



# *Discovering Grace*

*A Closer Look at Jonah*

R. B. THIEME, JR., BIBLE MINISTRIES



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*A Doctrinal Bible Studies Catalogue* will be provided upon request.

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## Before you begin your Bible study . . .

If you have not believed in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you can take this opportunity right now. Tell God the Father that you believe His Son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross for your sins. You will immediately become part of God's family and will someday live with Him forever in heaven.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten [uniquely born] Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved."  
(Acts 16:31a)

If you are already a believer in Jesus Christ, then now is the time to *rebound*—name your sins to God the Father.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

You will then be in fellowship (in the bottom circle), filled with the Holy Spirit, and ready to learn Bible doctrine.



You're probably familiar with the story of Jonah. Maybe you know all about how he ran away from God, was swallowed by a giant fish, and was spit out on shore to preach in Nineveh. But do you know there's a lot more to Jonah's story than that? If not, then now is a great time for some serious field work.

Think of this study as an excavation, digging out the doctrines that often lie hidden beneath the surface of the narrative. Along the way, you'll also uncover some historical facts and additional verses to shed more light on your findings. Hopefully, you'll grasp God's love and grace toward sinners faster than Jonah did. You might even sharpen your own sense of responsibility toward His plan.

Before getting started, here are a few things to keep in mind. First, the Holy Spirit will be your guide. So to get the most out of it, make sure you are filled with His power (confess your sins to God the Father, 1 John 1:9). Second, the dig site is Scripture. That means there are no dead remains or ruins to uncover here—only the living, powerful, unchanging truths of God. You'll find the entire Book of Jonah placed piece by piece throughout. At each scene, read the Bible passage first, then dig into the details and discover God's endless treasures of grace.



Jonah was a Jewish prophet in the ancient nation of Israel. He came from a town called Gath-hepher, located in Lower Galilee—a region known for its vineyards and fertile farmlands.

As a prophet, Jonah was God’s messenger, teaching His Word and delivering warnings of judgment. While Jonah was typically faithful in carrying out his mission, there was one occasion when he refused to follow orders. God straightened him out with some tough lessons on grace. He then made sure the details were recorded in Scripture for our benefit.

Jonah’s journey reads like a fairy tale or an epic adventure. And many skeptics have argued that the story is either pure fiction or a historical event told through rich symbolism. But human explanations don’t hold weight. All that matters is what God says in His Word. The Book of Jonah is a true account, filled with real miracles that occurred just as they are described. Ultimately, it reminds us that God is sovereign and almighty. Nothing that He wills is beyond His ability. Miracles are simply tools God uses to display His unlimited power, especially when nothing else will get people’s attention.

If you have any doubts about God’s abilities or faithfulness, then ask yourself: What good would it do to trust a God who is no more powerful than you or anybody else?

#### FACT FINDS

Jonah was the son of a man named Amittai, which in Hebrew means “true, faithful” (2 Kings 14:25b). Jonah’s name in Hebrew, *Yownah*, means “dove.”

Jonah lived during the reign of Jeroboam II, the fourteenth king of Israel.

The events of Jonah occurred about 2,800 years ago, or about eight centuries before Christ lived on earth. Jonah’s hometown of Gath-hepher was only a few miles from Nazareth, where Jesus Christ would later grow up.

#### TAKE NOTE

*Miracles* are supernatural works of God that cannot be explained through human reasoning or natural causes. God can perform miracles because He is *sovereign* and *omnipotent*—He has authority over all the universe and infinite power to do whatever He wills to do.

#### EXPLORE MORE

Job 42:2  
Psalm 77:14  
Jeremiah 32:17  
Luke 1:37





*Jonah 1:1–2 The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.”*





Before God's Word was completed in writing, He spoke to prophets and certain believers in dreams, visions, direct conversation, and even through angelic messengers. (Today, God communicates to us only through the Bible.)

In whatever way God communicated with Jonah, He gave His servant a direct order. It was intense but easy to understand. Jonah was to go to Nineveh and proclaim that their wickedness was so out of control, its stench had risen up to heaven. They were in serious trouble with the Creator.

What God spoke to Jonah was His *directive will*. In other words, God gave Jonah specific directions on exactly where to go and what to do.

Like Jonah, we are God's servants. And when He gives us—through His written Word—information about His plan and will, He expects us to listen and act. We have no excuse to not obey. After all, God knows everything, all of the time. We should never doubt that His will is absolutely “good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). And remember, His words on the pages of Scripture are just as powerful as His voice spoken in person.

#### TAKE NOTE

The *directive will* of God is found in commands in His Word: “Do this! Don’t do that!” He gives these directions to protect us, guide us, and bless us.

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God is *omniscient* and perfectly *righteous*: He knows everything that can possibly be known, and He uses that knowledge when doing only what is absolutely best and correct for His creation.

#### EXPLORE MORE

Exodus 12  
Numbers 22:12  
Proverbs 15:3  
Luke 1:26–38  
John 14:15  
2 Timothy 3:16  
James 1:22

Jonah knew all about Nineveh and its people. This “great city” was the impressive capital of the Assyrian Empire—one of Israel’s fiercest and oldest enemies.

