

Jonah

These studies are meant to “stand-alone” from the study book on Jonah, Joel and Amos. If you are using both, I would suggest working through these first and then looking at the appropriate chapter in the Study Book for further questions etc.

I intend to break the Book of Jonah down into four, one week for each chapter, beginning this week with a general introduction and Chapter 1. It would be best to read through the whole book before we begin!

Date and Author

Nowhere in the text is there any statement that the prophet himself wrote the book, although the prayer in chapter 2 is in the first person singular. However, conservative scholars have consistently held with the strong traditional view that Jonah himself was the author and that it was written in the 8th. Century B.C. (799 – 700).

“*Jonah, the son of Amitai, the prophet who was from Gath-he-pher*” is mentioned in 2 Kings 14, verse 25.

Gath-he-pher was in the Northern Kingdom, Israel, just north of Nazareth.

Nineveh

Was a principal city and the last capital of Assyria, on the river Tigris, about 250 miles north of the site of Babylon. At the time of Jonah, Assyria was the chief enemy of Israel.- remember the poem “*The destruction of Sennacherib*”? (2 Kings 19, verses 32 – 37). Excavation has shown that the city itself was enclosed by a wall over 7 miles circuit and could have contained some 175,000 persons. The distance of “*three days journey in breadth*” (Jonah 3, verse 3) could refer to the administrative district which would include the surrounding villages. The walled city itself would be a place of refuge in time of war.

Jonah, chapter one - “Fleeing”

The Book opens with the usual formula “*the word of the Lord came to Jonah . . .*”. We are not told how the Lord spoke to him, but he did not like the message! His first thought was to try to get as far away as possible, taking a ship to Tarshish (verse 3). The land is mentioned a number of times in the Old Testament, usually concerned with precious metals and mining. (Jeremiah 10, verse 9 and Ezekiel 27, verse 12). This was most likely Spain, which was settled by the Phoenicians who traded out of Joppa and other ports. Jonah had given his flight from the Lord as the reason for his journey (verse 10). One would have thought that a Hebrew who feared the “*Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land*” (verse 9) would know that he could not flee from the Lord!

The relationship between Jonah, the Lord God and the sailors is at heart of this first chapter. The storm was sent to stop Jonah in his tracks. However there is more going on in the background than the simple fact of getting Jonah where God wanted him to be.

There are at least 3 miracles recorded in this chapter and it was not just Jonah who was affected!

1) “*Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea . . .*” (verse 4). The Creator God in whom Jonah believed was in control of nature. This is only one of many such miraculous events recorded in both the Old Testament and the New.

2) Jonah knew the reason for the storm and when the sailors had overcome their reluctance and thrown him overboard, “*the raging sea grew calm*”. (verse 15).

3) “*But the Lord had provided a great fish to swallow Jonah . . .*” (verse 17) Note that this “*great fish*” was not necessarily a whale! It was another miracle of the Lord God’s appointing! There may not have been another such fish in the seas before or since. This one was there in the right place at the right time to save the prophet from drowning. He still had work to do for the Lord.

Further study and questions

1) Read Matthew 8, verses 23 – 27. Does this story of Jonah help you to answer the question asked by the disciples - “*What kind of man is this? Even the wind and waves obey Him.*”?

2) There are actually 4 miracles in Jonah chapter 1. Have you noticed the other one? The testimony of the reluctant prophet Jonah led to the “conversion” of the pagan seamen! Compare verses 5 – 6 and verse 16.

3) Read and meditate on Psalm 139, verses 7 – 18.

Be assured that wherever you are, physically, mentally or spiritually, the Lord God knows and is with you.

“*Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday and today and forever.*” (Hebrews 13, verse 8).