



**FLOURISH
BIBLE STUDY**

JONAH

GOD'S RELENTLESS GRACE



LYDIA BROWNBACK

Endorsements for the Flourish Bible Study Series

“The brilliant and beautiful mix of sound teaching, helpful charts, lists, sidebars, and appealing graphics—as well as insightful questions that get the reader into the text of Scripture—make these studies that women will want to invest time in and will look back on as time well spent.”

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“As a women’s ministry leader, I am excited about the development of the Flourish Bible Study series, which will not only prayerfully equip women to increase in biblical literacy but also come alongside them to build a systematic and comprehensive framework to become lifelong students of the word of God. This series provides visually engaging studies with accessible content that will not only strengthen the believer but the church as well.”

Karen Hodge, Coordinator of Women’s Ministries, Presbyterian Church in America; coauthor, *Transformed*

“Lydia Brownback is an experienced Bible teacher who has dedicated her life to ministry roles that help women (and men) grow in Christ. With a wealth of biblical, historical, and theological content, her Flourish Bible Studies are ideal for groups and individuals that are serious about the in-depth study of the word of God.”

Phil and Lisa Ryken, President, Wheaton College; and his wife, Lisa

“If you’re looking for rich, accessible, and deeply biblical Bible studies, this series is for you! Lydia Brownback leads her readers through different books of the Bible, providing background information, maps, timelines, and questions that probe the text in order to glean understanding and application. She settles us deeply in the context of a book as she highlights God’s unfolding plan of redemption and rescue. You will learn, you will delight in God’s word, and you will love our good King Jesus even more.”

Courtney Doctor, Coordinator of Women’s Initiatives, The Gospel Coalition; author, *From Garden to Glory* and *Steadfast*

“Lydia Brownback’s Bible study series provides a faithful guide to book after book. You’ll find rich insights into context and good questions to help you study and interpret the Bible. Page by page, the studies point you to respond to each passage and to love our great and gracious God. I will recommend the Flourish series for years to come for those looking for a wise, Christ-centered study that leads toward the goal of being transformed by the word.”

Taylor Turkington, Bible teacher; Director, BibleEquipping.org

“Lydia Brownback has a contagious love for the Bible. Not only is she fluent in the best of biblical scholarship in the last generation, but her writing is accessible to the simplest of readers. She has the rare ability of being clear without being reductionistic. I anticipate many women indeed will flourish through her trustworthy guidance in this series.”

David Mathis, Senior Teacher and Executive Editor, desiringGod.org; Pastor, Cities Church, Saint Paul, Minnesota; author, *Habits of Grace*

JONAH



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GOD'S RELENTLESS GRACE

LYDIA BROWNBACK

■ ■ CROSSWAY®
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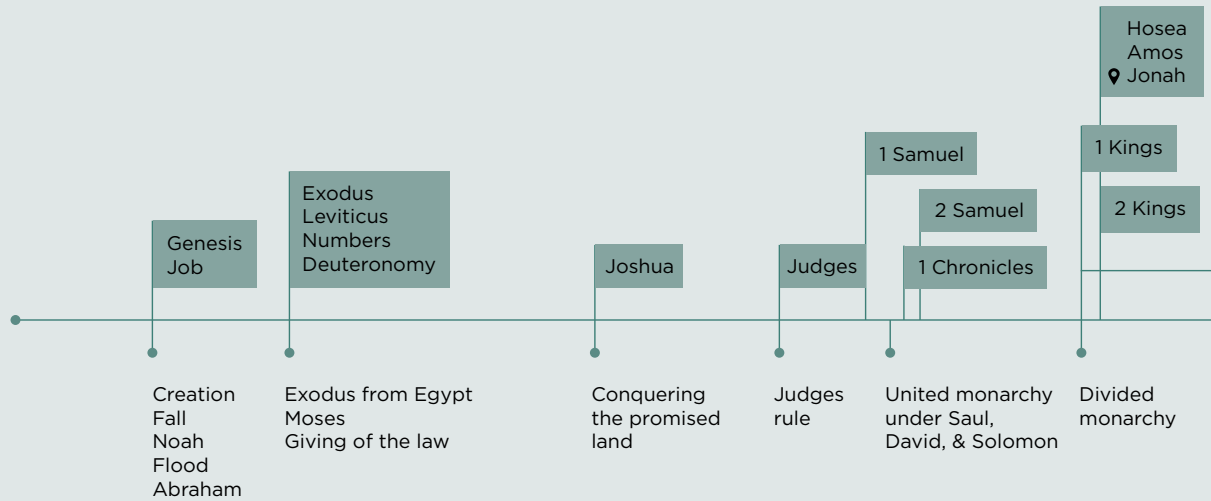
With gratitude to God
for
Patti Kopylczak, Heidi Stock, and Maria Trexlar,
and our summer journey through Jonah,
where together we glimpsed the greater Jonah
and the grace that brings us to him.

