

Sample Study

Jonah/Habakkuk

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Read – Jonah 1:1-2:10; other references as given.

The book of Jonah is not about Jonah, nor is it about a great fish or a great city (i.e., Nineveh). The book of Jonah is about God. The Book reveals God's great missionary heart and His infinite love for the wicked (the Assyrians) and the wayward (Jonah). The Book has been called the "Book of Acts" of the Old Testament because it reveals God's searching heart for those who rebel against Him.

Jonah is the fifth of the twelve Old Testament (abbrev. OT hereafter) books known as the Minor Prophets. The Minor Prophets are known as such because of their comparative brevity to the four Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel) that precede them in our English Bibles.

The book of Jonah, with its famous story of Jonah being swallowed by a great fish, continues to fascinate believers of all ages. Believers are equally intrigued by Jonah's bold rejection of God's command and the Lord's relentless pursuit of His "servant". Jonah was a world-class rebel, but at least he was not a hypocrite. There was no playing church with this guy. He was planning to run away from God as far and as fast as he could. If we listen carefully, we can almost hear him say, "*I'm outta here,*" as he boards a ship bound for Spain. (Note: Tarshish was an ancient city on the southeastern coast.)

There is much to learn about God and His love in these 48 verses. Now, before we begin, ask God to reveal His precious truths to you.

1. After the death of King Solomon, Israel's third king, the nation entered a civil war that ended with the establishment of two nations. The ten northern tribes retained the name Israel and the two southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) took the name of Judah (the larger of the two southern tribes).
 - a. The book of Jonah provides us with only a brief introduction of the prophet himself (Jon. 1:1). What else does the Bible tell us about Jonah (2 Kgs. 14:23-25)?
 - b. The opening words, **Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah**, literally means the word of the Lord "was" or "became" to Jonah. We are not told how it came to the prophet; nor is it important, since it is the message of God rather than the messenger that is essential. What did God command Jonah to do (Jon. 1:2)?
 - c. How did the prophet respond to His divine command (Jonah 1:3)?
2. From 2 Kgs. 14:23-25 we learn that Jonah lived during the reign of King Jeroboam. (Note: This king is known as Jeroboam II, which places the historical setting of the Book from 793-753 BC.) During this period the nation Assyria (modern Syria) was in the declining years of its military domination of the Middle East. The Assyrians were renowned for their cruelty and were a constant threat to both Israel and Judah.
 - a. Jonah's desire to flee from the presence of the Lord seems surprising since he had been a faithful prophet of God. Many New Testament (abbrev. NT hereafter) believers are secretly amazed how the prophet Jonah could blatantly ignore the direct command of God. However, there is a striking parallel in God's relationship with the church today. What direct command has God given every church and every believer that is also ignored by thousands of believers every day (Matt 28:19, 20, Acts 1:8)?

- b. If you are a Christian, how long has it been since you warned an unsaved person of the coming judgment of God? Are you, like Jonah, fleeing from the presence of the Lord's command to be His witness to the lost?
3. As you read the beginning verses of chapter one, it is easy to focus on the prophet's defection rather than what God was doing. Take a minute to consider what God is doing in these opening verses. List at least five things that the Text teaches us about God and His nature (Jon. 1:1-7).
4. When God's people turn away from His commands, they sin and others are hurt in the process. Tragically the erring believer is often oblivious (i.e., asleep like Jonah) while others are experiencing great peril (Jon. 1:4-6). Jonah's sin kept him from understanding the full impact his disobedience had upon others.
 - a. Name four individuals or groups who were adversely affected by Jonah's rebellion and how they were affected (Jon. 1:4-6). (Note: Like Jonah, you might have trouble seeing these three individuals or groups who were negatively impacted by his sin, but think hard: there are at least four.)
 - b. Has there been a time when your rebellion against God caused others to be hurt or adversely affected? What spiritual lesson(s) did you learn from this experience?
5. God could have rejected Jonah and chosen another prophet to serve Him. Nevertheless God pursued His wayward servant with a love that often stands in sharp contrast to the church's spiritual indifference toward believers who have fallen into sin.
 - a. What three things did God cause to happen to Jonah in an attempt to restore him to spiritual fellowship and service (Jon. 1:4-8)?
 - b. What two things should believers do when another Christian falls away from the Lord (Ja. 5:16b; Gal. 6:1)?
6. God sent **a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up** (Jon. 1:4). Jonah was awakened by the anxious captain and joined the superstitious mariners as they cast lots to determine which sailor was responsible for the storm. When Jonah was chosen, he responded to their interrogation by saying, **"I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land"** (Jonah 1:9).
 - a. Jonah's response to the desperate mariners seems falsely religious in light of his rebellion. How do we know that Jonah did not have a full understanding of the fear of the Lord at this time (Pro. 8:13, 14:27)?
 - b. Take a minute to examine your life. When you consider the things you do (both public acts and private thoughts), can you honestly say that you truly fear the Lord?

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1. a. Jonah was a prophet from a place called Gath Hepher. God had used him to minister to a wicked king of Israel named Jeroboam, the son of Joash.
b. God commanded Jonah to go to the Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and preach against all the wickedness that the people were doing.
c. Jonah fled from God and went down to the port city of Joppa. There he boarded a ship bound for Spain in an attempt to flee from the presence of the Lord.

2. a. God has commanded His people to be aggressively intentional about making disciples of all nations. This means they are to be personally engaged in evangelistic outreach to the unsaved, leading them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, seeing them baptized, and then training them in all the ways of God. Believers must realize that they are not fulfilling God's will if they are simply regular in their attendance to their church and avoiding the sins that are common among the non-Christian community.
b. Answers will vary.

3. 1. God communicates with man (v. 1, **Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah**).
2. God opposes sin and wants people to turn from it (v. 2, **cry out against it**).
3. God sees the works of man (v. 2, **their wickedness has come up before Me**).
4. God commands man and expects him to obey (v. 2, **Arise, go**).
5. God has control over the seas (v. 4, **the Lord sent out a great wind**).

4. a. 1. The sailors experienced fear.
2. The captain may have lost his job because he was responsible for the safe arrival of the cargo.
3. The individuals or corporation who owned the ship.
4. The individual or corporation who owned the cargo, which was likely uninsured.
5. The other ships and their crews in the immediate area of the storm.
6. The people of Nineveh who did not hear God's message when He originally told Jonah to go to them.
b. Answers will vary.

5. a. 1. God used nature (i.e., **a great wind...and a mighty tempest**, v. 4) to cause distress in Jonah's life.
2. God used the unsaved ship captain to confront Jonah with his selfish disregard for the welfare of the other sailors and the ship (v. 6).
3. God allowed Jonah to be identified through the casting of the lot (vv. 6, 7).
b. They should pray fervently for the fallen Christian (Ja. 5:16b). They should also attempt to restore the sinning brother or sister in a spirit of gentleness after a time of self-examination to eliminate any hint of a critical or judgmental spirit (Gal. 6:1).

6. a. A true fear of the Lord causes an individual to depart from evil (Pro. 8:13). It is likely that the prophet Jonah would have known that his rebellion against God's direct command was an act of evil. Jonah would also have been experiencing the spiritual dryness that all believers experience when they walk away from the Lord. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life that brings joy, peace, and blessing (Pro. 14:27). Those who have experienced the goodness of God in earlier times soon realize its absence when they walk away from God.
b. Answers will vary.