As great as Nineveh was in size and wealth, it was even greater in wickedness. The Ninevites lavished themselves in luxury and never gave one thought to God. Instead, they worshiped false gods from the city’s heathen temple. And like the Assyrians in general, the people of Nineveh were known for executing their captives in the most cruel, gruesome ways. It was time for God to relieve the world of their evil.

We can peek ahead in the Book of Jonah for more details of God’s instructions: the prophet was also to tell the Ninevites, “God will destroy you in forty days” (Jonah 3:4). Jonah would have been happy to simply announce his enemy’s destruction, but he knew there was more to the message than that. God was giving the Ninevites “forty days” as a grace period—a little time to change their thinking and to avoid harsh judgment on earth and in eternity (Jonah 4:2b).

The thought of God offering the gift of salvation to such vile creatures made Jonah seethe. No way was he going to let the God of Israel be called the God of those despicable Assyrians!

#### FACT FINDS

Nineveh was located on the east bank of the Tigris river and was likely the world’s largest city at that time. Today, just across the river from that area sits the city of Mosul, Iraq.

Nineveh’s surrounding walls were over fifty feet high and were wide enough for chariots to drive side by side. The interior city was about three miles long and one-and-a-half miles wide. With the outlying ‘suburbs’ included, Nineveh spanned perhaps as much as sixty miles, with plenty of lofty towers decorating the skyline.

#### TAKE NOTE

Never forget that the saving grace God extends to others, even to your worst enemies, is the same grace that God has extended to you.

#### EXPLORE MORE

Acts 1:8  
Romans 5:8  
Ephesians 2:8–9  
2 Peter 3:9





*Jonah 1:3 But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.*



Jonah had allowed his self-righteous, hostile attitude to motivate his actions. He had heard God's Word loud and clear but decided that his own will was more important.

Did Jonah really think he could reason his way around God . . . that if Nineveh had no chance to be saved, then God would destroy it and Israel would be out of danger? We don't know exactly. But whatever his reasoning, it's clear he excused his own sinfulness and decided that the Ninevites' sins were not forgivable. In Jonah's mind, he had been saved by grace but the Ninevites did not deserve that same grace.

Once Jonah had justified rejecting God's orders, he followed the pattern spelled out in James 1:22—he deceived himself. Jonah actually thought he could run away from his assigned mission and that everything would be okay. And so he fled in the opposite direction from Nineveh. He snuggled up deep inside a ship headed across the Mediterranean Sea.

God's *permissive will* was in play here. God permitted Jonah to disobey and reap the consequences of his decisions. Always faithful, though, God kept His loving eye on His runaway. At the right time, God would send the right discipline to encourage Jonah to return to His plan.

#### FACT FINDS

Joppa, located nearly thirty-five miles from Jerusalem, was a major seaport for the nation Israel. Jonah went there because he knew he could easily find a ship headed across the Mediterranean.

Tarshish was a city in the southern tip of Spain, about as far away from Nineveh as Jonah could travel. Just below Tarshish was the area we now call the Strait of Gibraltar, the passageway between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic.

#### TAKE NOTE

The *permissive will* of God steps in once a believer chooses to ignore His guidance and instructions. God patiently stands aside and allows the believer's bad decisions to play out.

If you're like Jonah, happy to float along in your own eternal security with no care for others who face eternal doom, you too might be in for a hard lesson.

#### EXPLORE MORE

Nehemiah 9:17  
Hebrews 12:6  
James 4:17

*Jonah 1:4-6 The LORD hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up. Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down and fallen sound asleep. So the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish."*





For a while, it looked like Jonah might get away with being a quitter in the plan of God. But while he snoozed below deck, God's *overruling will* went into action. God had decided to use Jonah's own runaway scheme to redirect him—with tough but loving discipline—back into His will and plan.

Enter miracle number one: the wind and waters were whipped into a raging whirlpool, unlike any storm the crew had ever seen. These men were heathens, unbelievers, so all they knew was to call on their false gods and try to fix things themselves. Yet even though they understood very little, they demonstrated a valuable lesson: prayer before action! For all believers out there, instead of hacking away at problems and THEN begging God to get you out of your mess, go the route of Philippians 4:5–6. Seek the Lord's solutions first.

Jonah—the only believer on board—missed that important lesson, along with the fact that the ship was about to fall apart. Not only did he have to be shaken out of his clueless slumber, but he also had to be begged to pray by an unbeliever. Shame on him!

For Jonah, the sudden crisis included more than just survival. You see, the crew was depending on him to score some divine deliverance . . . yet how could Jonah pray while still out of fellowship? He wasn't quite ready to acknowledge his sins and return to God's plan, and that means his prayers would go no higher than the deck (Ps. 66:18). Somehow that ticket to Tarshish no longer seemed like such a good deal.

#### TAKE NOTE

God's *overruling will* is His supreme power at work to protect His creation and accomplish His objectives. While God does not force anyone's volition, He skillfully uses our decisions and circumstances to fulfill His purpose and plan.