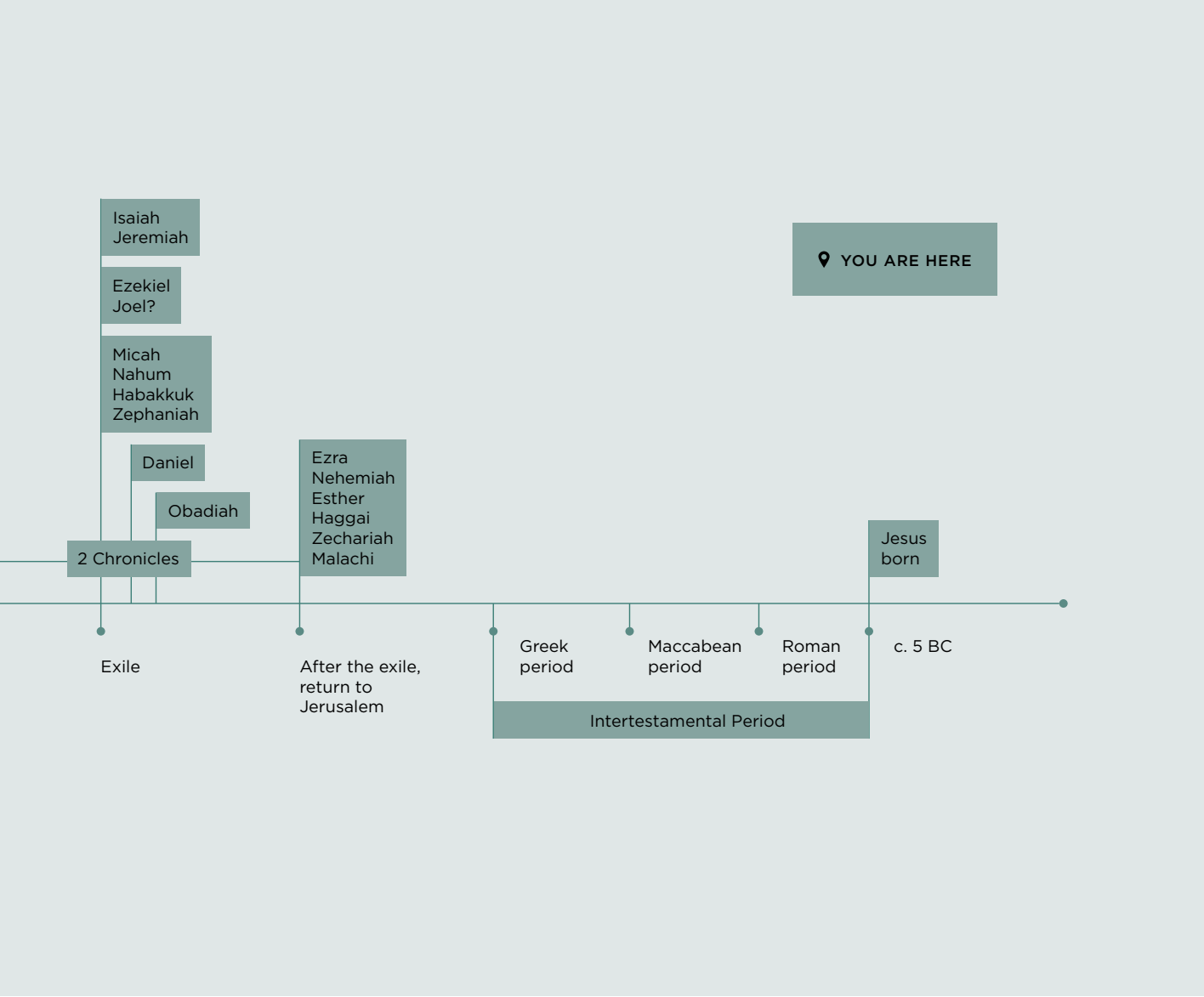
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THE PLACE OF JONAH IN BIBLICAL HISTORY





