

## Jonah: Who, What, Why and When?

### **Written by whom?**

The book does not identify the author. Tradition says it was Jonah himself, son of Amittai from Gath Hopher. However, because it shares some similarities, it may come from the same prophetic circles that originally composed the accounts about Elijah and Elisha.

### **Written from where and when?**

If it was written by the group that wrote the accounts of Elijah and Elisha, it would be sometime in the eighth century BC. Jonah himself served as a prophet for fifty years, 800-750 BC, in the northern kingdom of Israel. The most likely date is after the public ministries of Amos and Hosea and before the fall of Samaria to Assyria in 722-721 BC, or the third quarter of the eighth century BC.

### **Written to whom?**

To the Israelites of the northern kingdom, Israel. Jesus used the lessons of Jonah to teach the people of his day.

### **Why was it written?**

During the time of King Jeroboam II, the traditional borders of Israel had been restored. This was possible because the country of Damascus had been defeated by Assyria. This war had temporarily weakened Assyria, giving Israel a chance to build itself up. Israel had become proud, complacent about her status before God as a chosen nation. The religion became focused on the 'day of the Lord', when God's darkness would swallow up the other nations, leaving Israel alone to bask in God's light.

The primary purpose of the book is to make the readers think carefully on the compassionate character of God and to see if their own character is similar. God wanted them to share his compassion in the world that God had made and cared for so deeply..

## 2 Jonah: Chapter 1 – Scripture Questions

1. Where did the Lord want Jonah to go, and what was he to do there? (vs. 2)
2. Where did Jonah go instead? (vs. 3)
3. What happened to disrupt Jonah's voyage? (vs. 4)
4. What did the sailors do to figure out who was responsible for the storm? (vs. 7)
5. How did the sailors respond to Jonah's explanation? (vs. 10, 11)
6. What did Jonah tell them to do to calm the storm? (vs. 12)
7. What did the sailors try to do, instead of throwing him overboard? (vs. 13, 14)
8. Then they took Jonah and threw him \_\_\_\_\_, and the raging sea grew \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 15)
9. How did the sailors respond to the calming of the sea? (vs. 16)
10. What happened to Jonah? (vs. 17)

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## Jonah: Chapter 1 – What Did It Mean To Them?

The main theme for Jonah is compassion: God's compassion for all peoples, everywhere.

There are several other ideas included under this main idea:

1. God is in control over all events on the earth
2. God is determined to get his message to all nations
3. Everyone needs to repent from sin
4. Specific repentance is needed from hypocrisy and self-centeredness
5. There is assurance that God will relent and forgive when people repent

The name 'Jonah' means 'dove', and in the book of Hosea it was used as a symbol for Israel as silly and senseless. 'Son of Amittai' means 'son of my faithfulness'. Taken together, it means that no matter how ridiculous Jonah is, he is still the object of God's faithful love.

The episode with the pagan sailors is designed to ask the question, Who fears the Lord, Jonah or the pagans? The key repeated word is 'fear'. Jonah claims to fear the Lord, but the sailors actually do fear and respect the Lord. It is also noteworthy that the Israelite prophet has to be called to prayer by the pagan sailor! And who is concerned that people not perish? Again, it is the sailors who seem to care.

Casting lots was used in the ancient world to discover and understand the will of divinity. The Israelites believed that God controlled the outcome.

'God of heaven' referred to the universal and supreme God, not necessarily to the God of the Hebrews. This is why the sailors were terrified, and very hopeful that tossing Jonah overboard did not offend the supreme God.

## 4 Jonah: Chapter 1 – Application Questions

1. God called Jonah, a prophet, to reach out to a city of people who were enemies of Israel. Jonah was understandably reluctant. What has God called you to do, that you resisted?
2. Jonah made a really bad decision and did something he knew was wrong. How do you make up for this kind of action?
3. It was common for sailors to 'pick up' deities they liked as they sailed around. We still do this: people get invested in angels, crystals, 'earth spirits', the Mayan Calendar, UFOs, aliens, cults, conspiracy theories, etc. Why do you think people enjoy this kind of 'spirituality'?
4. God used the 'lots' cast by the sailors as a way to point out Jonah as the responsible party. (You notice Jonah didn't volunteer.) Could we do something similar today if we are trying to choose people to lead our church?