Does unconfessed sin stand between you and God? Then do your part, confess your sins—and God will do His part, cleanse and forgive you (1 John 1:9).

#### EXPLORE MORE

Proverbs 16:9  
Galatians 6:7

Jonah 1:7-10 Each man said to his mate, "Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity has struck us." So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, "Tell us, now! On whose account has this calamity struck us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" He said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land." Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, "How could you do this?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.



For the heathen crew, casting lots was the way to find out who had made the gods so angry. But were they really leaving the outcome to superstitious magic or chance? Well, in the ancient world unbelievers and believers cast objects as a way to settle disputes. God didn't just allow His people to cast lots—He sometimes commanded it to show His guidance. When the Jews in Israel threw lots, they knew God was the one who decided how the lots landed (Proverbs 16:33).

The sailors' throw pointed to Jonah, and here we find not a coincidence but miracle number two: as part of His overruling will for Jonah, God controlled the lots. He also grabbed the crew's attention with the terrifying conditions. As they clutched the rails and listened to Jonah, they thought, "This man says he believes in the Creator of heaven, earth, and sea? Only a fool could believe in the God who can make THIS storm and still disobey." Jonah was on show for the unbelieving world to see. Sadly, his actions spoke louder than his words.

Jonah had admitted his wrongdoing to the sailors, but of course that didn't get him back in fellowship with God. The stubborn servant wasn't quite motivated enough to *rebound*. And that's why God would have to apply a whole new level of pressure.

In the meantime, we already see God's grace causing "all things to work together for good" (Rom. 8:28). He was blending a runaway prophet, a heathen crew, and a raging sea to stress the importance of obedience, rebound, and witnessing for the Lord. No way would God forsake Jonah . . . no matter how many times Jonah failed the plan of God.

### FACT FINDS

#### ***Biblical examples of casting lots***

- By God's order, Aaron cast lots to determine which goat would escape the sacrificial offering on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:8–10).
- Before invading enemy lands, Israel's army used lots to select the participating troops (Judg. 20:9).
- The Jews in Esther's time were threatened with destruction on a day chosen by "Pur [lot]" (Esther 9:24–26). To honor their deliverance from that destruction, the Jews named an annual celebration the Feast of Purim [lots]. In 1884, in the ruins of the Persian palace in Susa, archaeologists found a "Pur" that had been used for casting.
- Roman soldiers at the foot of the cross cast lots for the robe that had been worn by Jesus Christ (John 19:24).

### TAKE NOTE

*Rebound* means naming your sins to God the Father, privately, to recover your fellowship with Him (1 John 1:9).

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Today, God does not guide believers by signs and rituals. He guides us through His written Word, the filling of the Holy Spirit, and Bible doctrine in our souls (Ps. 119:105; John 14:26; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Pet. 1:2–4).

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Believers are a spectacle for the world—including angels and humans—to watch and consider (1 Cor. 4:9b). We have a duty to present the Gospel and demonstrate the same virtue and grace that Jesus Christ demonstrated (2 Cor. 2:14–17). So ask yourself: Do your attitudes and actions attract others to the grace of God, or do they turn them away?



Jonah 1:11–16 So they said to him, “What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?”—for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy. He said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you.” However, the men rowed desperately to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming even stormier against them. Then they called on the LORD and said, “We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man’s life and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, O LORD, have done as You have pleased.” So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.



Finally, Jonah's attitude was turning in the right direction. He began to accept responsibility for his decisions and was willing to sacrifice himself for the innocent crew.

Notice also the crew's response toward their problem passenger. They could have dumped Jonah as soon as the lots pointed to him, but instead they gave him a chance to explain. Then, even after he owned up, they did everything possible to avoid throwing him overboard. It looks like these unbelievers cared more about this one man, Jonah, than he cared for the hundreds of thousands in Nineveh.

The crew soon realized, though, that fighting the God in control of this storm was useless. They had to get rid of the 'curse.' But in fear of being punished for murder, they shouted "O Lord," hoping to earn some divine favor. What they earned was another shock of God's omnipotence. When Jonah hit the water, the third miracle made the raging waters still as glass. On deck, the superstitious sailors made promises and offerings because they were desperate to appease this power they could not understand.

Now about the poor castaway, any of us could have said, "Serves him right . . . he deserves to die." Thankfully, God in grace doesn't give us what we deserve. If He was willing to save the wicked Ninevites, then He was not going to abandon Jonah to the bottomless depths.

#### TAKE NOTE

Trying to cover up your sins is foolish. Even if others don't know about your sins, God does, and He will definitely use discipline to motivate you back into His plan.

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God will keep shaking you until you give in to His grace. You will never be happy until you do, so you might as well avoid a few storms and realize that sovereign God always has the last word.

#### EXPLORE MORE

Psalms 103:10; 135:6

Proverbs 28:13

Luke 12:2

*Jonah 1:17 And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.*





Have you ever considered what you might have done to keep Jonah from drowning? Maybe you would've tossed him a life vest, or merely hoped he could cling to a piece of driftwood and float ashore. Well, God's ways are not our ways. He rescued Jonah in the way only He could, with a fourth miracle. For the Creator, it was no problem to prepare a colossal sea creature to be in the right place at the right time and to swallow Jonah whole for safekeeping.

