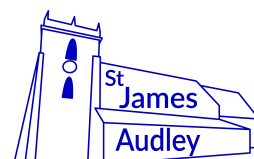




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Bible Reading Notes

April 2021 – Jonah & Nahum



How To Use These Bible Reading Notes

These Bible reading notes are a resource to help you feed on God's word a little and often and allow it to change your life. If you miss a day (or several!), don't feel guilty or try to catch up; just pick up wherever you left off – it doesn't matter if it's the wrong date. Here are some tips on how to get the most out of this:

1. Find a time and place where you can be quiet but awake. Maybe set an alarm on your phone to remind you each day.
2. Pray: ask God to help you understand what he says.
3. Use the notes to help you think about the passage (use a good translation of the Bible like the NIV).
 - 'Read' tells you which verses to read
 - 'Apply' shows how it affects you
 - 'Pray' suggests ways to talk to God about it
4. Pray about what you have read.
5. Look for a chance to share with someone what God has been saying to you.

These notes are easy to install on most phones or tablets. Install the 'PrayerMate' App and you'll find it under 'Add Subject → Church Life → UK Churches → St.Philemon's → Bible Notes'. You can also find them on our website: www.stphilemons.co.uk. If you have any problems, email miriam@stphilemons.co.uk.

Jonah & Nahum

This month we are reading Jonah and Nahum, both prophets in the Old Testament.

Jonah is set in the middle of the 8th Century BC. If you've heard anything about the book of Jonah, it's likely to be something to do with a prophet being swallowed by a great big fish. But the focus in Jonah isn't on a great big fish - it's on a great big God who loves to show mercy. As we read it, it will ask us searching questions about how much we love him for who he is.

Nahum was a prophet speaking at least 100 years after Jonah. His message is also to do with the city of Nineveh - they had turned back to their violent, vicious ways, brutalising the surrounding nations, including God's people. Nahum will get us to fix our eyes on God's destruction of his enemies as the way that he brings salvation for his people.

Thursday 1st April

The historical setting helps to understand the book of Jonah, so we're going to start there.

Read 2 Kings 14v23-27

- What do these verses teach us about:
 - The northern kingdom of Israel at the time
 - Jonah (who lives in the northern kingdom)
 - God

We see the evil of God's people but the mercy and patience of God. We also see how Jonah would have likely been known as a 'nationalist' prophet, supporting the regaining of land from their enemies.

Apply

- Why is it so important that God's people have a perfect king?
- How has God shown you and your church mercy despite your failings? Use that as a fuel to pray for God's mercy and help to be faithful.

Friday 2nd April

Before we 'dive' into Jonah, we need to get to know the other characters in Jonah's story - the Assyrians, who do eventually invade the land.

Read Isaiah 36

This records what happened in the (approx. 50) years after events of Jonah.

- What do we learn about the Assyrians?
- How would God's people (including Jonah) likely have felt about them?

Apply

Idols always claim God-like power, but are they are always counterfeits who deceive.

- Are there things in your life that you fear/trust more than the living God, when push comes to shove?
- Rejoice that Jesus is the one who is in charge, even when people make great boasts about being in control.

Saturday 3rd April

Read Jonah 1v1-3

- What does God command Jonah to do, and why?
- What does Jonah do?
- God clearly cares about the wickedness and violence of the Assyrians, so what good and bad reasons might Jonah have had to run the opposite way? (N.B Tarshish is in southern Spain)
- Why was it silly for him to think he could flee from the Lord?

Apply

Sometimes God's word tells us to do things we don't want to do.

- How do we/should we respond when that happens?

Our natural reaction when we sin is to try to flee from God (like Adam and Eve did in the garden).

- Is there any area of your life where you're doing that?
- Go to God and enjoy his forgiveness and grace.

Sunday 4th April

Read Jonah 1v3-6

What do these verses teach us about:

- God's power?
- Jonah?
- The pagan sailors?

The contrast between Jonah and the pagan sailors is striking;

- How do they react in the way that Jonah should have done?
- Does Jonah appear to care about them?

Apply

- Rejoice that God is all powerful.
- Ask for the Lord's help to cry out to him when we face tough times, and that he would use our trials to show us where we need to grow.
- Ask for his help to care about others today, rather than just care about yourself (like Jonah *seems* to here).

