

## Jonah Chapter 1

The book of Jonah is not prophecy, as the books we have been studying. This is an account of Jonah's call to minister at Nineveh, and his reaction to that call. He really did not want to answer God's call to minister in Nineveh. We find that God has ways of getting him to answer His call.

Jonah was from Galilee. He ministered during the reign of Jeroboam the second. The name "Jonah" means dove. The lesson we can learn from this is the danger that lies ahead for us, when we do not do the will of God for our lives. We can also receive the message, in God's sight all men are worth saving, not just the ones we choose. Jesus said it best in the following Scripture.

Mark 16:15 "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

**Jonah 1:1 "Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,"**

“Jonah” (Dove), “the son of Amittai” (Truth): Nothing further is known of the prophet’s identity except the reference made to him (in 2 Kings 14:25).

“Amittai”: Jonah’s father’s name of Amittai means “truthful” or “loyal.”

Many believe the account of Jonah was not an actual happening, but Jesus mentions it in the New Testament and verifies it. Amittai was of the tribe of Zebulun.

**Jonah 1:2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me."**

“Arise, go to Nineveh”: While other prophets prophesied against Gentile nations, this is the only case of a prophet actually being sent to a foreign nation to deliver God’s message against them. This was for the salvation of that city and for the shame and jealousy of Israel, as well as a rebuke to the reluctance of the Jews to bring Gentiles to the true God.

An ancient capital city of the Assyrian Empire founded by Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-10), several centuries before Jonah’s ministry (Jonah 3:5-10). Several centuries before Jonah’s preaching mission to the city, Nineveh became one of the royal residences of Assyrian kings.

Sennacherib (ruled 705-681 B.C.), made it the capital of the Assyrian Empire to offset the rival capital of Dur-Sharrukin (Khorsabad), built by his father Sargon II (ruled 722 – 705 B.C.). He greatly beautified and adorned Nineveh. The splendid temples, palaces, and fortifications made it the chief city of the empire (2 Kings 19:36).

In Sennacherib’s day the wall around Nineveh was 40 to 50 feet high and extended two and a half miles along the Tigris River and for eight miles around the inner city. The city wall had 15 main gates, five of which have been excavated. Each of the gates was guarded by stone statues of bulls.

Sennacherib created parks, a botanical garden, and a zoo both inside and outside the walls. Despite its magnificent splendor, it fell to a coalition of Chaldeans, Medes, and others (in 612 B.C.), in accordance with the prophecies of several Old Testament prophets (Nahum 2:10, 13; Zeph. 2:13-15).

The name Nineveh is thought to derive from “ninus,” i.e., Nimrod, and means the residence of Nimrod or “nunu” (Akkadian for “fish”). The people worshiped the fish goddess Nanshe (the daughter of Ea, the goddess of fresh water), and Dagon the fish god who was represented as half man and half fish.

“That great city”: Nineveh was great both in size (3:3), and in power, exerting significant influence over the Middle East until her destruction by Nebuchadnezzar (in 612 B.C.). It was possibly the largest city in the world at this time.

The ancient capital of the Assyrian Empire was east of Israel and located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River.

“Their wickedness is come up before me”: Nineveh was the center of idolatrous worship of Assur and Ishtar. A century later, Nahum pronounced doom upon Assyria for her evil ways and cruelty (Nahum 3).

This is a call of God to Jonah, to go and minister in Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. Nineveh was founded by Nimrod. It is believed the city had well over 600,000 people living there, so it was a large city.

This city was not part of the family of Jacob, and was thought of as a Gentile city. Even though they are not from the family of Jacob, God is aware of the evil going on there. This shows us that all the earth actually belongs to God. He is interested in Gentile people, the same as He is the Hebrews. Jonah was to cry against the evil going on in the city.

**Jonah 1:3 "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD."**

“But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish”: This is the only recorded instance of a prophet refusing God’s commission (Jer. 20:7-9).

The location of Tarshish, known for its wealth (Psalms 72:10; Jer. 10:9; Ezek. 27:12, 25), is uncertain. The Greek historian Herodotus identified it with Tartessus, a merchant city in southern Spain. The prophet went as far west in the opposite direction as possible, showing his reluctance to bring salvation blessing to Gentiles.