Now, are you still trying to figure out what kind of sea creature God used? Was it an overgrown swordfish, a beluga whale, a white shark, a whale shark—or something else? In truth, the species doesn't matter. Debating it misses the greater point: God is not limited by the natural world. Just as He created the storm and calmed it in an instant, and just as He controlled the way the lots landed, God also miraculously prepared a huge swimming animal to carry Jonah safely to his mission field.

Later in the lesson, you'll see how God used the fish to help Jonah get the Ninevites' attention with the Gospel message.

#### FACT FINDS

The Hebrew *dag gadol* literally means “great fish,” and that’s how the English of Jonah 1:17 translates it. The Greek *ketos* means “sea monster.” In the New Testament, Matthew 12:40 says “Jonah was in the belly of the sea monster [*ketos*]” for three days and nights.

#### EXPLORE MORE

Exodus 15:11  
1 Chronicles 16:9  
Isaiah 55:8–9

*Jonah 2:1-8 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, "I called out of my distress to the LORD, and He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice. For You had cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the current engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me. So I said, 'I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.' Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, weeds were wrapped around my head. I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, but You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple. Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness, but I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD."*





Squished inside the pitch-black fish belly, Jonah realized his helplessness and called out to the “LORD his God” (Jonah 2:1). Notice how he used Scriptures to apply doctrine. He wove together many Psalms to recall God’s grace, power, and promises and to rebound back into fellowship (Ps. 31:22; 42:7; 50:14–15, etc.). He understood the grace of God, he believed it, and he claimed it.

With his sins off his chest and his eyes on the Lord, Jonah could see his discipline turning to blessing. That’s why he praised God for His goodness. Three days and nights in a foul fish gut was how Jonah’s life was being preserved—another miracle from omnipotent God, for sure.

Many years later, Jesus Christ used the miracle of Jonah’s three days and nights inside the fish to prophesy His death, burial, and resurrection. The Lord told a group of unbelieving scribes and Pharisees, who knew the Scripture of Jonah very well, that an even greater miracle was about to happen right before their eyes (Matt. 12:38–40).

#### TAKE NOTE

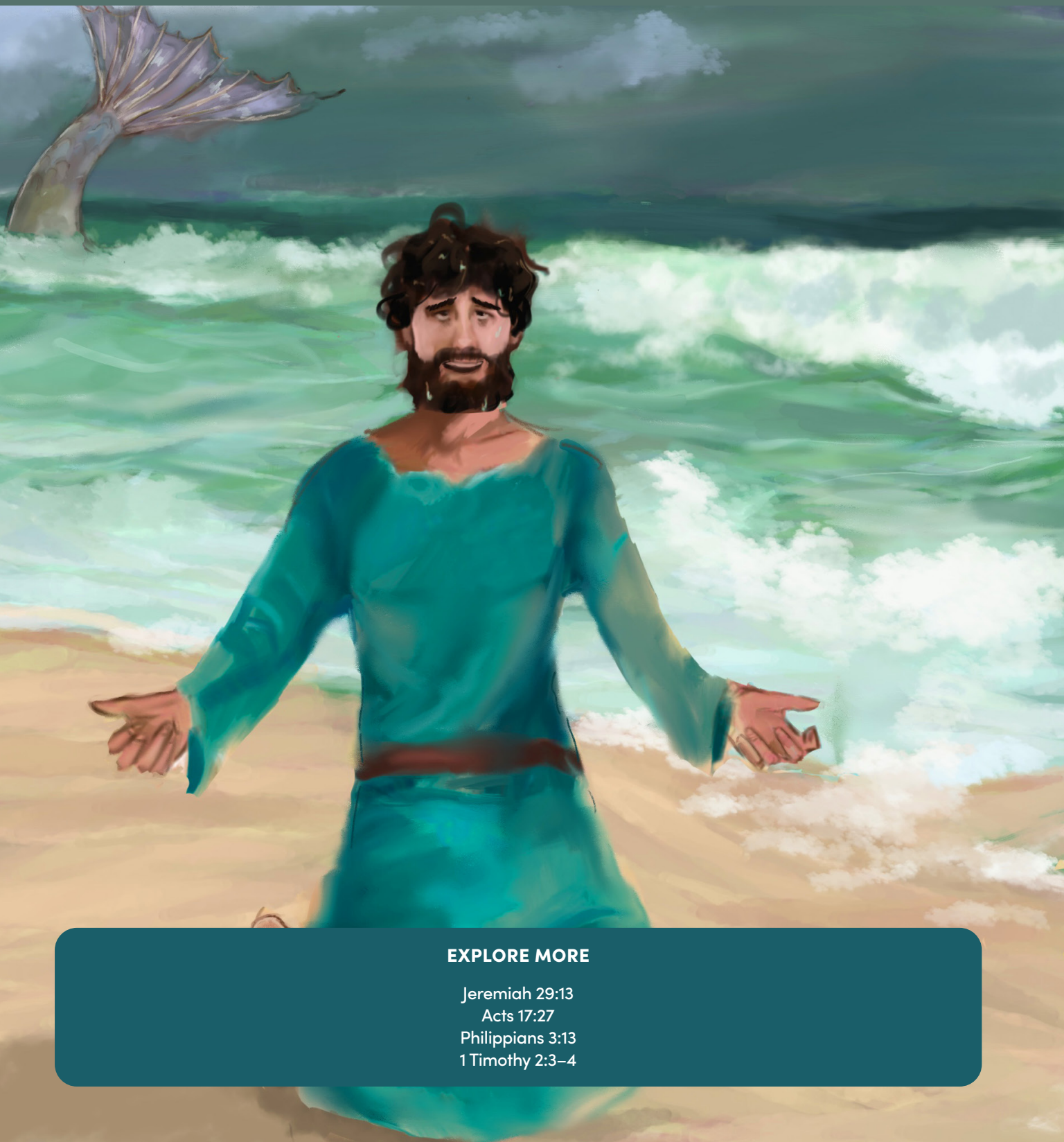
As a child of God, you should never resent discipline or feel sorry for yourself when it comes. Confess your sin then ride out your discipline in thankfulness and blessing. If God allows unpleasant things to come your way, He will surely see you through them.

