

JONAH - A STUDY GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
 - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. Do you remember hearing the story of Jonah as a kid? What did you think of it? Did you want to try it? Is it just another miracle story? Is it possible to believe that this story actually happened as it says? Would you feel more comfortable among modern scientific friends if the book of Jonah were not in the Bible? Does the story seem a little “unrealistic?” Did Jesus believe it? (Matthew 12:38-41) Is Jonah mentioned as a historical character elsewhere in the Bible? (2 Kings 14:25)
2. What picture of God did Jonah have? Was he happy and proud of how God treated him? Was he proud of how God treated the Ninevites? Does Jonah contribute anything of importance to your picture of God?
3. How did Jonah know that throwing him into the sea would stop the storm? (Jonah 1:9-12) On what basis could he make such a statement? Well, wasn't he a prophet? Did God actually send the storm against the ship that Jonah was in? (Jonah 1:4) Or is this just a general understanding that whatever happens, God is behind it? When Jonah said he was a worshiper of Yahweh, “the God of heaven, who made land and sea”, did the sailors think of the evil “god” of the sea, Mot, who always seemed to be angry?
4. Where did Jonah think he had gone when he was swallowed by that big “fish?” He says he went down into Sheol (sometimes translated hell). It is interesting to note how different translators deal with Jonah's comments. Did Jonah make some “foxhole” promises?
5. “Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale.” (Jonah 1:17) How long would that be? If Jesus was dead three days and three nights as we reckon time, He would need to be crucified on Wednesday in order to rise on Sunday morning? How long was Jonah inside this creature?
6. What about the sailor's use of an “magical” practice, like casting lots to find out who it was on the boat that was causing this storm? Does God see through these kinds of needs among people who believe in such things? If our church officers were chosen today by “casting lots” could you then be certain that they were the right choices? Surely the two men they chose as candidates to take Judas' place (Acts 1:12-26) were very carefully selected. They prayed over both of them. And if the lot had fallen on the other one, would it have been a mistake? Should we use this method for selecting church officers today? Think how much time we could save!
7. What do you think of the appeal made by the king of Nineveh (Jonah 3:6-9)? What kind of picture of God did he have? Who do you think had the biggest effect on the people—the King or Jonah?
8. What gave Jonah such authority? Was it his recounting of the “whale” story? Have you ever heard of an evangelist that won a whole city?
9. How do we go to the world with a serious message about what's going to happen at the end of the world, and at the same time, tell them that God is infinitely gracious, patient, loving, and compassionate? Is there any way we can phrase that so it won't confuse people? Didn't God's graciousness make Jonah want to die? Was he hoping to go home with the message that with

God's help he had managed to singlehandedly wipe out the Ninevites?! If on the other hand Jonah comes home and explains that he has evangelized the Ninevites so they didn't have to be destroyed as God had said they would be, would his neighbors want to stone him?

10. What is the real message of Jonah? Why is Jonah upset by God's kindness toward the Ninevites? Look at Jonah 4. Doesn't this imply that there was a rather extended conversation between Jonah and God earlier? Can you imagine what was said during that conversation?
11. Look at Jonah 3:9-10. What do we mean when we say, "God repented of evil"? Did God seem to change His mind about destroying Nineveh?
12. What about Jonah's complaint? (Jonah 4:1-3) Is it fair for God to send one of His prophets off so far to give such a message and then just make him look like a false prophet?
13. Is this just a message about Jonah being disobedient by not at first doing what God had asked him to do, or is there a really significant theological matter involved here regarding Jonah's attitude toward God?
14. In light of Jonah's comments about God, do you think he did his preaching with real conviction? Or all the while did he have in the back of his mind that God would probably not go through with this threatened punishment?
15. What do you think of Jonah's attitude about God? What about God's attitude toward these number one enemies of Israel? If Jonah understood that God is the kind of God that is implied in Jonah 4:2, why wouldn't he be proud of it and want to share that message?
16. What was Jonah really afraid of? It seems that he was most of all concerned about his own reputation! (Jonah 4:1-3) Is it not apparent that Jonah didn't really care much about God's reputation nor about the heathen inhabitants of Nineveh?
17. By comparison, what about us? How long has it been since you have heard a sermon about the "signs of the end" with all the dates being given and a real conviction that these signs are proof of the nearness of the end? Could we even today preach with conviction about the nearness of the end? What explanation should we give of the reasons for the delay? Would a study of this matter—the reason for the delay in the second coming—help us to reorient our thinking toward a more correct picture of God? How many years of warning were given to the people before the flood?
18. Compare the response of the Ninevites to Jonah's message and the final comment about Israel and Judah themselves given much later at the end of 2 Chronicles 36:15-16. Who seems the most "Christian" or savable?
19. Do you expect to see Jonah in the kingdom? If so, what do you think he will have to say about this whole experience? Don't you think he will look back and be able to say, "The picture of God that I was ashamed of then, I am proud of now?" Are we Adventists proud or distressed that God has waited 160 years? Are we being true friends of God and correctly representing Him?
20. What did the angels learn from the stories and books of Jonah and Nahum?

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