INTRODUCTION

GETTING INTO JONAH

Word-association games can be lots of fun and a good way to learn how people think. *Salt . . . pepper. Creepy . . . spiders. Taboo . . . cream-filled donuts. Adam . . . Eve. Jonah . . . whale.* My hope is that this study will remove that last association from your mind forever. If you associate Jonah with a whale, it's likely you learned it during childhood from a Sunday-school felt board. The great fish (not necessarily a whale) is certainly a sensational part of the story, but it's a minor part. The fish is just a bit player in a powerful drama about God's power, wisdom, patience, and relentless grace. The story of Jonah is all about how God works out his purposes and how nothing can thwart his determination to save. We're going to see that the story of Jonah is our story too in our struggles to trust God and submit to his revealed word. Ultimately, we'll see that Jonah's story is really a story about Jesus.



WHO'S WHO IN JONAH

Jonah served as a prophet in Israel from about 760 to 745 BC. He is one of the “writing prophets,” which means that he is among those whose prophecies became a book of the Bible. We know little about his life leading up to the events recorded in his book, but we do know from 2 Kings 14 that he had enjoyed a measure of success in his prophetic ministry. Also in the story are the mariners who work on the ship Jonah boards as he runs away from the Lord. There are the Ninevites as well, a people with no knowledge of God until Jonah came along. We must include a few nonhumans in our Who's Who—a great fish, a plant, a worm, and an east wind. Overarching all these figures is the Lord God, who works in and among them to accomplish his purposes.



SETTING

Jonah's story takes place in the mid-eighth century BC. At the time, Israel had fallen far from its glory days under the rules of King David and his son Solomon. In Jonah's day, Israel was no longer a united nation of twelve tribes ruled by one king. The kingdom had divided into a northern