No matter how many times you fail or how tough things are, if you are still breathing, God still has a plan and purpose for you.

#### EXPLORE MORE

Psalms 3:8; 18:5–6; 31:6; 69:1–2; 86:13; 88:1–18; 107:23–32.

*Jonah 2:10—3:2 Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land. Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.”*



#### EXPLORE MORE

Jeremiah 29:13  
Acts 17:27  
Philippians 3:13  
1 Timothy 2:3–4

Here's where we see miracle number six: God delivered Jonah out of the fish, safe and sound, exactly where He needed him. The slimy passenger was ready to leave behind his failures and move forward, and God was giving him a second chance at the Nineveh mission.

Once again, God's instructions described Nineveh as a "great city," and He surely wasn't talking about its glamor and riches. First, God knew there were Ninevites seeking a relationship with Him. Their idol worship was not solving their problems and their ears were open. Second, a peek ahead to Jonah 4:11 tells us that God had a special love for the city's 120,000 children. Since children often respond better to the Word, God wanted to reach them before the wicked ways of Nineveh did. They were, after all, the future of that land.

Now here's how God used that giant fish to aid the mission. A Hebrew hurled alive from such a creature was sure to draw attention in a land that worshiped an ancient fish-deity. Even before Jonah reached the city gates, the buzz probably sounded something like this: "Our fish-god was ordered by the God of the Hebrews to swallow and deliver a messenger. If the God of the Hebrews can make our god obey Him, and that God is sending a messenger to us, then we better listen!"

#### FACT FINDS

Some believe Jonah was delivered on the Phoenician coastline, assuming the fish swam eastward through the Mediterranean. Others say the fish swam westward through the Mediterranean, then around the African continent, through the Persian Gulf, and up the Tigris river to the Nineveh waterfront. Whichever route the sea creature traveled, it was miraculously empowered by God to deliver the prophet safely after three days and nights.

Dagon (from *dag*, meaning "fish") was one of the ancient fish-gods worshiped by the Philistines, some Assyrians, and other ancient heathen peoples. Dagon is mentioned in connection with the Philistines in Judges 16:23–24; 1 Samuel 5:1–7; 1 Chronicles 10:8–12. Artifacts dug out from the ruins of Nineveh confirm that the fish held a prominent place in their heathen worship.

#### TAKE NOTE

Other Bible figures—like Elijah, David, Peter, Mark—failed the grace of God but were given a second chance to serve. So no matter how badly you fail, don't give up. If God gives you a second or third or fourth chance to serve, just move forward and thank Him for His faithfulness.

God always knows exactly where people are who want to know Him. Even if they are completely isolated, God makes sure they receive the Gospel message. He breaks through every barrier to reveal Himself.

Like the young people in Nineveh, you too are important in God's plan. Who knows? The future of our country might depend on your attitude toward the Lord and His Word, which you are learning right now.



*Jonah 3:3–4 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."*



Jonah still despised the Ninevites, but this time he obeyed the Lord's orders. He preached nonstop across the city for several days. And while we don't know exactly what Jonah said, we can assume he used his giant fish experience and explained that if they didn't believe in the God who had power over everything, they would be destroyed.

Even if Jonah rubbed doom in their faces—"You're all going to hell in forty days!"—the Ninevites heard hope in the message. Here was the Holy Spirit working a seventh miracle: He helped the listeners figure out that if the God of the Hebrews really wanted to destroy them, He wouldn't have sent His prophet with a warning. And if God was giving them time to think about it, then He must love and care about them.

#### FACT FINDS

Since Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, its king was actually ruler over the entire Assyrian Empire. Jonah's evangelism of Nineveh most likely occurred during the reign of Ashur-dan III.

