

# JONAH

## THE RELUCTANT PROPHET

### STUDY THREE

## Prayers Onboard—Prophet Overboard!

*Jonah 1:9–17*

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*When you read your Bible, never forget about the invisible presence of God.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**W**HETHER or not we believe it, whether or not we see it, everything in the universe from a carbon atom to the Milky Way Galaxy marches in step to God's command.

Jonah refused to acknowledge God's universal sovereignty, so he comforted himself by boarding a ship headed to Tarshish, assuming he had escaped the presence of the Lord. But he hadn't. Deep down, he probably knew it. Once Jonah fell asleep below deck, God sent a violent storm. So, the frightened sailors awakened Jonah and led him to confess the truth: his God had sent the storm on account of his own disobedience.

Jonah and the mariners came face to face with the power of God.

How would each respond? Would they march in step to God's command? In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we will examine with Pastor Chuck Swindoll Jonah 1:9–17 to understand the meaning of the phrase "God knows what He's about." We'll learn with Jonah and the crew how we should respond when we, in our day, come face to face with that same power.

*This isn't ancient theology, for only ancient times. This is for today. This includes the storms in your life and those in mine. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



INSIGHT FOR LIVING

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SEARCHING  
THE  
SCRIPTURES  
BIBLE STUDIES

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before we delve into the Word of God, contemplate the prayer below and make it your own as you ready yourself before the Lord.

*Father, I open myself to You and pray You will not find my mind closed as I sit before Your Word, Your truth to live by. These words that have been preserved through the centuries are so precious to us. Give me faith to see the invisible, to hear the inaudible, and to realize the incredible that is taking place in my life. In Jesus' name, amen.*



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

This study will take us to the most iconic scene in the story of Jonah: a gigantic fish swallowing a grown man.



## Observation: Storms That Shock Us

Observe [Jonah 1:9–17](#). Be sure to jot down what you see. Putting your observations into words on paper clarifies what you identify as significant.

Did the sailors immediately obey Jonah's instructions from 1:12–13? \_\_\_\_\_

What did the sailors assume and express about God in 1:14?

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How did the sailors respond to the Lord when the storm ceased in Jonah 1:16?

What theological significance did the author prescribe to the fish in 1:17?

*God is high above us. That's why we hold Him in awe. God prearranges events. That's why He is an awesome God. He brings the great fish. The fish swallows Jonah, and in fact, rather than punishing Jonah, it is a gracious rescue of Jonah.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## Interpretation: Fears That Bring Us to Our Knees

If you are waiting in line at the movies with a friend and he says, “Hey, my foot!” you easily apprehend the words he uses. You interpret that his foot hurts because you are standing on it. What’s the message he wants you to grasp? *Get off my foot!* You know you have interpreted the Bible well when you understand the author’s meaning *and* what he wants you to do with it.



### *Searching the Scriptures* Tip: Interpretation

As Jesus is truly divine and truly human, two natures in one person, so is the Bible, two natures in one book. This means God used the personalities, languages, cultures, and education of the biblical authors when He deposited His Word among us. So we should study the text’s genre and literary devices during interpretation. A genre follows a certain style or pattern of writing while literary devices create special effects for the audience, emphasizing certain points. The book of Jonah contains two genres: narrative and poetry, and it employs irony as a literary device which serves to contrast expectations and reality.

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## Irony One: Hurl/Throw

In Jonah 1, the author used the Hebrew word *tul* in four locations to draw an ironic contrast between God, Jonah, and the sailors. It can mean “hurl,” “throw,” or “cast.” King Saul threw [*tul*] a spear at David (1 Samuel 18:11).

*But the LORD **hurled** [*tul*] a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship apart. (Jonah 1:4, emphasis added)*

*Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and **threw** [*tul*] the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. But all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold. (1:5, emphasis added)*

*“**Throw** [*tul*] me into the sea,” Jonah said, “and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault.” (1:12, emphasis added)*

*Then the sailors picked Jonah up and **threw** [*tul*] him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once! (1:15, emphasis added)*

The author could have used alternative words to describe the four actions, but he chose the same in each. Determine what theological emphasis the author’s repetition conveys. Remember to use your Bible-study [tools](#), such as *Constable’s Notes* at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).

## Irony Two: Fear/Worship

In Jonah 1, the author used the Hebrew root *yare* six times. It can mean “fear,” “afraid,” “worship,” “honor,” or “revere.”

***Fearing** [*yare*] for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. But all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold. (Jonah 1:5, emphasis added)*

*Jonah answered, “I am a Hebrew, and I **worship** [*yare*] the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.” (1:9, emphasis added)*

*The sailors were **terrified** [*yare*] when they heard this, for he had already told them he was running away from the Lord. “Oh, why did you do it?” they groaned. (1:10, emphasis added) (The word *yare* is mentioned twice for emphasis.)*

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The sailors were **awestruck** [yare] by the LORD's great power, and they offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him. (Jonah 1:16, emphasis added) (Yare is mentioned twice for emphasis.)

What theological emphasis or emphases did the author communicate through this repetition of yare?

## Concluding Interpretation

In the last *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we noted God's control over this world. How did the author further develop this theme in Jonah 1:13–17?

*If you've been brought to your knees and your limitations have been revealed to you, learn from the sailors. Learn from the sailors that it's time to be awestruck.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## Correlation: “I Want the Wicked to Turn and Live.” —God

God's judgment against Jonah prompted the sailors to turn from their false gods. In Jonah 1:16, the Phoenician sailors made a sacrifice in gratitude to Israel's God and vowed to Him in faith. Repentance—it's what God desires of all: “Do you think that I like to see wicked people die?” says the Sovereign LORD. Of course not! I want them to turn from their wicked ways and live” (Ezekiel 18:23).

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## First Thessalonians 1:2–9

Around AD 50, Paul wrote from Corinth to the Thessalonian church. He began his letter with a beautiful image of the Thessalonians' repentance. Take a moment to read [1 Thessalonians 1:2–9](#), noting especially 1:9. How did Paul describe the event and outcome of the Thessalonians' turn to God?

## Anticipating Jesus

In the next verse, Paul said:

*And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven—Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment. (1 Thessalonians 1:10)*

What the sailor's experienced in part—the deliverance and mercy of God—Jesus offers in full. Jesus received the storm of God's wrath, which is against all evil, that we might be more than conquerors through Him because He loves us. Now we await our full deliverance from all the storms of this world. He will appear one day. Maybe soon!



## Application: Releasing Your Grip

*Storms that shock us remind us of who is in charge. They have a way of helping us release our grip on what we have been clinging to too tightly.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Is there something in your life that you now realize you have clung to too tightly? What would it look like for you to release your grip on it?

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Sometimes, God sends the storm when we need to rearrange our priorities. Do your priorities need rearranging? Do you worship with God's people regularly? Do you share your resources with others? Do you meet with friends and build them up?

We don't always need a storm to remind us to march in step with God. Sometimes the Lord whispers His presence to us in a gentle reminder that He is with us. Cup your ears to hear your Savior, and when you sense His loving call, don't hesitate. Obey the One who has the universe at His command.



## A FINAL PRAYER

Reflect upon Jonah 1. Consider what you learned about God and His ways. Write a prayer below expressing your gratitude to Him and making your requests known to Him.

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2018, 2019, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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Insight for Living  
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