

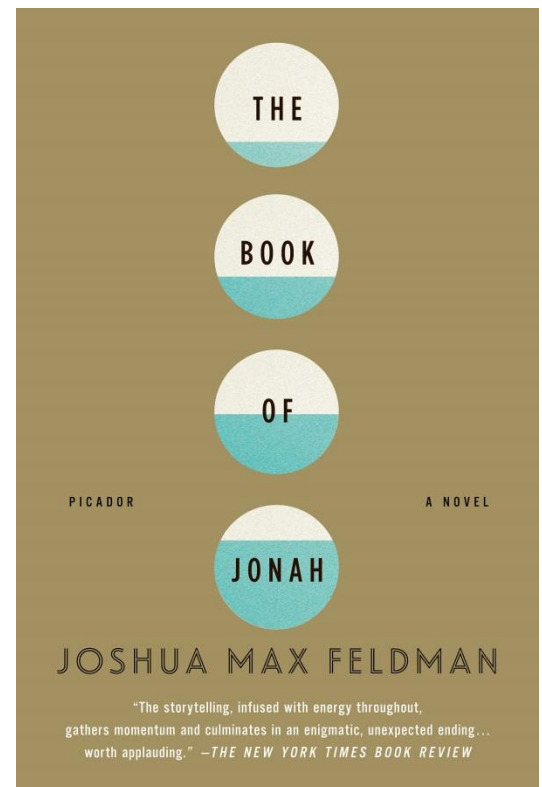
PICADOR

Reading Group Gold

The Book of Jonah

By Joshua Max Feldman

1. In the biblical text of the book of Jonah, God instructs Jonah to prophesy the destruction of the city of Nineveh, yet Jonah tries to escape the divine mission. Although the novel is based on a story that is thousands of years old, how does it translate to a modern story that is relevant today? What are some of the themes that are common in the lives of both Jonah of the Bible and Jonah in the novel?
2. Describe Jonah at the beginning of the novel and how he is changed after he starts having visions. Why is he no longer able to be the same person that he once was, no matter how hard he tries? Why do you think Jonah is “chosen” by God?
3. The story moves from New York to Amsterdam, and then Las Vegas. What are the characteristics of each location, and how does each unique setting act as the perfect backdrop for the different stages in the characters’ journey?
4. Jonah’s life unravels just at the moment when he thinks he has achieved everything he has always wanted. In the same way, Judith’s world comes crumbling down when she feels that her life is perfect, then loses everything she holds dear in life. What is the purpose of loss in life? Do you think that one must be stripped of everything in order to find out who he/she really is? Or are the losses in life mere obstacles that challenge one to become the person he/she is meant to be?
5. What is the significance of being naked in the context of the story? There are multiple references to the nakedness of others, and also instances when the characters examine themselves stripped down and unclothed. What does it mean when the Hasid says, “The body is clothed, but the soul is naked?”
6. Judith says, “Maybe there is a person the world expects you to be, and all your struggles not to be that person are in vain.” What does the universe expect from Judith? From Jonah? What are the things that prevent them from being who they want to be? How does one really know what kind of person they are supposed to be? Do we decide who we become, or is it dictated by a higher power?
7. Jonah and Judith’s physical appearances change as the novel progresses. How are their appearances altered, and what is the significance of this change? How do their outward selves mirror what happens to them as a whole?



8. Examine Jonah's relationships with Sylvia, Zoey, and Judith. What causes his relationships with Sylvia and Zoey to fail? Is his relationship with Judith any different? What do you predict for their future together? What do you believe are the core factors in a successful relationship? Do you believe in the fated "one," or do you think that we choose who we want to be with?

9. What is the role of faith in the novel? Do you think that faith is only associated with religion, or can it be linked to things outside of the divine? How do people come to faith? What were the things that Jonah and Judith put their faith in, and did this change at all during the course of their journey?

10. The novel ends with more uncertainties and questions. What do you think will happen to Jonah and Judith and what do you think is the author's reasoning in keeping the ending open to interpretation? What does it mean when God says to Jonah, "Is there not so much more under heaven than shadow?"

About the Author

Joshua Max Feldman is a writer of fiction and plays. Born and raised in Amherst, Massachusetts, he graduated from Columbia University and currently lives in south Florida. *The Book of Jonah* is his first novel.



Join the discussion online:

www.facebook.com/PicadorBookClub

Reading Group Guide written by Henry Holt and Company