“From the presence of the LORD”: While no one can escape from the Lord’s omnipresence (Psalm 139:7-12), it is thought that the prophet was attempting to flee His manifest presence in the temple at Jerusalem (Gen. 4:16; Jonah 2:4).

“Joppa”: Joppa (today Jaffa), located on the Mediterranean coast near the border of Judah and Samaria, was also the location of Peter’s vision in preparation for his visit to Cornelius, a Gentile (Acts chapter 10). Jaffa is located just south of modern-day Tel Aviv.

Jonah wanted nothing to do with these Gentiles, and he fled from God, so he would not have to go. In fact, he went away from Nineveh, instead of toward it. He has turned his back on the call of God. He was sent to the Far East, and he fled to the west.

He was running from the face of God. He should have known, there was no place far enough to go to get away from God. He booked passage on a ship to get himself away from this call of God. Many of us have run from the call of God. We should pay special attention to this book.

**Jonah 1:4 “But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.”**

“A great wind”: This is not an ordinary storm, but an extreme one set (“hurled”), from God. Sailors, accustomed to storms, were afraid of this one (verse 5), a fear which served God’s purpose (Psalm 104:4).

God is in control of the wind and the sea. He controls all natural elements of the earth. God causes the wind to come up so strong, that the ship is about to break up and sink.

**Jonah 1:5 “Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that [were] in the ship into the sea, to lighten [it] of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.”**

"Then the mariners were afraid": Perceiving that the storm was not ordinary, but a supernatural one; and that the ship and all in it were in extreme danger, and no probability of being saved. This shows that the storm must be very violent, to frighten such men who were used to the sea, and to storms, and were naturally bold and intrepid.

"And cried every man to his god": To help them, and save them out of their distress. In the ship it seems were men of different nations, and who worshipped different gods. It was a notion of the Jews, and which Jarchi mentions as his own, that there were men of the seventy nations of the earth in it. And as each of them had a different god, they separately called upon them.

"And cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them": Or, "the wares", a word the Hebrews use for all sorts of goods, utensils, etc. It includes, with others, their military weapons they had to defend themselves, and their provisions, the ship's stores or goods it was loaded with.

"But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship": Into one of its sides, into a cabin there; the lowest side, as the Targum.

"And he lay, and was fast asleep": It may seem strange he should when the wind was so strong and boisterous. The sea roaring; the waves beating; the ship rolling about; the mariners hurrying from place to place, and calling to each other to do their duty; and the passengers crying.

And, above all, that he should fall into so sound a sleep and continue in it, when he had such a guilty conscience. This shows that he was asleep in a spiritual as well as in a corporeal sense.

These mariners were used to storms on the sea. This had to be an unusually bad storm, to cause them to fear for their lives. They threw out the cargo, and began to pray to their gods. Here gods are plural, because they were of different cultures, and they worshipped the gods of their country. They did not know the True God.

Jonah had slipped to the bottom of the ship and was sound asleep. He was exhausted from running from God, and slept very deeply. He felt as if he had safely gotten away from the call of God.

**Jonah 1:6 "So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not."**

"The shipmaster": Either the captain or the pilot.

"Arise, call upon thy God": He supposed that Jonah had his god, as well as they had theirs. And that, as the danger was imminent, every man should use the influence he had, as they were all equally involved in it.

Everyone was praying but Jonah, and the ship was in so much danger of sinking, that the shipmaster woke Jonah to help pray. It is interesting that even though these people did not know the True God, they were aware that this was a judgment of God.

**Jonah 1:7 "And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil [is] upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah."**

"Cast lots": The last resort is to ascertain whose guilt has caused such divine anger. God could reveal His will by controlling the lots, which He did. This method of discernment by casting lots, the exact procedure of which is not known, was not forbidden in Israel (Prov. 16:33; Joshua 7:14; 15:1; 1 Sam. 14:36-45; Acts 1:26).

"So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah": Through the overruling providence and disposing hand of God, which attended this affair. For, not to inquire whether the use of the lot was lawful or not or whether performed in that serious and solemn manner as it should be, if used at all.

