

jonah : God's outrageous grace

jonah 1

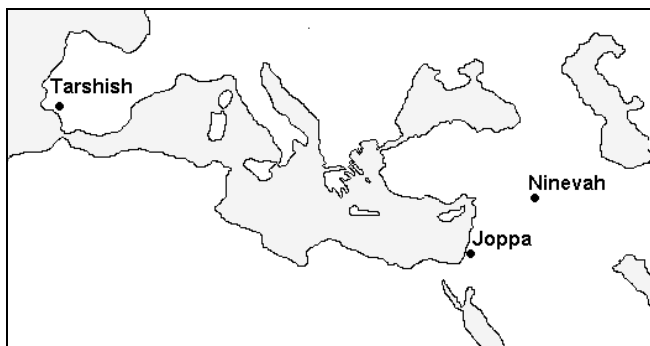
background – where & when

We don't know much about Jonah. We know his father was called Amittai (1v1). The only other place he's mentioned, apart from the book named after him, is in 2 Kings 14v25, which tells us where he was from Gath Hopher (near Nazareth in Galilee) and that he was around during the reign of Jeroboam II.

Jeroboam II was king of the northern kingdom of Israel from 793-753 BC. The kingdom had split in two in around 930 BC after the death of King Solomon, and Jeroboam was king of the much larger northern part. In 2 Kings 14 we read that he did evil in the eyes of the Lord, as had his predecessors. Nevertheless, he was successful in taking land which was traditionally part of the promised land, as prophesied by Jonah.

We have no way of knowing when the book was actually written, or who actually wrote it down (although it could easily have been Jonah himself). But we know that Jonah was around during Jeroboam's reign. Other political and historical events in Ninevah which might help to account for the remarkable response of the Ninivites (like political instability, military losses and a frightening solar eclipse in 763 BC) have led people to date the events to the 760s BC.

Ninevah was a huge city (see Jonah 3v3) in Assyria, in what we now call Iraq. Assyria were a superpower, and they were a major threat the Israel. Eventually, Assyria conquered the northern kingdom and wiped it out forever by around 720 BC.



The book of Jonah shows God's grace towards Ninevah – he warns them of his coming judgement and gives them an opportunity to repent. But Jonah's response is shocking. He is outraged that God should want to save these pagans. The book is designed to show us what

God is like, and what our response should (or should *not*) be.

chapter 1

God's command to Jonah is simple: "Go to the great city of Ninevah and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me" (1v2).

Jonah's response is not what we'd expect from a prophet chosen by God - he runs away. He heads for Tarshish, which is in the opposite direction to Ninevah. We don't find out why until 4v2 – Jonah hates the idea that God might save these pagan enemies of Israel.

Chapter 1 describes the consequences of Jonah's actions. Jonah cannot escape God's authority; during the voyage, God sends such a violent storm that the ship is in danger of being destroyed. The sailors cast lots, and they point to Jonah as being responsible. When the sailors ask him, Jonah explains that he worships a god who is more than capable of sending storms: "I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (v9). He tells them that the only way to save the ship is for them to throw him into the sea – he knows that it is his fault. But they are reluctant to throw him over board, probably because they fear what God will do. But eventually they have no choice and they throw Jonah into the sea.

The incident has a remarkable effect on the sailors. Initially they call on their own pagan gods to save them (v5). But then they wake Jonah to get him to call on his god. Eventually they call out to God themselves, and they offer sacrifices to Him (v16).

Despite his disobedience, God is gracious to Jonah - He provides a huge fish to keep Jonah alive (v17).

The themes of this passage are God's grace and His power. God graciously makes the first move to warn Ninevah of the coming destruction. But when Jonah disobeys, we see that it is impossible for him to escape God's power. God commands the elements to stop Jonah fleeing. And the pagan sailors are so amazed by what they witness that they call out to God themselves.

Jonah: God's outrageous grace

jonah 1

questions

Remember, these are **suggestions** – feel free to add, remove or change them!

I'd probably handle this passage slightly differently to previous studies we've prepared. It is difficult to break Jonah 1 into chunks to study separately. So I'd probably look at what we can learn from the three main parties in the chapter: Jonah, the sailors, and God. Here are a few suggested questions – you'll need to come up with more...

jonah

discover What do we know about Jonah's identity?

understand Why does Jonah run away (you might need to look at 4v2)? How does he feel about God's grace?

respond Do we ever show the same attitude as Jonah?

sailors

discover What do we learn about the sailors? What kind of people are they?

understand How do the sailors react to their situation? How does their attitude towards God change through chapter 1?

God

discover What aspects of God's character do we see in chapter 1?

understand How does God treat Jonah? Is it surprising at all?

respond How should this affect the way we think about God?

where does Jesus fit in?

If we believe that the whole Bible is about Jesus, then we should expect to see pointers to Jesus as we study the Old Testament. Sometimes they are more obvious than others, but ask yourself the question, "**how does this passage point to Jesus?**"

For example, in chapter 1 we begin to see glimpses of God's grace. We see his holiness and his hatred of wickedness. But we also see his compassion – God wants to warn the Ninevites and give them chance to repent. This unfolds more in the rest of the book, but they are aspects of God's character which ultimately come together in Jesus, who died to pay for our sin so that we don't have to.

Any problems, let me know... gleaney@uccf.org.uk