Pronunciation Guide

Amittai: ah-MIT-tie

Jonah: JOE-nah

Joppa: JOP-ah

Nineveh: NIN-ah-va

Tarshish: TAR-shish

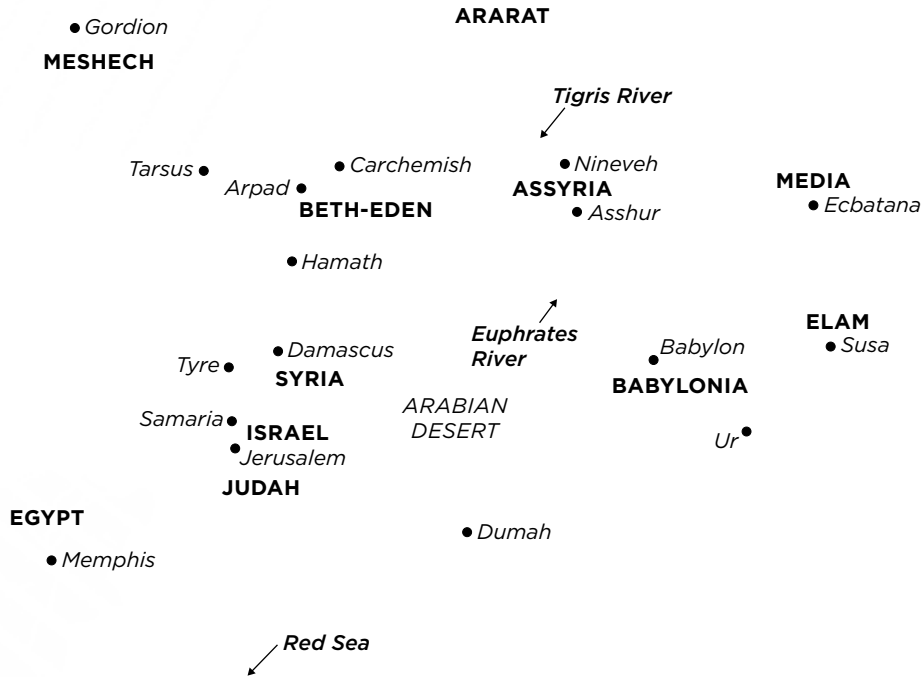


portion and a southern portion. Only two of the tribes, Judah and Benjamin, continued to live and worship in Jerusalem in the south, while the other ten tribes lived to the north. Jonah's prophecies were directed to this northern kingdom, which at the time was ruled by King Jeroboam II, one of Israel's many ungodly kings. A bit farther north was the nation of Assyria, a rising empire and ever-present threat to Israel. The Assyrians had a reputation for cruelty, expanding their empire with sheer brute force and subjecting conquered enemies to torture. Nineveh, the city where the Lord calls Jonah to preach, was the military headquarters of Assyria and the center of the empire's violent depravity.



THEMES

We can't help but come away from our study of this book with a deep, awe-inspiring grasp of God's compassion for wayward sinners, for both lost nations and his very own people. Woven in with his compassion is God's mercy and patience. Added together, these attributes showcase God's grace, his pursuit of people who spurn his kindness. God's rule of the whole world—his sovereignty—is visible all through the story, demonstrating how he works through his creation to get people where he wants and to win their hearts. For that reason, repentance is another vital theme. Unbelievers can escape God's judgment when they embrace God and reject sin. And we see the need for God's own people to repent daily of self-centeredness, to prioritize God's purposes and plans ahead of their personal comforts.

The Setting of Jonah, c. 760 BC¹**STUDYING JONAH**

Although our study of Jonah works through this Bible book verse by verse, you'll benefit from reading through all four chapters before beginning. Since it's a short book, you can read it all in one sitting. Then you can go back and reread each week's portion as you prepare to do the lesson.

**GROUP STUDY**

If you are doing this study as part of a group, you'll want to finish each week's lesson before the group meeting. You can work your way through the study questions all in one sitting or by doing a little bit each day. And don't be discouraged if you don't have sufficient time to answer every

question. Just do as much as you can, knowing that the more you do, the more you'll learn. No matter how much of the study you are able to complete each week, the group will benefit simply from your presence, so don't skip the gathering if you can't finish! That being said, group time will be most rewarding for every participant if you have done the lesson in advance.

If you are leading the group, you can download the free tips sheet at <https://www.lydiabrownback.com/flourish-series>.



INDIVIDUAL STUDY

The study is designed to run for ten weeks, but you can set your own pace if you're studying solo. And you can download the free tips sheet (<https://www.lydiabrownback.com/flourish-series>) if you'd like some guidance along the way.

Marinating in the Scripture text is the most important part of any Bible study.