It pleased God to interfere in this matter, to direct it to fall on Jonah, with whom he had a particular concern, being a prophet of his, and having disobeyed his will (see Prov. 16:33).

The Syriac version renders it, "the lot of Jonah came up"; that is, the paper, or whatever it was, on which his name was written, was taken up first out of the container which the lots were put.

They felt this sudden storm of such great magnitude was punishment from God on someone aboard the ship. They cast lots to find out who it was, and God revealed to them that it was Jonah.

**Jonah 1:8 "Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil [is] upon us; What [is] thine occupation? And whence comest thou? what [is] thy country? and of what people [art] thou?"**

"Then they said unto him, tell us, we pray thee": They did not fall upon him at once in an outrageous manner, and throw him overboard. As it might be thought such men would have done, considering what they had suffered and lost by means of him. But they use him with great respect, tenderness, and kindness. And implore him to tell them:

"For whose cause this evil was upon them": For their inquiry was not about the person for whose cause it was; that was determined by the lot; but on what account it was. What sin it was he had been guilty of, which was the cause of it. For they supposed some great sin must be committed, that had brought down the vengeance of God in such a manner.

"What is thine occupation?" What trade or business? This question they put, to know whether he had any, or was an idle man; or rather, whether it was an honest and lawful employment. Whether it was by fraud or violence, by thieving and stealing, he got his livelihood; or by conjuring, and using the magic art.

Or else the inquiry was about his present business, what he was going about. What he was to do at Tarshish when he came there. Whether he was not upon some ill design, and sent on an unlawful errand, and going to do some ill thing, for which vengeance pursued him, and stopped him.

"And whence comest thou? What is thy country? "And of what people art thou?" Which questions seem to relate to the same thing, what nation he was of. And put by different persons, who were eager to learn what countryman he was, that they might know who was the God he worshipped, and guess at the crime he had been guilty of.

They were extremely frightened for their lives, and when the lot fell on Jonah, they began to question him. They thought he might speak for himself, and perhaps, repent of whatever he was guilty of, so as to appease God. They gave him an opportunity to explain, by answering these questions.

**Jonah 1:9 "And he said unto them, I [am] an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry [land]."**

"I am an Hebrew": Jonah identified himself by the name that Israelites used among Gentiles (1 Sam. 4:6, 9; 14:11).

“The LORD, the God of heaven”: This title, in use from earliest times (Gen. 24:3, 7), may have been specifically chosen by Jonah to express the sovereignty of the Lord in contrast to Baal, who was a sky god (1 Kings 18:24).

Spoken to sailors who were most likely from Phoenicia, the center of Baal worship. The title bears significant weight, especially when coupled with the phrase “who made the sea and the dry land.”

This was the appropriate identification when introducing the true and living God to pagans who didn't have Scripture, but whose reason led them to recognize the fact that there had to be a Creator (Rom. 1:18-23).

To begin with creation (as in Acts 14:14-17 and 17:23b-29), was the proper starting point. To evangelize Jews, one can begin with the Old Testament Scripture.

Jonah was proud of the fact he was a Hebrew. He even says, he fears the LORD. One thing in his favor, he does acknowledge God. He even explains that God created the sea and the dry land.

**Jonah 1:10 "Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them."**

“I fear the Lord”: In this Jonah was faithful. He gave an honest testimony concerning the God he served, which placed him before the eyes of the sailors as infinitely higher than the objects of their adoration.

For the God of Jonah was the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land, and governed both. He also honestly told them that he was fleeing from the presence of this God, whose honorable call he had refused to obey.

It appears, when he booked passage, he had admitted to some of the sailors that he was running from God. Now, they want to know why he had brought this terrible storm upon them.

Verses 11-12: Unwilling to go to Nineveh and feeling guilty, Jonah was willing to sacrifice himself in an effort to save the lives of others. Apparently, he would rather have died than go to Nineveh.

**Jonah 1:11 “Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.”**

“What shall we do unto thee”? They knew him to be a prophet; they ask him the mind of his God. The lots had marked out Jonah as the cause of the storm; Jonah had himself admitted it, and that the storm was for "his" cause, and came from "his" God.

"That the sea may be calm unto us?" Or "silent, for the waves made a hideous roaring, and lifted up themselves so high, as was terrible to behold. And dashed with such vehemence against the ship, as threatened it every moment with destruction.