Monday 5th April

Yesterday we saw Jonah's lack of fear in a boat in the face of a divinely appointed storm, in contrast to the pagan sailors who cry out to Jonah to call on his God.

Read Mark 4v35-41

Spot the similarities between the story in Jonah and this one...

- What does this teach us about Jesus?
- What does this teach us about the correct response to him?
- How should Jonah have responded to the storm?

Apply

- Rejoice that Jesus is the God who sends and controls storms!
- Ask for his help in growing in your faith in Christ through tough times.

Tuesday 6th April

Read Jonah 1v7-10

- Why does the lot fall on Jonah?
- What questions do they ask Jonah, and why are these significant?
- What is telling about Jonah's response, when you think about what he could have said to these pagan sailors? Is Jonah living in the light of even what he says here?
- Again, how do the pagan sailors help to expose Jonah's rebellion in their reaction in v10?

It's striking that Jonah here chooses not to share the good news about God's offer of mercy, but just tells them about who *he* worships, and about his nationality (which as we saw from 2 Kings 14 is really important to him).

Apply

- It's possible to know something about God but not to live in the light of it. What are the implications of God being the creator of everything and everyone for you today?
- Sometimes God brings non-Christians into our lives to help expose our sin. Resolve to trust that God is big enough to use others in this.

Wednesday 7th April

Read Jonah 1v11-12

- What do the sailors clearly realise about the cause of the storm, and its possible remedy?
- What does Jonah suggest?

It's striking that rather than falling to his knees in repentance, Jonah - very aware of the source and reason for the storm - is suggesting they kill him instead. There's almost the sense in which Jonah would rather die than go to Nineveh!

Apply

- Sometimes we can be keenly aware of something we've done wrong, but also still stubbornly refuse to repent of it. Is there any sin the Spirit is prompting you turn from today?
- Ask the Lord to give you a soft heart, and rejoice that God shows mercy to those who repent.

Thursday 8th April

Read Jonah 1v13-16

- Instead of throwing Jonah overboard, what do the sailors do, and why? What are they so worried about?

The pagan sailors, in spite of a pretty useless prophet, now address God as Lord, and greatly fear his judgement for taking the life of his prophet.

- What happens when they do throw him overboard?
- How do they sailors respond to the calming of the storm?
- How does this contrast with Jonah's reaction to God?
- Given that the pagan sailors are saved from an event brought on by God's wrath at sin through the sacrifice of Jonah's life, how does this story point forward to Jesus' death?

Apply

- Rejoice that Jesus took the wrath we deserve so that we could be saved
- Pray for a right fear of the lord today, and for his help to serve him in all you do.

Friday 9th April

Read Jonah 1v17-2v7

- What happens to Jonah?
- What does this and his song tell us about;
 - Jonah
 - God?

Jonah appears to have understood that he's been saved by God's grace. He was 'dead', but the Lord heard his cry and saved him.

- How does the imagery help us to feel Jonah's plight?

Apply

The Bible says that without God we are without hope.

- How could you use the language of v1-7 to describe your plight before you became a disciple of Jesus?
- Give thanks for his grace to you.

Saturday 10th April

Read Jonah 2v8-9

- How does Jonah describe pagans here? How is this ironic, given the way that the pagan sailors have just reacted?
- What does Jonah resolve to do? How much has his heart been changed by the experience?

Jonah rejoices in God's salvation for himself, and vows to go to Nineveh.

- What is good about Jonah's response here, and what is lacking?
- How is the Lord's control over all these events underlined in verse 10?

Apply

- In what ways are you tempted to cling to worthless idols (even good things that we make into God-things)?
- Rejoice that salvation comes from the Lord. We can't save ourselves - it's all him!

Sunday 11th April

Read Jonah 3v1-4

- What are the similarities between the beginning of chapter 1 and 3?
- What does Jonah do this time?

Jonah would have felt like a Jew walking into Berlin in 1944.

- What might have been running through his mind as he walked through the huge city?
- What was Jonah's message, certainly in summary form?
- What do you think Jonah was expecting or hoping would happen?

Jonah has discharged his duty, but you don't get the sense that he was telling them about God's grace!

Apply

The fact that Jonah is still alive says a huge amount about the Lord's grace and patience with Jonah.

- Rejoice over the Lord's patience with you yesterday and pray for his forbearance with you today!