#### TAKE NOTE

After salvation, God keeps you alive so that your life can represent Him on earth. Your most important responsibility is to be filled with the Holy Spirit, learn Bible doctrine, and apply God's wisdom to everything in life.

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God will use you in spite of your weaknesses. Your past failures, once confessed, will not stop you from serving Him in the future.

#### EXPLORE MORE

Romans 1:16  
1 Corinthians 2:9–10, 12; 15:10  
2 Corinthians 12:10  
Philippians 3:13

*Jonah 3:5–10 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish." When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.*





Decision made! The entire city believed and was saved, around 600,000 people including the king. Jonah could have never imagined that his three-day fish ride would make him the greatest evangelist of all time.

These new believers, however, were still unsure that God would spare them. So they showed Him their faith by using customs of the ancient world. The king even insisted that they include the animals in this demonstration of helplessness and dependence. (Jonah 4:11 says God cared about the animals as well.)

When God saw that all these rotten, vile sinners had changed their attitude toward Him, God changed His attitude toward them. Now that they were all His children, all born again, He could only treat them with personal love and grace.

#### FACT FINDS

In Old Testament times, believers and unbelievers wore sackcloth (rough, itchy fabric) and ashes to demonstrate their helplessness, sorrow, distress, or mourning. Sometimes they gave up meals and drink to demonstrate humility and allow time to concentrate on prayer or meditation (Neh. 9:1–3; Esther 4:1–3; Dan. 9:3–19).

#### TAKE NOTE

We know from Isaiah 55:11 that God is faithful to honor His Word and that He uses it to accomplish His purpose.

Because God is *loving, righteous, and just*, He always reveals His grace before His judgment. He offers evildoers a chance by warning them before He pours out His wrath.

#### EXPLORE MORE

Exodus 34:6  
Psalm 36:6b

*Jonah 4:1-4 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life." The LORD said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?"*





Jonah had quickly forgotten about his recent rescue and was back to nurturing his grudge. He had taken his eyes off God and fixed them smack-dab on his miserable self. “God, why did you let this happen to me?” was Jonah’s self-pitied attitude. “Lord, you’ve allowed hundreds of thousands to come to know you. Now I’ve had enough of your grace! I’d rather be dead than watch you spare those worthless losers.” He even had the gall to admit that he fled to Tarshish because he was afraid that if he delivered the message, God would save Nineveh.

Instead of scolding Jonah for his childish outbursts, God prompted him to reflect on his blessings: “Why so angry, Jonah? Haven’t you been saved by grace, not to mention recently kept alive inside a fish’s stomach? Don’t you want others to receive that same mercy?”

Jonah heard God’s question but was not ready to respond. The frustrated grouch would not be satisfied until everything was going his way. When it came down to it, Jonah just couldn’t bear the thought of God giving grace and salvation to Gentiles—especially Gentiles who were enemies of the Jews.

#### TAKE NOTE

Salvation is for “whoever believes in Him [the Son]” (John 3:16). Christ died for all people (1 John 2:2). All have sinned and all are savable, although not all will accept the gift of salvation.

Self-pity is a type of arrogance that makes you miserable and foolish. Once you feel sorry for yourself, you’ll try to make others feel sorry for you. You’ll exaggerate unfairness that has occurred and imagine some that hasn’t. This hypersensitivity toward yourself will make you insensitive toward others.

Are you a grudge bearer like Jonah, selfish and hateful, wanting nothing more than to get even? As long as you stay under the control of your sin nature, you cannot live up to God’s expectations—He expects you to forgive EVERY time a wrong is done to you (Matt. 18:21–22).

#### EXPLORE MORE

Isaiah 53:6  
Romans 3:23  
Colossians 3:13  
1 John 4:14

*Jonah 4:5-6 Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city. So the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant.*



Jonah assumed his little shelter would keep him comfortable while he waited for God to change His mind. It would also give him—so he thought—a front-row seat to mighty Nineveh’s destruction. Needless to say, God had something else in mind.

While Jonah sat inside his lean-to but outside of fellowship, God turned the structure into Jonah’s little schoolhouse. He started by graciously protecting Jonah from the desert heat with another miracle: a castor plant grew to full height within a few hours.

Notice Jonah’s response to his hasty shade tree: he wasn’t thankful, wasn’t humbled—he was just very, very happy. Personal comfort and protection were at the top of his list. To put it in Bible class terms, Jonah’s eyes were on the superficial *details of life* instead of on the Lord.

The Ninevites’ safety was the last thing on his mind, along with the message God was sending him: “Jonah, if that little plant can make you this happy, then imagine the joy I have with the salvation of an entire city!”

### FACT FINDS

The castor plant (*ricinus communis*), sometimes called a castor-bean or castor-oil plant, has gigantic veined leaves and grows ten to twelve feet in one year. The castor plant is extremely poisonous (due to its concentrated ricin), yet the oil processed from the seeds is used for several health reasons.

### TAKE NOTE

The *details of life* are things outside of your spiritual life, things like food, clothes, entertainment, education, friends, and money. These details make life comfortable, interesting, and enjoyable, but they can come and go quickly and can never bring lasting happiness.