"For the sea wrought, and was tempestuous": It was agitated to and fro, and was in a great ferment, and grew more and more stormy and tempestuous. Jonah's confession of his sin, and true repentance for it, were not sufficient; more must be done to appease an angry God; and what that was the sailors desired to know.

It is interesting to me, that they had enough respect for Jonah's God, that they asked Jonah to speak his own punishment. They knew something must be done to save their lives.

**Jonah 1:12 "And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest [is] upon you."**

"Cast me forth into the sea" has been taken by some to indicate his repentance and heroic faith. However, his statement could well indicate the intensity of his disobedience: he would rather die than repent and go to Nineveh.

Jonah was aware that God had brought this storm, because of his disobedience. He also realizes if he stays on board, they will all perish. He offers to give his life to save the sailors. He will not take his own life, but will take the rightful punishment for disobeying God. He asks them to throw him into the sea.

Verses 13-14: Heathen sailors had more concern for one man that Jonah had for tens of thousands in Nineveh. The storm, Jonah's words, and the lots all indicated to the sailors that the Lord was involved. Thus they offered sacrifices to Him and made vows, indicating Jonah had told them more about God than is recorded here.

**Jonah 1:13 "Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring [it] to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them."**

"Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to bring it to the land, but they could not": Or, "they digged"; that is, in the waters of the sea with their oars; not by casting anchor, as Abendana. They used all their skill and exerted all their strength; they labored with all their might and main, as a man digs in a pit.

They rowed against wind and tide. God, his purposes and providence, were against them; and it was not possible for them to make land, and get the ship ashore. Which they were desirous of, to save the life of Jonah, as well as their own.

For, seeing him penitent, they had compassion on him. His character and profession as a prophet, the gravity of the man, the sedateness of his countenance, his openness of mind, and his willingness to die, wrought greatly upon the men.

That they would gladly have saved him if they could. And perhaps being Heathens, and not knowing thoroughly the nature of his offence, might think he did not deserve to die. But all their endeavors to save him were to no purpose.

"For the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them": It grew more and more so. The storm beat right against them, and drove them back faster than they came; so that it was impossible to stand against it.

Simply, they tried to save Jonah, but they could not. They rowed as hard as they could, but the wind God had sent was stronger, and they could do nothing.

**Jonah 1:14 "Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee."**

"Wherefore they cried unto the Lord": Not unto their gods, but unto the true Jehovah, the God of Jonah, and of the Hebrews. Whom they now, by this providence, and Jonah's discourse, had some convictions and knowledge of as the true God. And therefore direct their prayer to him, before they cast the prophet into the sea.

"And said, we beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee": Which repetition shows the ardent, vehemence, and earnestness of their minds in prayer.

"Let us not perish for this man's life": They were in the utmost perplexity of mind, not knowing well what to do. They saw they must perish by the storm, if they saved his life; and they were afraid they should perish if they took it away.

And which yet they were obliged to do; and therefore, had no other way left but to pray to the Lord they might not perish for it. Or it be reckoned as their crime, and imputed to them, as follows.

"And lay not upon us innocent blood": For so it was to them; he had done no hurt to them since he had been with them, except in being the cause of the storm, whereby they had suffered the loss of their goods. However, had not been guilty of anything worthy of death, as they could observe.

And as for his offence against God, they were not sufficient judges of, and must leave it with him. The light of nature teaches men to be tender of the lives of fellow creatures, and to avoid shedding of innocent blood.

"For thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee": It appeared to them to be the will of God that he should be cast into the sea; from the storm that was raised on his account. From the determination of the lot; from the confession of Jonah, and his declaration of the will of God in this matter.

As a prophet of his, they did not pretend to account for it. It was a secret to them why it should be; but it was no other than what he would have done. And therefore, they hoped no blame would be laid on them.

They really did not want to kill Jonah. They had to do something to save their own lives, however. They did not want to be guilty of murder either. They begged God to not hold them responsible for his death. They even remind God, that He brought the storm up.

**Jonah 1:15 "So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging."**

"The sea ceased": This was similar to Christ's quieting the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 8:23-27).

