

Jonah

IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE QUESTIONS

Welcome

“You are approaching the ‘word of God’. But for thousands of years, . . . the Word of God has been approaching you.”

The following guide is provided to enhance your reading of the Book of Jonah using the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*. If you are new to this resource or to reading the Bible, we recommend you read the general Introduction before you begin. It explains what it means that Scripture is the Word of God as well as how we understand and interpret it as Catholics. It also introduces the special features of the Study Bible and tells how they can enrich your reading and study. Additionally, the *Introduction to Reading the Prophets*—especially the section on Jonah—will provide valuable context for your reading.

A simple rhythm of prayer followed by reading and reflection is offered below to guide you through the book one chapter at a time. Questions draw attention to key footnotes and word studies to lead you into a deeper understanding of what you read and then prompt you to consider how to apply what you have learned. For a deeper dive, take advantage of additional features as you go: not just the other footnotes but also cross-references to Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that are provided above the footnotes as well as any maps, charts, or essays that are not touched on in the questions.

Don’t miss these helpful icons as you read! They highlight footnotes that pertain to the Church’s criteria for interpreting Scripture (see CCC 112–14):



Be attentive to the content and unity of Scripture

Notes marked with a Bible icon connect Old Testament passages and New Testament mysteries, fostering appreciation for God’s unified plan.



Read Scripture in light of the Church’s living tradition

This icon marks notes drawn from the Holy Spirit’s guidance of Church teaching and the spiritual senses of scripture. Here you’ll find official teaching as well as interpretations from Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church.



Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

Explore notes marked with an icon of keys to learn how the mysteries of faith, revealed in Scripture and defined by the Church, clarify and connect with one another in a unified, coherent way.

May God bless you as you read his word!

of God,* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷but emptied himself,[†] taking the form of a servant,[‡] being born in the likeness of men.[§]And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.[¶]Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,^{||}that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,^{|||}and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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12 Therefore, obeyed, so now much more in salvation with f work in you, bo pleasure.
14 Do all thi tioning,¹⁵that y children of God crooked and per

2:9–11: Rom 10:9; 14:9; Eph 1:20–21. 2:13: 1 Cor 15:10. 2

2:7 emptied himself: The Greek verb *kenōō* means “empty out” or “render void”. The idea is, not that Christ divested himself of divinity when he united himself with humanity, but that he restricted his rightful exercise of certain divine abilities during his earthly life and accepted certain limitations of the human condition. In effect, the Son of God made himself poor in order to make us rich with his grace (2 Cor 8:9) (CCC 472). • Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of his Godhead within our smallness. What he always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what he assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*).

2:8 death on a cross: The ultimate indignity. Death by crucifixion was the most awful and degrading form of criminal execution in the ancient world. The Romans reserved it for slaves and insurrectionists. See note on Mk 15:24.

2:9 exalted him: By raising him from the dead, enthroning him in heaven, and clothing his humanity with divine glory. A similar destiny awaits all who humble themselves as Jesus did (3:21; Lk 14:11).

2:10 every knee should bow: An allusion to the divine oath in Is 45:23. • Yahweh swore that all peoples, to the very end of the earth, would acknowledge his Lordship and bow before him in homage. Paul moves Christ into the center of this prophecy as the divine Lord destined to be revered by all. **heaven . . . earth . . . under the earth:** The three principal realms in the world view of ancient Israel (Ex 20:4). Homage will come from all creatures great and small—the angels and saints above, the family of man and beasts spread over the earth, and the dead and the demons of the underworld.

2:11 confess: I.e., acknowledge. Included in this open dec-

serious that we pur sense of awe at ser the prospect of sinn Encouragement con readers that God’s g desire (intention) at 21; CCC 308) (CC “work”, he address and trembling”, he good deeds were th not boast of your g within you (St. Augu **2:15 pervers** • Deuterono poetic lawsuit that and ingratitude du

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Prepare

Read the Introduction to Jonah, paying particular attention to the *Literary Genre*, *The Message of the Prophet*, and the *Christian Perspective* on it. What one thing stands out to you, that you would like to remember?

Read the Outline of Jonah to get an overview of the book. What are its major divisions?

Pray

Use the following questions to guide your reading of Jonah, going at a pace that is comfortable to you. Before you begin each new section, pray simply for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to hear and receive these words as what they truly are, the Word of God. Enlighten my understanding and give me grace to put what I read into practice in my life. Amen.

Read and Reflect

Read and reflect on Jonah as follows:

- Pray before you read
- Read a section of biblical text by itself
- Read the text again, referring to the notes that accompany the text
- For deeper understanding and to aid in applying what you read, answer the questions that follow. The references at the top of each numbered question correspond to particular notes.

At the end of each chapter, review what you have written and linger where you feel drawn, asking the Lord to speak to your heart and into your life. What do you hear? Respond in prayer and ask his help to live what you hear in your attitudes and actions this week.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

For understanding

1. **1:3.** What are the stages of Jonah's steady descent toward death? Where is Jonah's motive for running away from his divine calling revealed, and what was his motive? How is Tarshish usually identified, and why is that destination significant? Where is Joppa in relation to Jonah's hometown of Gath-hepher?
2. **1:9.** Who is a Hebrew? Why did Israelites sometimes use this term of themselves? How does Jonah indicate his religious affiliation? Ironically, how is his claim contradicted? What adds to the irony? How is saying that God is the one who made the sea still another irony?
3. **1:14.** To whom do even the pagan sailors pray? What is Jonah conspicuous for not doing? For what do the mariners not wish to be punished? What is the irony between the pagan sailors' concern for the life of a single Israelite and Jonah's apparent attitude?
4. **1:17.** What does the expression "the Lord appointed" show? Where else is the same expression used in this book? Of what does the great fish serve as an instrument? What in terms of the fish is the Hebrew nonspecific about? How does the Greek LXX translate the Hebrew? How long did journeys to the underworld often last in ancient Near Eastern literature? As what does Jesus view Jonah's three days in the fish? What does St. Cyril of Jerusalem say about the believability of Jesus' Resurrection from the tomb and Jonah's escape from the fish?