Reading Plan

	Primary Text	Supplemental Reading
Week 1	Jonah 1:1-3	2 Kings 14:23-26; 1 Kings 18:1-46
Week 2	Jonah 1:4-6	Revelation 16:17-21
Week 3	Jonah 1:7-16	Leviticus 16:7-10, 21-22; Acts 27:13-44
Week 4	Jonah 1:17	Matthew 12:38-40
Week 5	Jonah 2:1-6	Psalms 88:6-7; Matthew 27:46
Week 6	Jonah 2:7-9	Proverbs 3:34; Isaiah 44:12-20; Jeremiah 2:11-13
Week 7	Jonah 3:1-5a	Nahum 3:1-7; Romans 2:6-11
Week 8	Jonah 3:5-10	Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Matthew 12:38-41
Week 9	Jonah 4:1-4	Exodus 34:6-7; Luke 15:11-32
Week 10	Jonah 4:5-11	Matthew 12:39-41





WEEK 1

PRIVILEGED PROPHET

JONAH 1:1-3

Have you ever considered how amazing it is that God reveals himself to people? He certainly doesn't have to. Sometimes we take God's word, the Bible, for granted, don't we? We view our daily Scripture reading as one more thing on the to-do list and even (dare we say it?) as if we're fulfilling a spiritual obligation. That's why it's good to be reminded that the only reason we can know God is that he has chosen to make himself known, first to people like the prophets and later, to us today, through the prophets' message and God's entire written word. Jonah, as one of Israel's prophets, was someone who received God's word straight from the source, from God himself, as we see this week. But on the occasion before us now, Jonah doesn't want to hear God's word, and he does all he can to close his spiritual ears.

1. THE WORD OF THE LORD (1:1)

To Jonah is given one of the best of good gifts:

“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai.” (v. 1)

We're told very little about Jonah in this first verse other than his father's name, but we do know a bit about Jonah from his earlier years as a prophet, a time when God made him the bearer of good news for God's people. On that earlier occasion, the military aggression of Assyria had weakened another one of Israel's enemies, Syria, enabling Israel, under the leadership of King Jeroboam II, to regain territory that Syria had taken from them in battle. Jonah had prophesied this Israelite victory.

✦ Read 2 Kings 14:23–26, which recounts this earlier episode in Jonah’s life.

- How does this passage in 2 Kings liken King Jeroboam II of Jonah’s day to an earlier King Jeroboam (identified here in 2 Kings as the son of Nebat), and what does this likeness reveal about the spiritual state of Israel at this time?

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- Why, according to 2 Kings 14:26, did God give this good news to Jonah and then carry it out?

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✦ Jonah is identified as “the son of Amittai,” which means “son of my faithfulness.”³ The name isn’t so much about the faithfulness of Jonah’s father or of Jonah himself but about God’s faithfulness to Jonah, as we will soon see. The actual meaning of Jonah’s name is “dove.” What does Hosea 7:11 reveal about the meaning of Jonah’s name?

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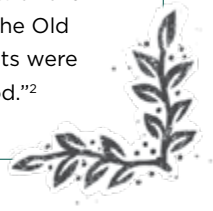
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The Old Testament Prophets

“Those who were called to be prophets under the old covenant were appointed to bring the people of Israel special messages from God and to watch over the Israelites to ensure that they kept the terms of their covenant with the Lord. Essentially, the Old Testament prophets were spokesmen for God.”²



2. GET UP AND GO (1:2)

The word God has for Jonah is detailed and specific:

“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” (v. 2)

If you recall from the introduction, Nineveh was the military capital of Assyria, the headquarters for its ruthless and aggressive army. Although at the time of Jonah’s call the growth of Assyria had stalled somewhat, Assyria was still a feared and powerful force in the ancient world and would become a superpower in another generation.

As a prophet in Israel, Jonah was surely familiar with the military ups and downs involving Assyria. Adding to his knowledge was his proximity to Assyria. Jonah’s hometown, Gath-Hepher, was only about 500 miles from this enemy nation, and word about the goings-on in Assyria no doubt trickled into Gath-Hepher on a regular basis. (You might want to take a look at the map on page xv and fix in your mind the locations of Israel and Assyria, especially the great city Nineveh.)

