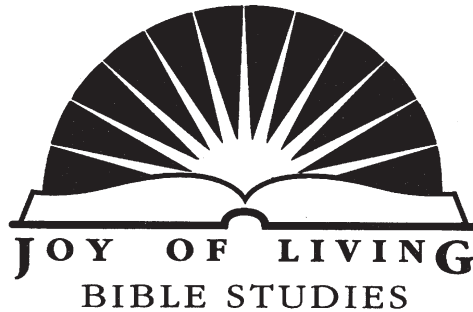


Jonah

Lesson 1



God's Call and Promise

Genesis 11-35

Although the story related in the book of Jonah took place in the eighth century B.C., it actually began about a thousand years earlier with one man in the city of Ur of the Chaldees. The descendants of Noah had spread out, multiplied and populated the earth and they had again abandoned the God who created them.

Yet God had not abandoned mankind. He called one man, Abram, and told him that if he would leave his country and go to a land God would show him, He would give Abram that land, make a great nation from his descendants, and bless all the world through him. (It would be through his descendants that the Savior of the world would come.) In faith Abram (later called Abraham) obeyed God. Abraham had a son, Isaac, to whom the promise was given and he in turn had a son, Jacob, to whom the promise was given.

From a Family to a Nation

Genesis 46—Exodus 18

Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel, had 12 sons. When Jacob was an old man he, his sons and their families (70 people in all) went into Egypt to escape starvation during a great famine. One of the sons, Joseph, was already there and in great power. He was second only to the Pharaoh and because of this the family was well cared for.

However generations passed and the descendants of Israel grew in numbers. A new pharaoh arose and was fearful of this great number of foreigners living within the borders of his land. To protect himself and his country, he placed the Israelites in bondage where they remained for nearly 400 years.

As always God was faithful, and in His time He raised up a man named Moses to lead His people. With great and mighty miracles God delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians and led them to the land He had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

A Covenant Made and Broken

Exodus 19 — 1 Samuel 7

God made a covenant with the Israelites prior to their entering the Promised Land, the general area of the nation of Israel today. At Mount Sinai they agreed to serve the Lord and obey His commands. He gave them His Law and promised to bless them as long as they served Him. But even as God gave them His glorious Law, they were rebelling against Him and worshipping other gods. And so began the cycle of God's blessing, Israel's rebellion, God's disciplining, their repentance, God's deliverance and blessing again.

The Israelites were told to drive the heathen nations from the land. They were to make no covenants with them, but they disobeyed and were led into idolatry by them.

The Kingdom

1 Samuel 8 — 2 Chronicles 36

The people of Israel had the perfect government with the Lord Himself as King, and the Law of the Lord as the law of the land, yet they weren't satisfied. They wanted to be like the nations round about them. They wanted a man as their king. God granted their desire.

Saul, their first king, didn't fully obey the Lord so God gave the kingdom to David, a shepherd who loved the Lord. Although David made many mistakes, God said, "I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22). God promised David that one of his descendants

would have a kingdom without end. He was referring to Jesus Christ, the coming Savior, who would pay the price for the sins of the world and redeem mankind.

David's son Solomon inherited the kingdom from him, but because of Solomon's sin the kingdom was divided in the days of Solomon's son Rehoboam. The northern kingdom was known as Israel with Samaria as the capital. The southern kingdom was known as Judah with Jerusalem as the capital. As long as a godly king was on the throne the kingdoms tended to serve the Lord, but all too often there were ungodly kings and the people followed the practices of the heathen nations, which included burning their children as sacrifices to the demonic god, Molech.

Introduction to Jonah

This book is named after its main character, the prophet Jonah, who ministered from about 800-750 B.C. He was from Gath Hopher (see 2 Kings 14:25) in the territory of Zebulun (see Joshua 19:10,13), part of the northern kingdom of Israel. Unlike all the other books of Old Testament prophecy, the book of Jonah delivers its message through a narrative story—through observing Jonah's experiences—rather than through a series of messages from God.

The book of Jonah challenges our faith. Our attitude toward Jonah reveals our attitude toward God and His Word. The question is—Is the story of Jonah mere natural experience or is it supernatural? Jesus Christ Himself made the book of Jonah important. When Christ was asked for a sign to prove His claims, He gave the people the sign of the prophet Jonah (see Matthew 12:38-41). Christ spoke these words as a sign from heaven to authenticate His ministry to the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees.