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God’s faithfulness to every believer continues, even if the believer himself is faithless to God.

### EXPLORE MORE

Lamentations 3:21–23  
2 Corinthians 1:3–4  
Philippians 4:19  
1 Timothy 6:17  
2 Timothy 2:13



*Jonah 4:7-11 But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered. When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life." Then God said to Jonah, "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death." Then the LORD said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"*



School was not out yet. A few more strokes of God's handiwork were necessary to jolt that stubborn student out of arrogance and teach him a thing or two about grace.

By assigning an eager worm to the plant, God showed Jonah that his priorities were mixed up. Jonah was looking to a plant for comfort instead of looking to God. And because he was caught up in himself and was not applying doctrine, the heat of God's discipline was too much to bear. All Jonah could do was spew more anger at God. In Jonah's mind, not only was God letting those nasty Ninevites live on, but He was also refusing to stop the suffering of His good little servant. So why bother to keep on living? Why not just give up?

Once again, the patient Gentleman urged His servant to think: "Jonah, if you are grieved, even willing to die, over a measly plant, how much more will I grieve over the destruction of an entire city? There are many children and animals there, but even more, all the Ninevites are now saved. They are all My children forever, so why would I not want to care for and spare them?"

#### FACT FINDS

The worm God used was likely a castor-bean caterpillar (larval *achaea janata*), which feeds on the giant leaves and tolerates the ricin. These caterpillars typically infest the plant in droves and can destroy it within a week. In Jonah's case, God empowered one worm to do the job in less than an hour (miracle nine).

The storm of Jonah 4 sounds like the Sirocco storms of the North African Sahara. Winds of 30–50 mph carry hot, dry air that makes temperatures up to 120°F feel like 140°F. Dehydration and exhaustion occur quickly. Though Jonah sat in the Syrian Desert of western Asia, God sent these specific conditions for His specific purpose (miracle ten).

#### TAKE NOTE

We get into a mess when we rely on props—superficial things in life—and not on God. Any 'plant' you rely on for happiness (like money, friends, awards) can disappear in a heartbeat and leave you miserable and confused. So learn from Jonah. Instead of depending on a 'plant' for comfort and contentment, depend on God's love and grace. When life gets tough, He and His Word are still there, and His plan for you goes on.

#### EXPLORE MORE

Isaiah 51:12  
1 Corinthians 10:13  
1 Peter 5:7





When everything was said and done, God reserved the last word for Himself. Jonah was put in his place, his griping shut down. So does this mean he was finally ready to see life from God's point of view? Was he finished arguing with God, maybe because he finally had the same compassion for the Ninevites that God had all along?

We don't know for sure, because this is the last we hear of Jonah's whereabouts in the Bible. However, if the tradition that says Jonah died in Nineveh is correct, then that would mean he stayed there to teach God's Word to all those new believers. In any case, whether Jonah preached for three days or ten years, we do know that Nineveh endured long after Jonah arrived. God allowed the Ninevites well over a century of prosperity and stability. And here you'll find the greatest miracle in this exploration: an entire population, about to be judged for rampant evil, suddenly became more vigorous than ever before—all because of the way God works His message in the souls of people who believe.

God's main message in the Book of Jonah is the same as in 2 Peter 3:9—God doesn't want anyone to perish. He wants everyone to change their thinking about His Son and believe in Him. To spread that message, God uses believers who are prepared and willing to carry out the missions He assigns. From there, to nurture those who respond to the Gospel, He uses faithful, doctrine-filled believers in various ways.

If you're not yet ready to carry out God's mission for you, the teaching of His Word is waiting. Every day, "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18a). As you do, He will guide you into His will and protect you through it. You'll become a faithful representative of our Lord and Savior, both in words and actions, and everything you do will have eternal value in His plan of grace.

#### FACT FINDS

Jesus Christ used the Ninevites as a positive example of faith when He scolded a group of unbelieving religious leaders. He pointed out that the Ninevites' response to Jonah's ministry made them worthy to witness the judgment of people who reject Him. This message from Christ is a strong indication that the believers in Nineveh flourished in doctrine—likely through Jonah's continued teaching (Matt. 12:41).

Nineveh eventually returned to its evil and was finally destroyed in 612 B.C. (Nahum 3). God allowed the armies of the king of Babylonia and the king of Media to conquer the city and plunder all its wealth.

# Challenge Yourself

## Short Answer

1. What was at the heart of the Ninevites' wickedness?
2. Nineveh was the capital of which ancient empire?
3. Name five miracles that occur in the Book of Jonah.
4. Name two Bible figures who failed the Lord but went on to serve Him magnificently.
5. What are some of the mental attitudes that motivated Jonah's detour from God's plan?
6. God is \_\_\_\_\_. This means He has perfect, total knowledge of everything.
7. Name the three types of divine will pointed out in this study of Jonah.
8. While inside the fish, what did Jonah do to focus his thinking and remain calm?
9. What sinful attitude best describes Jonah's response after the Ninevites believed in God?
10. God is perfectly \_\_\_\_\_. This means He is absolutely good, free from sin, and can only make correct decisions.

