

Fact Sheet for **“A Different Lens”**
Jonah 1

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Today I'm going to give you a different lens through which to view this book. We will see some biblical truths that can both encourage and challenge us today. We will begin with a few questions that will help form that lens.

1. Who was Jonah?

We first read about Jonah in the 2 Kings 14:23-25. He was a prophet who lived during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel.

2. Who was Jeroboam II?

He reigned in Israel from 793-753 B.C. During his reign he was able to expand Israel's territories to their greatest extent since the time of David and Solomon. He occupied land that formerly belonged to Aram (northeast toward Damascus and north to Hamath). But it would be only 31 years after his reign that Israel would be completely and devastatingly conquered by Assyria.

3. What was happening in Israel?

In short... gross idolatry. Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, and Micah all warned Israel of this. Look at Amos 5:27 and Hosea 11:5.

4. What was Assyria like in battle?

They were one of the cruelest, vilest, most powerful, and most idolatrous empires in the world. A former king of theirs boasted, "I slaughtered them; with their blood I dyed the mountain red like wool.... The heads of their warriors I cut off, and I formed them into a pillar over against their city; their young men and their maidens I burned in the fire". "Regarding one captured leader, he wrote, 'I flayed [him], his skin I spread upon the wall of the city....' He also wrote of mutilating the bodies of live captives and stacking their corpses in piles. Another former king boasted, "I cut their throats like lambs" and "Like the many waters of a storm I made their gullets and entrails run down upon the wide earth.... Their hands I cut off". A later king described his treatment of a captured leader in these words: "I pierced his chin with my keen hand dagger. Through his jaw.... I passed a rope, put a dog chain upon him and made him occupy.... a kennel". He also boasted that his officials hung Egyptian corpses "on stakes [and] stripped off their skins and covered the city wall(s) with them".¹ There was certainly no love lost between Jonah and the Assyrians. From the book of Jonah it is safe to say that he absolutely hated them. They deserved every punishment God could deal out!

5. But what was God's desire?

From what is written in this book it is clear that God's desire was that they would repent. When God began forming the nation of Israel he even formed them to have a missionary impact on the world. This can be seen even in his first words to Abram on Genesis 12:3. *Remember that God has given us the same task (Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Peter 3:9)*. But instead Israel took on the idolatry of the world and did not follow-up on their call to impact for God the nations around them. Notice also that the main character in this book in *NOT* Jonah, it is God!

Read Jonah 1:1 This was God's first command to Jonah in this book. And Jonah would have immediately gotten the idea that God was going after their repentance. Instead Jonah strongly wished for their destruction!

¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament, p. 1494.

Read Jonah 1:3 At God's command Jonah responds with, "No!" He attempts to get out of Dodge. But God is omnipresent. No one is ever out of His presence no matter where they are or how hard they try to hide.

Read Jonah 1:4 This was no small storm. And God hurled this storm around that ship in direct response to Jonah's disobedience. Think about it. God can change the circumstances of our lives for His purposes. We, from a merely human perspective, could consider these changes in circumstances a matter of coincidence or luck, but not from God's perspective. It would take a lot to frighten a mariner, but that was no small storm.

Read Jonah 1:5 It is interesting to note that God would keep these mariners safe, though they didn't know it yet. In fact, their perception of the God of Israel would be greatly increased because of the events of this storm.

Read Jonah 1:6 Everyone else was crying out to their god. I don't know when Jonah first got the idea that the storm was on his account, but that thought may have been birthed here.

Read Jonah 1:7 Have you ever tried casting lots? I have and it didn't work. There is nothing I can see in the Bible that guarantees that this is a sure way to know God's will, but God did use this method on occasion. This is one of those occasions. And God guaranteed this lot! In any case Jonah now knew that the cause of the storm was his refusal to follow God's command. Was Jonah repentant? I doubt it because of what is to follow in the book.

Read Jonah 1:8-9 To a group of idol worshippers Jonas words would have struck fear. But again think about it. This was a great statement of theology, but Jonah wasn't following it, and later didn't want to follow it.

Read Jonah 1:10-11 Can you imagine being in that ship??? God was ramping up the storm for His own purpose.

Read Jonah 1:12 Jonah could easily have thought this would result in his death. For Jonah that may have been a better option than to see Nineveh repent. He likely had no idea that God had a different plan.

Read Jonah 1:13 The mariners thought that throwing Jonah overboard would almost certainly result in his death, so they tried to avoid that action, but to no avail. And God continued to further ramp up the storm.

Read Jonah 1:14-15 Wow! The God of the Hebrews truly is a great God!

Read Jonah 1:16 Be careful here. Their perception of the one true God was definitely increased here, but it does not necessarily mean that they became saved. However this may have resulted in the real salvation of one or more of the crew.

Read Jonah 1:17 Was this possible? You bet, if that fish were let's say a sperm whale. They have been known to swallow even a 15-foot shark.² I can't help thinking what it smelled like in that creature, and what that creature felt like with Jonah and all that air inside.

When I look back over this chapter here are some truths I see that God is reminding me of.

1. The main character in this story is really God, not Jonah.
2. God is omnipresent. We are never out of His sight.
3. God is absolutely sovereign in his plans, and powerful enough to see those plans through.
4. God can change the circumstances of our life for the worse when we choose not to follow Him. Don't be stubborn like Jonah!
5. God seeks the salvation sinful folks just like us. So should we, no matter how offensive those folks are.

² The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament, p. 1463.