The fact that the sea stopped raging suddenly showed them they had done the right thing by throwing Jonah overboard. They had not thrown him over in anger, but to save all of them from drowning. The suddenness is like the sea ceasing to roar, when Jesus spoke and told the sea to be still. God controls the sea and the wind.

**Jonah 1:16 "Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows."**

"Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly": This was not a natural fear, as before, but a religious one. And not a servile fear, or a fear of punishment, but a reverential godly fear. For they feared him, not only because they saw his power in raising and stilling the tempest, but his goodness to them in saving them.

"And offered a sacrifice unto the Lord": A spiritual sacrifice. The sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for a safe deliverance from the storm. For other sorts of sacrifice they seemed not to have materials for; since they had thrown overboard what they had in the ship to lighten it, unless there might be anything left fit for this purpose. Rather, it is to be understood as a ceremonial sacrifice.

"And offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows": They vowed that they would offer a sacrifice when they arrived in their own country, or should return to Judea, and come to Jerusalem.

So the Hebrew "vau" is often used as interpretive and explanative; though many interpreters understand the vows as distinct from the sacrifice. And that they vowed that the God of the Hebrews should be their God, and that they would for the future serve and worship him only.

If these men were truly converted, as it seems as if they were, they were great gainers by this providence. For though they lost their worldly goods, they found what was infinitely better, God to be their God and portion, and all spiritual good things with him.

And it may be observed of the wise and wonderful providence of God. That though Jonah refused to go and preach to the Gentiles at Nineveh, for which he was corrected; yet God made this dispensation a means of converting other Gentiles.

This is like many conversions in the churches today. They came to the LORD, because of fear of death. They recognized the supernatural event that had taken place, and they recognized the power of Jonah's God. They even sacrificed to the LORD to show their sincerity. They made promises to God, as well.

**Jonah 1:17 "Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."**

“Prepared” indicates “to appoint, ordain, prepare, or order.” The idea is one of commission rather than of creation. The fish was already in existence, but God commissioned it for a specific mission.

“A great fish” (Hebrew dag gadol): Jesus said that it was a sea monster (Greek ketos, Matt. 12:40). Our Lord’s citation ought to lay to rest any speculation of the historicity of the event.

The species of fish is uncertain; the Hebrew for whale is not here used. God sovereignly prepared (Literally “appointed”), a great fish to rescue Jonah. Apparently, Jonah sank into the depth of the sea before the fish swallowed him (2:3, 5-6).

“Three days and three nights” (see note on Matthew 12:40).

This fish was not an ordinary fish. God had prepared a special fish, so that Jonah could live in the fish's belly. This entombment in the belly of the fish is a type and shadow of the three days Jesus would be in the belly of the earth.

Notice, God did not save Jonah from the fish. He saves him in the fish. There had to be a continuous prayer coming from that fish, while Jonah was in its belly. This will give Jonah time to reconsider about running from God.

## **Jonah Chapter 1 Questions**

1. This book is an account of what?
2. Where had God called Jonah to minister?
3. Jonah was from \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The name "Jonah" means \_\_\_\_\_.
5. What lesson can you and I receive from this?

6. How do we know that the account of Jonah is not fiction?
7. What tribe was Amittai from?
8. Nineveh was the capital of \_\_\_\_\_.
9. How large was Nineveh?
10. This was a \_\_\_\_\_ city.
11. What was Jonah to cry against?
12. What did Jonah do about his call to Nineveh?
13. He was sent to the far east, and he went to the \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Who should pay close attention to this book?
15. What does God do about Jonah's flight?
16. What did the mariners do, when the wind came up so strong it nearly sunk the ship?
17. Where was Jonah during this time?
18. What does the shipmaster say to Jonah?
19. What did they cast lots to determine?
20. Who did the lot fall upon?
21. What questions did they ask Jonah?
22. What answer did Jonah give them?
23. How did they know he was fleeing from the LORD?
24. Who decided Jonah's punishment?
25. What did they do, before they threw Jonah overboard to try to save his life?
26. What happened, when they threw him into the sea?
27. What had the LORD done to save Jonah?
28. What is the entombment in the fish's belly a type and shadow of?
29. What may we assume Jonah was doing, while he was in the fish's belly?