Monday 12th April

Read Jonah 3v5-9

- Amazingly, how do the people of Nineveh respond to Jonah's message of impending judgement?
- What do they explicitly turn away from? (see Jonah 1:2)
- How universal is this turning in Nineveh?
- What do the Ninevites hope will happen in v9?

It would seem that Jonah hasn't given them the assurance of God's forgiveness if they turn to God, but they sense that he might relent and show compassion if they turn from their evil ways.

Apply

John the Baptist came preaching a gospel of repentance.

- Ask the Lord to help you turn from your evil ways.
- Give thanks for the assurance of 1 John 1:9; *"If we confess our sins, he [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

Tuesday 13th April

Read Jonah 3v9-10

- What does God do and why?
- Is this God being inconsistent, or going back on his word?

Read Jeremiah 18v5-11

- What does this tell us about who God cares about, and what he wants for them?

Apply

Here we see a pagan city turn from their evil ways so be spared.

- Pray for the area where you live, that such mercy would be poured out on those around you!

Wednesday 14th April

Today we're going to listen to Jesus speaking about Jonah...

Read Matthew 12v38-42

Jesus is preaching to the religious establishment that is *failing* to repent in the light of his preaching.

- Jonah was in the 'grave' for 3 days, and then appeared as a sign to the Ninevites. What is the sign of Jonah in Jesus' day?
- What does Jesus say that this generation in Nineveh, who turned to God on very little information, will do on the last day?
- Why is Jesus greater than Jonah?

Apply

- Rejoice at the sign of Jonah - the resurrection of the person of Christ according to his human nature. That is all the evidence we need!
- Pray that the Lord would help you to listen to the words of Jesus, and to act on what you do know, rather than worry about what you don't.

Thursday 15th April

Read Jonah 4v1-2

- How does Jonah feel about God relenting?
- What does he pray, and how does this explain why he tried to flee from Tarshish?
- Did Jonah flee because he didn't know what God was like, or because he did?
- What did Jonah want to happen to his enemies?

Apply

Here, Jonah gets angry because God shows mercy to people that Jonah thinks don't deserve it.

- Is there anyone who you would be angry if God saved?
- What does that say about our understanding of God's grace?

Friday 16th April

Yesterday, we saw Jonah lose it because God had shown mercy to his enemies, which he'd been desperate to stop happening!

This passage from Exodus comes in the context of God's people having rebelled with the golden calf, and Jonah quotes it...

Read Exodus 34v5-7

Jonah had understood that God shows mercy to anyone who turns to him.

- Spend some time rejoicing over the descriptions of God's mercy to you in v6-7.
- Jonah clearly wanted the Ninevites (his enemies) to be judged, but what's the truth in verse 7 that he'd missed out?

N.B. the "*punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation*" doesn't mean God will punish great-grandchildren for their great-grandparent's sins, it means that he will hold each generation accountable for their sins, even if their grandparents were punished for those same sins. In other words, he's a God of *justice* as well as mercy.

Apply

- Do you ever struggle to hold God's justice and mercy together? Can you sympathise with Jonah at all?

Saturday 17th April

Read Jonah 4v1-4

- What is Jonah's response to God's showing mercy to the Ninevites?
- Why would Jonah rather die than see his enemies spared? What does that reveal about his heart, and his view of God?
- What is God's response to Jonah's anger?

Jonah had no right to be angry, because it's way above his pay grade to be choosing who God shows mercy to! And that is the heart of the issue.

Apply

- What makes you angry?
- What does that reveal about your view of God, of yourself, and of other people?

Sunday 18th April

Read Jonah 4v5

- What is Jonah still waiting for and still wanting to happen?
- What does this tell us about the bad desires in his heart?

There must have been a part of Jonah that understandably wrestled with how God could show mercy to wicked, violent sinners. We might feel that tension when we struggle to forgive Christians who have sinned against us very seriously.

- How does the cross relieve that tension? (see Romans 3:21-26)

Apply

- Give thanks that your sins were taken on the cross.
- Pray for God's help to put bitterness to death, and to forgive others.

Monday 19th April

Yesterday we saw Jonah go outside the city to wait for judgement on his enemies. In contrast, Jesus went outside the city to die for his enemies!

Read Luke 23:33-34

- What is Jesus' attitude towards his enemies here?
- How does his attitude contrast with what we've seen of Jonah's so far?