The Jews regarded the book of Jonah as a record of real historical events. Its literal truth was never questioned.¹ Jesus Christ Himself authenticated the truth of the book of Jonah. He called Jonah a prophet and referred to him as a real person in history. He testified to the book's inspiration and infallibility. Christ's words proved that this was a literal account of an historical experience and event.

The Holy Spirit also foreknew that there would be attacks upon the history of Jonah, and so inserted a foolproof account of the actual literal existence of this prophet. This record is tucked away in the book of 2 Kings. Second Kings

14:23-29 records the story of Jeroboam II, who reigned over the northern kingdom of Israel from about 793-753 B.C.² In 2 Kings 14:25 we read, “[Jeroboam II] was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher.” Israel had been terribly harassed by the constant attacks of the Syrians on their northern border. Jonah's remarkable prophecy of the restoration of Israel to its dimensions at the time of Solomon was fulfilled during the reign of Jeroboam II.³

Many attempts have been made to explain Jonah's miraculous experience by natural reasoning and scientific investigation. This is a clever scheme of Satan to cause us to seek proof outside of the Scripture itself. The true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ needs no external proof of the authenticity of the Word of God. He has the witness within himself, for he has had an experience of its truthfulness. He believes the Word because God says it. Can you testify to this experience in your life?

The Bible needs no apologies and no defenses, no scientific endorsements, nor proof of archeological truths. Long before there was archeology, the Bible stood true. Bible scholar Dr. William L. Pettingill used to say, “Talk about defending the Bible? Why, you might as well talk about defending a lion. Let him loose. He'll defend himself.” The book of Jonah defends itself as it opens with a reminder that we are dealing with “the Word of the LORD” and not the word of man. That being said, it is also true that archeology and the historical record remarkably confirm the Bible's accuracy.

As you read your Bible you will discover God's many promises. Until you are willing to believe God you will never know the great strength and power which He wants to unleash in your life to prove Himself to you. Are you willing to trust God to show you the truth from His Word by allowing Him to enter your life through faith? Will you let Him work out His promises in and through your life experiences through the power of the Holy Spirit? As the apostle Paul wrote, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

1. F.F. Bruce, editor. *The International Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 918.

2. Ibid 921.

3. Ibid 916.

A minister was sitting opposite an atheist in a dining car. He struck up a conversation with the man and the atheist said, "I assume then that you believe the Bible from what you have said?" The minister replied that he accepted the Bible as God's Holy Word. The man said, "But don't you encounter things in the Bible you can't understand?" The minister answered, "Yes, I find some things in the Bible which are hard for me to understand." This reply gave the atheist an air of triumph, and thinking he had backed the man into a corner he said, "Well, what do you do when you don't understand something?" The minister was eating a delicious fish, which was quite bony. He looked up from his luncheon plate and said to the atheist, "I do just as I do when eating this fish; when I come to the bones, I put them to one side and go on enjoying my lunch." Are there things in the Bible that leave question marks in your mind? God only asks you to put them aside and He will answer your questions one by one. Perhaps some of your questions will never be answered this side of heaven, but you can be assured that you will be satisfied when you stand before the Lord one day!

A Daily Appointment with God

Make a daily appointment with God. Find a quiet spot. Take your Bible, pencil or pen and your lesson with you. If you have a busy phone, you may have to remove it from the hook, turn off the ringer or hide the phone under a blanket to muffle the ringing! Remember how very important your appointment with God is and *make time to be with Him daily*. Ask yourself the following things:

1. How much time will I spend with the Lord each day?
2. What do I need to put aside in order to spend this time with the Lord? (Examples: sleep, television, casual telephone conversations, window shopping, etc. Each person will have to decide what his or her priorities are

and what can be removed from the daily schedule to make time to spend with God.)

3. What is the *best time* for my appointment with God?
4. Where is the *quietest* place for me to pray and study?
5. Do I really want to spend time with God? (If your last answer is "yes," God will bless you as you work out the time. If your last answer is "no," pray that God will give you a desire, a hunger to spend this time with Him. He will do this for you!)

5. In the passage above the Lord Jesus was speaking to people who doubted His Word. What does He say about His Word in John 5:24?