For application

1. **1:3.** Almost everyone tries at some point to evade a calling that the Lord has given him. Have you ever tried to avoid such a calling? If so, how aware were you that you did not do what the Lord asked of you? What form did your avoidance take?
2. **1:4.** If the Lord has given you a vocation that you have resisted, what winds of circumstance have opposed the decisions you have made? In other words, what plans, life directions, relationships, and so on have either not materialized or have failed? How have circumstances influenced your understanding of the Lord's will for you?
3. **1:5b–6.** To what extent do your responsibilities at home or in your career affect the welfare of others? How diligent are you in carrying out those duties? How have you sought the Lord regarding the performance of your work?
4. **1:9–10.** Among your friends and acquaintances, who knows that you describe yourself as a Catholic? What difference does your Catholicism make to them? What would they say about your practice of the faith?

Chapter 2

For understanding

1. **2:1–9.** With what are these verses concerned? When Jonah remembers praying to God as he was sinking in the sea, what type of experience might he actually have experienced? At any rate, how did the Lord save him? What does Jonah vow to do? What are we to notice about Jonah's prayer? Where else are several expressions and images of Jonah's prayer found?
2. **2:6.** How is the netherworld of Sheol pictured? What is another biblical name for the place of the dead?
3. **2:8.** When Jonah mentions "those who pay regard to vain idols", to whom is he referring? Although Jonah had a strong disdain for idolaters, who acted more admirably than he did, despite his claim to fear the Lord?

For application

1. **2:4.** Have you ever felt cast out of God's presence? How would you identify the cause of this feeling, such as a sense of your sinfulness or because of God's apparent silence? What spiritual steps have you taken to return to God's presence?
2. **2:6.** What has been the lowest time in your spiritual life? What was it like, and how long did it last? How did you maintain hope that the desolation would end? How did the Lord bring you out of it? What did you learn from the experience?
3. **2:9.** Jonah offers his prayer of thanksgiving while still in the belly of the fish. How can praying prayers of thanks while in the midst of suffering help with the suffering itself? How does thanksgiving strengthen faith? At such a time, for what would you give thanks?

Chapter 3

For understanding

1. **3:3.** Of what is the word “was” in this verse sometimes cited as proof? Why is the argument inconclusive? Of what is “a three days’ journey” not a measure? Rather, what might the author be intending to stress, or else what is the point of the statement? At the time of the story, how large was the walled city of Nineveh?
2. **3:4.** What is a conditional prophecy? What will happen if Nineveh repents or if it ignores the warning?
3. **3:5.** In their stunning response to divine grace, what do the people do? Why does Jesus cite the repentance of the Ninevites in reference to his own generation? In their public act of penitence, what do the people do, and for how long? How is sackcloth made and worn? Why do fasting and wearing sackcloth go together?
4. **3:10.** How do we understand the description of God repenting here? What is the point? What does the example illustrate? How does St. Thomas Aquinas explain the saying of Jonah that Nineveh would be destroyed in forty days?

For application

1. **3:4.** The wording of this verse suggests that Jonah never completed the three days’ journey into Nineveh, that he only went a day’s journey into it. What does that suggest about his eagerness to spread God’s warning? Have you ever begun an unpleasant spiritual task, such as a fast or a discipline, and failed to complete it?
2. **3:5.** Some religious movements spread like wildfire. What Christian movements can you think of that have spread quickly across this country? Whom did they affect? What long-term impact did they have on Christian life and practice? If you were involved in such a movement, how did it change your faith?
3. **3:6–9.** Religious leaders are often the last to get involved in the spread of a movement. Judging from the response of the king of Nineveh, who published supporting regulations, what is the role of the leader in addressing people’s fervid excitement?

Chapter 4

For understanding

1. **4:1.** How is the “evil” of the repentance of Nineveh the subject of a wordplay in connection with the previous verse? What is the irony in Jonah’s “exceedingly” strong reactions to God’s behavior? Why is Jonah resentful? What does his desire to see Nineveh perish explain? What does Jonah forget?
2. **4:5.** What kind of booth does Jonah build? As soon as its leaves wither, what will happen? What does Jonah want to see?
3. **4:10–11.** How does God try to reason with Jonah? Because this final question is not answered by Jonah, what is left to the reader to do?
4. **4:11.** What do the Ninevites lack? Nevertheless, what mitigates their culpability for sin? What does the detail about the Lord’s providential care for animals expose regarding Jonah’s hypocrisy?

For application

1. **4:2.** Have you ever tried to convince God that your disobedience was not wrong or that his will for your life is mistaken? How do you recognize the point at which explaining your motives becomes mere rationalizing? When you understand what God’s will is, how does resistance to it harm you?
2. **4:4.** St. Paul, quoting Ps 4, says, “Be angry, but sin not” (Eph 4:26; Ps 4:4). When does the emotion of anger become sinful? If you get angry at God, how do you avoid sinning against him?
3. **4:6–8.** The word “appointed” appears three times in these verses. According to the note for v. 6, what does this repetition stress about God’s sovereignty? How does Jonah react to the changes in his circumstances? How does your behavior compare with his when your circumstances change in one direction or another?
4. **4:9.** In this verse, Jonah persists in his anger. If you met with such persistence in a child, how would you deal with it? If you met with it in an adult, what would you do? How have you learned or been taught to let your anger go?