Apply

- Meditate on Luke 23:34, and Jesus' amazing example of loving his enemies (which includes you!), even as they had just nailed him to a cross!
- Pray that the Lord would so fill you with amazement at his grace to you that you would find yourself praying for and showing love to your enemies.

Tuesday 20th April

Read Jonah 4v6-9

- What does the Lord do in verse 6, and how does Jonah feel about the plant?
- What does the Lord then do about the plant in v7, and how does Jonah feel?

Jonah clearly cares more about his own comfort than the lives of 120,000 Ninevites made in God's image. His joy and anger again expose where his heart is. He wants to die, as he's not getting anything that he wants (which would be a combination of a nice bit of shade to watch burning sulphur rain down on the Ninevites).

- What's the right answer to God's question in v9?

Apply

Our natural tendency is to want to be God, which is particularly exposed in anger when we don't get our way.

- Pray for the Lord's help today to be content with being a faithful creature of an all-wise Creator.

Wednesday 21st April

Read Jonah 4v10-11

- How does God help Jonah to understand why he (and Jonah) should care about the people of Nineveh?
- How patient is God being with Jonah?

Read 2 Peter 3:8-9.

- How does this express God's heart for the Ninevites, for Jonah, and for us?

Apply

- Pray that we would share God's heart for the lost, and that we would put to death any desire to see some people judged rather than saved.

Thursday 22nd April

Today we come back to the pagan city of Nineveh. After their repentance in the book of Jonah, they turned back to their violent, vicious ways, brutalising the surrounding nations, including the Israelites. In the time of Nahum, they had conquered the northern kingdom Israel and carted its people away, torturing and flaying the captives. The rest of God's people in southern Judah are terrified.

Read Nahum 1v1-6

- What aspect of God's character is Nahum focused on? How do you feel about that?
- Try to imagine the pictures of v3-6 – what impression do they make? How do you respond to them?

God is described as 'jealous' – think of a protective father whose children are being threatened.

- So how might this prophecy be good news?

Apply

Our enemies are not a single nation. But Satan is at war with God's people, and the world is on his side.

- How can this vision of God give us comfort, rather than frighten or distress us?
- Talk to God about how you feel about this aspect of him. Pray for his protection from our spiritual enemies.

Friday 23rd April

God's people are under threat from mighty Assyria and its capital, Nineveh. But Nahum is here to comfort them.

Read Nahum 1v7-11

- What is God to his people? What does he feel for them?
- How does that compare to how he feels about his enemies? What will happen to them?
- What different word-pictures does Nahum use to paint a picture of that fate for us?

Apply

Think of the trouble that God's people face, here and around the world.

- How does this passage encourage us to respond to those troubles?

The Bible speaks of a day when God's enemy Satan, and those who refuse to bow before God, will come to battle.

- In the light of this passage, what can we be confident of about that future day?
- How is this different to how we often think of God's wrath/anger?
- Thank God for his mighty, protective wrath, and how he is a refuge in times of trouble. Run to him from the trouble in your life now.

Saturday 24th April

Nineveh has been pushing the world around for a while now, on and off, including God's people. Now we hear God's sentence against them.

Read Nahum 1v12-14

- What might Nineveh have thought would protect them? (v12) What does God say about that?
- What is God going to take away from Nineveh? (v14) Why do you think he mentions those things?

Remember Nineveh had been the capital of the regional superpower for hundreds of years – so imagine how unlikely this would have seemed in light of that.

- What does Nineveh's destruction mean for the remainder of God's people (Judah)?

Apply

- How does the world in rebellion against God today look similar to how Nineveh might have looked back then?
- What does the destruction of God's enemies mean for God's people? Why does that mean that the coming Judgement Day is good news for us?

This all might seem very harsh. But remember, this is the world that attacks God's people, and God cares too much to stand aside.

- Pray in light of God's care for his people.

Sunday 25th April

Read Nahum 1v15-2v2

- This passage gives us two contrasting situations – what are they?
- What is Judah's past? What is its future?
- What is Nineveh's future?
- What is the link between these situations? Why might that be surprising?

Apply

Remember, when we think about how Nahum applies today, the enemies of God's people aren't a physical kingdom/city. Instead, they're spiritual, led by Satan, with the unbelieving world following.

- How do we and Christians round the world find ourselves in the situation that Judah faced in the past?
- How does that make you feel?

