

SLOW FOOD: JONAH (28 studies)

Taking four weeks to read the Book of the Prophet Jonah – which is surely meant to be devoured at a single sitting – may seem a trifle self-indulgent, but Slow Food junkies will recognise the value of proceeding by small mouthfuls. The questions that take up so much space in commentaries – who wrote the book and when, whether it is meant to be taken at face value as a sober historical account, and whether it is possible for a human being to survive after being swallowed by a large Mediterranean fish – are proper enough, but they fade into the background when the book's devotional and theological message is considered. Our Lord, as we shall see, applied its meaning to the significance of his own ministry and resurrection from the dead. We may wish to apply it to our own service and Kingdom mission, whether in a school or elsewhere.

Useful commentaries and monographs include Rosemary Nixon *The Message of Jonah* (BST 2003); Douglas Stuart in the *New Bible Commentary* (4th ed 1994); R T Kendall *Jonah: an exposition* (Paternoster 3rd ed 1995); Philip Jenson *Reading Jonah* (Grove Books B14, 1999); and if you can get hold of it, Ian Barclay's sparkling and provocative *The 'I' of the storm* (Henry Walter 1979). George Orwell's *Inside the Whale* (1940) has one brief passage on Jonah, together with some comments on a public school education.

- Jonah 1:1-2** What have I been sent to my present position to do?
Acts 1:8; Eph 5:8b-11; 1 Thess 5:24.
- Jonah 1:3** Is there any sense in which I am running away from the Lord?
Ps 139:7-12; Jer 23:23-24; 1 Jn 1:5-7.
- Jonah 1:4-5a** Am I a fair-weather Christian? *Dan 3:17-18; Mk 4:35-41; 1 Tim 1:19.*
- Jonah 1:5b-6** If I am backsliding, is my prayer going to be heard?
Lk 15:18; Jas 1:6-8; 1 Jn 3:19-24.
- Jonah 1:7-8** How do I discover God's will? *Ps 25:12; Isa 42:16; Jn 7:17.*
- Jonah 1:9-10** Has my recent life and behaviour been consistent with my verbal profession? *Ps 139:23, 24; Jas 1:22, 26; 3:13-18.*
- Jonah 1:11-12** How is Jonah's offer of self-sacrifice related to Christ's offering at Calvary? *Heb 9:14, 22, 26; Rev 5:9.*
- Jonah 1:13-14** Is the taking of human life ever guilt-free?
Gen 9:6; Mt 26:52; Exod 21:12-14.
- Jonah 1:15-16** Have I got out of the habit of praising God for unexpected deliverances? *Dan 4:34; Ps 40:1-5, 9; Ps 107:23-32.*
- Jonah 1:17** When I read the OT, do I expect to find the risen Christ there?
Isa 53:10; Mt 12:40, 42; Heb 11:19.
- Jonah 2:1-2** If my disobedience has got me into deep trouble, can I still pray?
Judg 16:28; Ps 66:18; Ps 116: 1-9.
- Jonah 2:3-4** Is it always wrong to feel despair? *Lam 3:19-24; Ps 22:1, 19; 2 Cor 1:8-11.* Some translations carry the note of doubt through to the end of v4.

- Jonah 2:5-6a** Whether or not I have ever reached the absolute depths of hopelessness myself, can I sympathise with those who have been, or currently are, apparently at the point of no return?
Ps 88:3-7; Job 10:20-22; Lam 3:54; 2 Cor 1:3-5.
- Jonah 2:6b-7** How do Jonah's prayer from the fish, Christ's prayer from the cross and my prayers today relate to one another?
Ps 22:24; Ps 30:22; Heb 4:16.
- Jonah 2:8-9** How can I show my gratitude for God's mercies to me? *Ps 116:15-19; Rom 12:1-2; Heb 13:15-16.*
- Jonah 2:10** If God's dealing with me has involved extreme humiliation or pain, is he still interested in me?
Gen 39:21; Ps 66:10-12; 2 Tim 3:11.
- Jonah 3:1-3a** Have I, so far as I know, responded to God's call to 'Go'? *Exod 4:12-13; Isa 6:8; Mt 21:28-30.*
- Jonah 3:3b-4** Does our gospel preaching today include any word of judgment? Should it? *2 Chron 36:15-17; Mk 1:15-16; Jn 12:31-32; Acts 24:25.*
- Jonah 3:5** If God is putting his finger on something in my life, how much do I intend to do about it? *Hosea 6:1-4; 7:10-14; 14.*
- Jonah 3:6-9** Should a leader take the initiative in moral reform? Do I pray for my leaders? *Prov 20:26, 28; 21:1; 1 Tim 2:1-3.*
- Jonah 3:10** Does God change his mind? *Ezek 17:21-32; Joel 2:13-14; Jas 1:17; 2 Pet 3:9.*
- Jonah 4:1-2** Is Jonah's God too small-minded? Is mine? *Ex 34:6-7; 1 Ki 21:25-29; Rom 11:32-36.*
- Jonah 4:3-4** What question might God want to ask me about the way I feel I have been treated by him? *Job 38:2; 40:2; 41:11; 42:1-6.*
- Jonah 4:5-6** If I ever get exhausted or depressed in the Lord's service, will I be left to struggle on alone?
1 Kings 19:6; Ps 31:21-22; Heb 13:5, 6.
- Jonah 4:7-8** What is my attitude when circumstances turn against me?
Ps 91:9-10; 121:5-6; Phil 4:11-13.
- Jonah 4:9-11** Do I share Christ's compassion for the comprehensively lost? *Mt 9:35-38; 23:37; Jn 3:16; Rom 9:1-3.*
- Luke 11:29-32; Mt 12:38-41 Jesus and Jonah** What might Christ have said to our own generation about the significance of the Jonah story?
Lk 16:31; Jn 5:39-40; Rom 14:9.
- Review** Am I currently experiencing a sense of humour failure about my effectiveness for Christ? *Eccl 3:4; Hab 3:17-19; Lk 5:5-6.*