6. Personal: Have you experienced God's forgiveness through faith in His Son Jesus Christ?

Third Day: Review Jonah 1, concentrating on verses 2-3.

1. What task did God give to Jonah in Jonah 1:2?

2. Nineveh was over 500 miles northeast of Gath Ephraim, Jonah's hometown.¹ Find these two places on the map on page 39. What do you learn about the founding of Nineveh in Genesis 10:8-12? At the time of Jonah, Nineveh was one of the major cities of Assyria, a bitter enemy of Israel.

3. a. What was Jonah's response to God's word to him? (Jonah 1:3)

- b. Find the places mentioned in Jonah 1:3 on the map on page 39. What do you notice about the locations of these cities and Nineveh in relation to Jonah's hometown? How does this confirm what Jonah was trying to do?

4. Read Psalm 139:7-10. What does David, the psalmist, say about the possibility of running away from God?

5. Personal: Notice that God did not prevent Jonah from trying to run away. Have you ever tried to run away from God? What was your experience?

1. Kenneth Barker, editor. *The NIV Study Bible*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1985).

6. Challenge: Like Jonah, we tend to run away from preaching the judgment message to those to whom God sends us. Yet along with the news of judgment, we have the privilege of sharing with them God's solution—the wonderful forgiveness, peace and joy that can be found by faith in His Son Jesus Christ. Read Romans 3:22-26. Try to put these thoughts into your own words as if you were explaining them to someone after having read this Romans passage to them.

Fourth Day: Review Jonah 1, concentrating on verses 4-10.

1. What did God do to get Jonah's attention as he was on board the ship? (Jonah 1:4)
2. How did Jonah and the ship's sailors each react to the storm? (Jonah 1:5-6)
3. How did God use an ancient custom practiced by the sailors to expose Jonah's guilt? (Jonah 1:7-8)
4. What did Jonah confess to his shipmates in Jonah 1:9-10, and how did they react?
5. Personal: Have you ever dared to be so honest in declaring your faith? Notice that Jonah even admitted that he was not walking the way God wanted him to, but was trying to flee from doing what God asked of him.

Fifth Day: Review Jonah 1, concentrating on verses 11-15.

1. What did Jonah tell the sailors when they asked him what they should do? (Jonah 1:11-12)

2. The sailors were not yet ready to accept Jonah's sacrifice. What did they do instead? Did it work? (Jonah 1:13)

3. When they finally realized that they must follow Jonah's instructions, what did the sailors do before throwing him overboard? (Jonah 1:14)

4. What was the result of their action? (Jonah 1:15)

5. Challenge: What do you learn from the following verses about God's power over the sea?

Psalm 89:8-9

Psalm 107:23-31

Matthew 8:23-27

6. Personal: Do you live as if you truly believe God has complete power over the world He made, just as He demonstrated in the time of Jonah? How would it change your attitude and actions if you truly believe this?

Sixth Day: Review Jonah 1, concentrating on verses 16-17.

1. What was the sailors' reaction to the calming of the sea after they threw Jonah overboard? (Jonah 1:16)

2. Challenge: Notice that the sailors did not just sacrifice to a generic god of the sea, but to “the LORD”—Jonah’s God, Yahweh, the covenant name of the one true God. The Bible does not say whether they renounced all other gods, but it is possible that their experience of God’s power opened their eyes to a true belief in Him. In the New Testament, God’s miraculous power brought many to believe in Him. What do you learn about this in the following verses?

Acts 5:11-14

Acts 9:38-42

3. How did God keep Jonah from drowning? (Jonah 1:17a)

b. How long was Jonah kept there? (Jonah 1:17b)

4. God did this not only to keep Jonah from drowning and to discipline him for running away, but also to provide a foreshadowing of the death and resurrection of one greater than Jonah who also came from Galilee.¹ (Gath Hopher is located about two miles from Nazareth.) What do you learn about this in the following verses?

Matthew 12:40

Matthew 16:21

5. Personal: Jesus Christ gave His life in payment for our sin, was in the grave for three days and nights, and rose victoriously from the grave so that we may have eternal life with Him. Read John 3:16. Have you accepted God’s loving gift of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ?

6. What verse did you choose to memorize this week? Share it with your group if you wish.

1. *The International Bible Commentary* 923.