There was something else that might have shaped Jonah’s thoughts about the Assyrians—a prophecy given to a fellow prophet, Amos, who served in Israel at the same time as Jonah. Amos foretold a day when God would turn the military might of Assyria against Israel, God’s very own people, because of Israel’s refusal to repent of sin (take a look at Amos 3:11).

In light of that background, it’s easy to imagine how Jonah might have felt when he received God’s directive. This word from God, contrary to the earlier word he’d received that foretold God’s work of grace and mercy in Israel (2 Kings 14:25–26), was for the benefit of people who would gladly do harm to Israel. Go to the Assyrians and warn *them*? This new word was a hard word and an unwelcome one for Jonah.

✦ Jonah wasn’t the only prophet in Israel to receive a challenging assignment from the Lord. Before Jonah’s time, God sent Elijah the prophet to confront evil head on. In Elijah’s case, it was the evil of Israel’s very own King Ahab. Read 1 Kings 18:1–46, which recounts one of these confrontations, and answer the following questions on the next page.

- How does Elijah respond when the Lord tells him to go to Ahab?

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- How does Elijah address the powerful King Ahab? (See 1 Kings 18:17–18.)

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- How does Elijah challenge God’s straying people in 1 Kings 18:21?

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- How does Elijah demonstrate great faith in 1 Kings 18:22–40 and again in 41–46?

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- What do you learn from this story about the God-appointed role of Israel’s Old Testament prophets?

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- ✦ Given how the great prophet Elijah responded to the Lord’s instructions, history that Jonah surely knew about, how would we expect Jonah to respond when the Lord calls him?

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- ✦ Jonah is instructed to go to Nineveh and tell the Ninevite people that the Lord sees what they are doing and calls it “evil” (v. 2). Not knowing the God of Israel, the people of Nineveh most likely viewed their ways and their deeds quite differently, so we’d expect them to respond, “Who cares what Israel’s God thinks of us?” The real question, however, isn’t what they think of God but what God’s thinks of *them*. The fact that God takes notice of these Assyrian people and sends Jonah to tell them—what does this reveal about God himself?

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3. ON THE RUN (1:3)

The Lord’s instructions were crystal clear. Jonah has been told what to do: “Arise, go . . .” He’s been told where to do it: “to Nineveh.” God has even given him a reason: “their evil has come up against me.” There was only one thing for Jonah to do—get up and go. But that’s not what he did:

“But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.” (v. 3)

- ✦ What words or ideas are found more than once in verse 3, and what does each repetition communicate to us?

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- ✦ How might Jonah’s earlier “success”—his prophecy of military victory (the episode we noted in 2 Kings 14)—have contributed to his present desire to run away from God’s call to go preach in enemy territory?

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- ✦ How does Psalm 139:7–12 show us the folly of Jonah’s actions?

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Joppa

“Joppa was 35 miles (56 km) northwest of Jerusalem on the Mediterranean Sea and was a major seaport. Joppa had the only natural harbor in all of Palestine. Though the surrounding reefs made it dangerous for ships to enter the harbor, it was still greatly valued because of its strategic location for trade with the west.”⁴



- ✦ We always pay a price when we run away from God. How do we see the beginnings of that here in Jonah’s flight?

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- ✦ Tarshish, Jonah’s intended destination, was likely somewhere along the coast of Spain, although no one is exactly sure of its precise location. A ship departing from Joppa would have sailed west in the Mediterranean Sea—in the exact opposite direction of Nineveh. Tarshish is included in a prophecy made by Isaiah, who foretold how God would one day bless this place and other nations. But at the time of both Isaiah and Jonah, that blessing had not yet come. What is indicated in Isaiah 66:19 about the spiritual state of Tarshish at the time of these prophets, and how might that reveal a bit about why Jonah wanted to flee there?

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“When you run away from the Lord you never get to where you are going, and you always pay your own fare. But when you go the Lord’s way you always get to where you are going, and he pays the fare.”⁵

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