

JONAH: THE RELUCTANT PROPHET

STUDY SIX

Proclamation, Transformation, Compassion

Jonah 3:3–10

God is pleased whenever and wherever His message is proclaimed. He has promised to bless His Word and to use it in our lives and in the lives of others. That means God's messengers have one major task: to teach His Word, to preach His Word, to proclaim His Word, and then to live that truth in their lives, step back, and watch Him work.

—Charles R. Swindoll

THE Lord of glory could have dispatched one of His angelic hosts, robed in white and poised with power, to warn the wicked Ninevites of their incurred destruction. Seeing a lightning flash and hearing a thunderous voice—that would have taught them the meaning of fear and caused them to take God seriously. But it seems God rarely sends trumpeting angels to proclaim His Word. The Bible teaches us that God mainly uses people—dirt fashioned in His divine image—to deliver His divine message.

No one, certainly not Jonah, could have guessed how the Ninevites might react to his short message: “Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!” (Jonah 3:4). How did they respond? For now, let’s just say the number of converts was of *biblical proportions*.

In this study, we will join Chuck Swindoll in Jonah 3:2–10 to examine Jonah’s proclamation, discover the meaning of repentance, and witness the compassion of our God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

In the book of Isaiah, we read an astonishing statement about the spirit of the person to whom God responds.

Thus says the LORD,

“Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool.

Where then is a house you could build for Me?

And where is a place that I may rest?

For My hand made all these things,

Thus all these things came into being,” declares the LORD.

“But to this one I will look,

To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.”

(Isaiah 66:1–2 NASB)

Where can we find God’s presence on this earth? Where can we see the work of God upon this planet? Not in the buildings or high places which we build for Him. *He’s the creator of all!* Rather, we see Him in those who have humble and contrite spirits—in those who tremble before His Word.

Before we study the Ninevites’ miraculous act of contrition, take a moment to record a prayer. Ask Jesus to soften your heart so that you humbly receive His Word and walk by its light. From Isaiah 66:1–2, we know our Savior delights in this.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Remember: effective Bible study must not be rushed. It should be methodical. We slowly savor the spiritual meal to enjoy it rather than scarf it down without receiving any hint of the flavors. In *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Chuck wrote, “Discipline and diligence are required when we prepare our own meals from the Bible, just as time and effort are required when we cook physical meals.”¹



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Observation: Walking the Streets of Nineveh

Begin observation with a slow read through of *Jonah 3:1–10*. We'll include the last study's passage for context. Note important observations you find as you walk the streets of Nineveh with Jonah.

You'll observe that Jonah didn't hold back when he declared his extremely confrontive message to a city that was known for violence. He didn't mince words. —Chuck Swindoll

How does Jonah 3:5 relate to 3:6–9?

Sometimes, writing a verse in our own words helps us draw out its substance phrase by phrase. Do that below with Jonah 3:10.



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Interpretation: Nineveh, Meet God

Three themes thread the surface of Jonah 3. Let's look at each one.

Necessity of a Bold Declaration

In what way does Jonah 3 reveal the importance of speaking truth—even when that truth might be difficult for the hearers?

In what way does Jonah 3 illustrate that the *message* of God is greater than the *messenger* of God?

The Marks of True Repentance

During observation, we noticed that Jonah 3:5 summarizes the events in 3:6–9. So what additional understanding would we miss if the author had chosen not to include the details of 3:6–9?



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The Relief of Divine Favor

How did God respond? “He changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened” (Jonah 3:10). What attributes of God do you see on display in God’s response to the Ninevites’ repentance?

Compassion replaced destruction. There it is. It all begins with a proclamation which leads to transformation and which results in compassion. The proclamation from the messenger, the transformation of the human heart, and the compassion of the living God to come into a life and bring about a change. God not only changed His mind regarding the destruction, He changed them from within.
—Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Never Turning from the Gospel

The good news of Jesus we proclaim today has the same power as Jonah’s message to transform the hearts of the lost “Ninevites” in our world. With similar brevity as Jonah, Paul proclaimed the simple basics of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4.

Gospel Basics

According to *1 Corinthians 15:1–4*, what are the most important components of the gospel?

God’s Word will never return empty. . . . The messenger isn’t that significant. The messenger doesn’t have to be clever or super creative. The messenger certainly doesn’t have to be perfect or profound or, for that matter, all that persuasive. The messenger doesn’t have to be eloquent or impressive or brilliant, but the messenger needs to be faithful. . . . I never think before Sunday arrives about what you want to hear. It never dawns on me. . . . My job is to deliver what God has written and what you need to hear. —Chuck Swindoll



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Gospel Power

According to 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, what consistent response should we have to the gospel, and what does the gospel do for believers as they continue walking by the light and power of the gospel?



Application: No One's Too Far Gone

Considering the power of God's Word and God's delight to use it in us, take a moment to consider one truth from Jonah 3 that you need to consistently preach to yourself over the next few weeks. Write this truth from God's Word below, keep it before you, and let it sink deeply in you so it might accomplish its perfect work in your life.

No one is too far gone into sin for us to stop hoping for their salvation. If we could swear off anyone as being outside the bounds of grace, it would be the Ninevites, who brutally enslaved and mutilated their foes. But God's message cut them to the quick so that they received His mercy. So also, the gospel can penetrate even the hardest hearts of the people we know.

Can you think of someone in your life who seems too far gone? How should you pray for him or her? Take a moment to pray to God on his or her behalf. Then write down how you can display God's love to that person. Sometimes it takes acts of selfless love to soften hardened hearts so they receive a gospel word.



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Just as in the days of Jonah, when we proclaim God’s message, hearts transform, and God pours out His compassion. Don’t give up hope on those you love who seem distant from God. In truth, God’s mercy is nearer than you . . . or they . . . can imagine.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your power that ignites truth in my life, even in those times when I am not necessarily expecting it or looking for it. I don’t ever want to take for granted that tremendous mercy: to be able to hear from You, the living God. How amazing it is that You call me friend! Please don’t let me be a fleeing Jonah, hesitant to share Your Word, but let me be Your mouthpiece for those who need good news. In Jesus’ name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 57.



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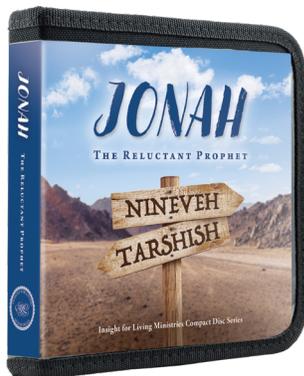
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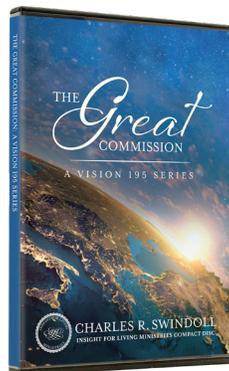
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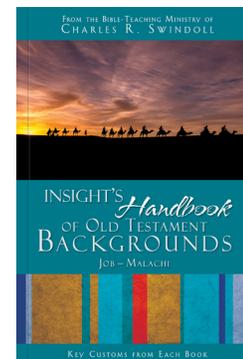
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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles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



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