

JONAH

STUDY GUIDE

AUTHOR & DATE

Most of what we know about the author of Jonah (meaning “dove”) comes from **2 Kings 14:23-27** and **Jonah 1:1**. **Read the passages** and answer the following:

- Who was king of Judah?
- Who was king of Israel?
- Who was Jonah’s father?
- Where did Jonah live?

Interestingly, Jonah is the only Old Testament prophet directed to travel to a Gentile nation and give a prophetic message. As you’ll see, Jonah takes offense at being told to do this and travels in a completely different direction. It is Jonah’s outright disobedience which has dubbed him a variety of names:

- Reluctant missionary
- Disobedient servant
- Runaway prophet

Dating of the book is largely based on the reigning king of Israel who reigned around 793-753 B.C. Based on information found in 2 Kings 14:25, we can estimate the book was written **around 760 B.C.** This means Jonah was a contemporary of Hosea and Amos, and possibly Joel.

NINEVAH AND THE ASSYRIANS

To understand the book of Jonah, you need to know a bit about Nineveh and the Assyrian people. One of Noah’s grandsons, Nimrod (the mighty warrior) established the city and tower of Babel (Genesis chapters 10-11), which later became Assyria with Nineveh as its capital. We’ll learn more about the destruction of Nineveh when we study the book of Nahum, but Nineveh’s ruins can be seen today outside the city of Mosul, Iraq. During its best years, Assyria was a mighty empire and known for great brutality as it conquered new territories. Physical dismemberment, impalement, displays of beheaded individuals, burning children alive, slave labor, etc. were common practices.

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Because of the timing of Jonah’s message, it is very likely that Nineveh and Assyria as a whole were in a period of decline due to internal dissension. This may explain why in Jonah 3:6 it refers to the “king of Nineveh” rather than a king of Assyria. Additionally, there was a full solar eclipse not too long prior to Jonah’s arrival, which may have still been in the minds of Ninevites and used by the Spirit to confirm Jonah’s short but direct message. No other prophet had a one-sentence message!

JONAH’S TRAVELS



In disobedience, Jonah travels away from Nineveh and toward Tarshish, or southern Spain. Using the map, here are Jonah’s travels:

- #1 – **Gath-hepher** – Jonah’s hometown
- #2 – **Joppa** – Jonah boards a ship for Tarshish across the Mediterranean
- #3 – **Travel back** toward Nineveh
- #4 – **Nineveh** – Jonah’s originally purposed destination

LITERARY STRUCTURE

Quite different from most other prophetic books where it is record of messages given by the prophet, Jonah is a story of a prophet and God’s dealing of both his sin and the corporate sin of a foreign city. There are a few ways to break down the structure of this great book:

Commission – *Dean Niforatos*

- Part 1: First Commission of Jonah (1:1-2:10)
- Part 2: Second Commission of Jonah (3:1-4:11)

Call & Response – *Frank S. Page*

- 1. First Call & Disobedient Response (1:1-16)
- 2. God’s Rescue of Rebellious Prophet (1:17-2:10)
- 3. Second Call and Obedient Response (3:1-10)
- 4. Jonah’s Displeasure & God’s Response (4:1-11)

A WARNING ABOUT READING JONAH

Many people are very familiar with the story of Jonah, either hearing it in Sunday School or as an adult. Because of this, it is quite easy to skim the book rather than truly read it. Reading in this way, or with an “I already know this” attitude limits the Spirit’s ability to speak new truths and applications to you. Therefore, **I HIGHLY encourage you read the book in a different translation.** This will slow down your reading, expose you to slight variations, and give space for the Spirit to reveal new truths.

OBSERVATION WORDS

- **God / Lord** (*any other names, references of God, character traits, etc.*)
- **Jesus** (*prophecies, foreshadowing, types, etc.*)
- **Holy Spirit** (*specific mentions, miracles/wonders, fulfilled prophecy, symbols, etc.*)
- **Called out / called on the Lord / Pray** (*overall sense of calling to a divine being*)
- **Perish / Die**
- **Compassion / Concern**
- **Turn / Relent**

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- What is something new you noticed in this book?
- Name a lesson you learned from this book and how you will apply it to your life.
- What does the book of Jonah teach us about God's character and mercy?
- How did you see Jesus and the Holy Spirit represented in the book of Jonah?
- Describe Jonah and his character? What in Jonah matches your own self?
- What do you think were Jonah's reasons for disobeying God's call at first? What reasons are stopping/delaying you from doing what God commanded you to do?

- What are your thoughts about Jonah’s prayer in chapter 2? Did he repent? Why or why not?

- Name a person or thing that evokes compassion in your heart. How does your heart compare/contrast with God’s?

- What are your thoughts about Matthew 12:39-41 and the book of Jonah?

- What if the repentance of Nineveh took place in your city? What would it look/sound like? What things would you expect to change for “normal” life?

- How does the story of Jonah affect your prayers for:
 - Your own repentance and obedience?
 - The lost?
 - Christian laborers?

KEY WORD/PHRASE:

KEY VERSE:

KEY CHAPTER:

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