scripture

Jonah was a contemporary of the 8th century BC prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. They were all called to prophesy to God's people in the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.



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Jonah is mentioned by name in 2 Kings 14:25. Read the verse. Was Jonah a prophet during a time of prosperity for Israel?

Was Jeroboam a godly king? (Look at the previous verse, 2 Kings 14:24, for the answer.)

Read Amos 2:12 to get a feel for the northern kingdom of Israel's spiritual climate during Jonah's time. Jot down your observations.



Application: The Next Time We're Tempted to Run Ahead of God

Chuck Swindoll concludes his message with four compelling lessons from Jonah 1:

- No will can be more stubborn than God's will. You can't out-stubborn God.
- No resistance is less effective than our resistance to God's will. Train yourself to think, *yes*.
- There's no greater relief than being in the center of God's will. It is the greatest place to be.
- No time is a better time than now to say yes to God's call.



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What personal application have you gained from Jonah 1? Write it here.



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, Your grace is so expansive and relentless. It pursues the most unworthy sinner. It propels the wandering saint. Thank You for Your faithful hand of guidance that remains true to even the most stubborn soul. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. "Assurnasirpal II," CDLI:wiki, http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/doku.php?id=assurnasirpal_ii, accessed Dec. 13, 2017.



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Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2017–2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Sharifa Stevens in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Searching the Scriptures Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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