Judah's future is a mere foretaste of our future peace.

- How can that encourage us?
- What has to happen to God's enemies for that peace to come about? How does that change the way we look at God's anger and judgement?
- Pray, thanking God for his future judgement that brings us peace and safety to worship him.

Monday 26th April

Today's passage is written in vivid picture language to bring the horror of the fall of Nineveh home to us.

Read Nahum 2v3-10

Remember, Nineveh was the capital of the regional superpower of that time, Assyria.

- How do its armies look in v3-4?
- How do things change in v5-10?

As you read this passage, let your imagination run with the images in it.

- How does this passage get you to feel about the fall of Nineveh?

Apply

- Given Nineveh's position at the time, how do you think they would have reacted to this passage?

God has also promised that the whole world of people in rebellion to him will fall.

- How likely does that seem to you, looking at that world now?
- How does this passage help us to see that reality differently?
- What will that fall be like?
- Pray that you and your church would trust that God will bring his enemies down, just as he promised and did to Nineveh.

Tuesday 27th April

The Assyrian empire used the lion symbol like we do sometimes, as a symbol of their royalty. Here, God uses it to picture the end of Nineveh's cruel strength.

Read Nahum 2v11-13

- How did Nineveh and its kings seem in the past? Imagine the picture in your mind - what in particular about Nineveh do you think this is showing?
- What is going to happen to this aspect of Nineveh?
- Why? What aspect of God does this focus us on?

Apply

"I am against you' declares the Lord Almighty." (v13)

- What is so awful about these words? What would be the implications of having the Lord Almighty against us?

Romans 8v31 says *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*

- How can today's passage help you appreciate having God for you, rather than against you?
- How does this impact your view of Jesus?
- Thank God that he is for those who follow Jesus, so we don't face the terrible fate of his enemies. Thank him for his grace in bringing us onto his side.

Wednesday 28th April

Nahum's prophecy continues to follow its thread – Nineveh, the capital of the enemies of God, must fall, and today we see more of why.

Read Nahum 3v1-11

- What is Nahum's picture of Nineveh now? Why do you think that might be?
- What are some of the reasons for the judgement against Nineveh?
- What aspect of Nineveh is destroyed in this passage?

God talks about Thebes, the powerful ancient capital of Egypt that fell before Nineveh.

- Why do you think God talks about Thebes?

Apply

- How do we see Nineveh's sins being repeated today?

Revelation 18-19 gives a similar warning now of doom to the world that opposes God (called 'Babylon').

- Do people believe that message?
- How does Nahum's prophecy and its fulfilment (Nineveh was destroyed) help us react to that message of judgment to come?
- Pray for people to believe that God's judgement really will come and to turn to God for salvation.

Thursday 29th April

Nineveh, the capital city of the enemies of God's people, looks unshakeable. But God says they're ripe for taking.

Read Nahum 3v12-17

- What is the point God is making with the comparison to fig-trees (v12)? What does that tell us about God?
- God addresses Nineveh's pride in its foreign merchants in v16. What comparison does he make? What is his point?
- What impression would those merchants have given about Nineveh?
- What does what they will do after Nineveh's fall mean for Nineveh?

Apply

Nineveh's fortresses, troops and merchants seemed to provide security and prosperity for Nineveh.

- What in the world today seems to provide prosperity and security in a similar way?
- How does this passage help reorient our view of those things?
- What does Nineveh's weakness before God tell us about the power of God (especially given Nineveh's huge empire)?
- Thank God that no evil power will be able to stand before him forever.

Friday 30th April

Today we conclude the book of Nahum, who has been fixing our eyes on the destruction of the enemies of God and the salvation that brings for God's people.

Read Nahum 3v18-19

The shepherds in verse 18 are the rulers of Nineveh and the wider country of Assyria.

- What is God's summary of the fate of Assyria?
- What will the reaction of the nations be?
- Why? How does that help us understand God's judgement rightly?

Assyria used to take away the population of countries it conquered, then replace them with others to make it easier to govern.

- How does God respond to that in this passage?

Apply

Those who are cruel to others often seem to be at the top of the tree in this world.

- How do these verses (and the whole of Nahum) address that?
- How do these verses (and the whole of Nahum) help us to see God's anger and destruction of his enemies rightly?
- Pray for God to comfort us when we are persecuted for him with confidence in his future victory.