## True or False

1. A miracle is an unusual event that can be explained only by the most intelligent humans.
2. Miracles present no problem for the Lord. They are the easiest thing He can do because they don't involve human volition.
3. God disciplines believers in time but never in eternity.
4. When believers are unfaithful to God, God is unfaithful right back.
5. Confession is not a part of prayer.
6. Jonah's entire journey represents God's grace.
7. If you were the only person in the world who would ever believe in Jesus Christ, God would have still sent His Son to die for you.



8. The unbelievers on the ship showed more honor and thoughtfulness than Jonah did.
9. God gave the Ninevites forty days' warning so that they could get the children and animals out of the city before He destroyed it.
10. The overruling will of God gave Jonah specific instructions on where to go and what to say.

### Multiple Choice

1. God used the plant to teach Jonah about \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. disobedience and discipline
  - b. the details of life
  - c. the beauty of nature
  - d. God's omnipotence
2. Jonah and the Lord Jesus Christ did not have the following in common:
  - a. both were sent on a special mission
  - b. both were from Galilee
  - c. both suffered for disobedience
  - d. both spent three days and nights in an unusual place
  - e. both were brought back alive
3. The main reason Jonah sailed toward Tarshish was because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. he was lazy and didn't feel up to a mission trip
  - b. he wanted to witness in Tarshish instead of in Nineveh
  - c. he didn't want God to save the Ninevites
  - d. he was afraid the Ninevites would torture and kill him
4. God would not have answered Jonah's prayer from the ship because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Jonah was still out of fellowship
  - b. Jonah was so scared he couldn't make a coherent prayer
  - c. Jonah was on a ship with a heathen crew
5. The crew called out "O Lord" before tossing Jonah because they were \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. expressing faith in the Savior
  - b. mocking Jonah's beliefs
  - c. afraid of being punished for murder
6. God sent Jonah to Nineveh because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. God wanted the Ninevites to know just how evil they were
  - b. God knew they might listen to the Gospel and He wanted them to be saved
  - c. God wanted Jonah to seize the wealth before He destroyed the city
  - d. Jonah had failed in his mission to Israel

7. God used the worm to \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. get Jonah's eyes off of himself
  - b. urge Jonah to think grace instead of arrogance
  - c. emphasize that the plant was superficial
  - d. all of the above
8. Which two words indicate that God has infinite authority and power?
- a. omniscience and veracity
  - b. sovereignty and omnipotence
  - c. sovereignty and omniscience
  - d. omnipotence and omnipresence
9. Why did God use a giant fish to deliver Jonah?
- a. it was the fastest mode of transportation
  - b. Jonah's fish adventure would help him connect with the Ninevites
  - c. the fish would scare Jonah into obedience
  - d. the fish happened to be close to the ship during the storm
10. How do we know that the Ninevites remained faithful to God long after Jonah arrived?
- a. God allowed Nineveh over a century of strength and prosperity
  - b. Israel and the Assyrian Empire became close allies
  - c. Jonah definitely died in Nineveh, which means he remained there to teach doctrine

# Answers

## Short Answer

1. rejection of God; belief in false gods 2. the Assyrian Empire 3. The ten miracles in the Book of Jonah: sudden violent sea storm, lots land on Jonah, wind and sea calmed, giant fish arrives for Jonah, Jonah preserved in fish, Jonah delivered by fish, Ninevites understand God's message of grace and hope, castor plant quickly grows to full size, worm quickly destroys plant, hot wind storm over Jonah 4. Elijah, David, Peter, Mark 5. arrogance, self-righteousness, anger, hatred, vengeance 6. omniscient 7. directive will, permissive will, overruling will 8. Jonah prayed, using several Psalms to remind him of God's grace and faithfulness and to rebound. 9. self-pity 10. righteous

## True or False

1. False 2. True 3. True 4. False 5. False 6. True 7. True 8. True 9. False 10. False

## Multiple Choice

1. b 2. c 3. c 4. a 5. c 6. b 7. d 8. b 9. b 10. a



## NOTES

## The Legacy of Betty Thieme

Betty Beal Thieme, the wife of Pastor R. B. Thieme, Jr., began teaching children's Bible classes in her Houston home in the mid-1950s. These lessons reflected her husband's systematic Bible-based teaching, but they were presented in a style that young people could easily follow. Betty's skillful use of visual aids and verbal imagery introduced a new generation of believers to key vocabulary and concepts, beginning with salvation then gradually covering the basics of the spiritual life.

In the mid-1960s, Betty documented her lessons to create the youth curriculum for Berachah Church. Youngsters, ranging from toddlers to teens, learned night after night, year by year, the intricate workings of God's grace in their lives. Over the decades, that curriculum was compiled into *Children's Bible Studies*, currently published in multiple volumes by R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries.

The content and doctrinal principles in this work are drawn from Betty Thieme's legacy. Her dedication to God's plan for her life continues to impact each generation of young believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.







