# Jonah 1 Bible Study

1. “God will never override out ‘free will’ in order to bring about his purposes”. Do you agree? Why / why not?
2. Background reading: **Read 2 Kings 14:23-25** (NB “Israel” means the Northern Kingdom that broke away from the Davidic kings and the true worship of God centred on the temple and sacrificial system in Jerusalem); **Hos 7:3, 13:9-11** (Hosea was a prophet in the Northern Kingdom around Jonah’s time) & **Amos 7:7-17, 9:11** (Amos was another contemporary of Jonah).What do we know of Jonah’s ministry before the book even gets going?

*He prophesied peace and expansion at a time when other prophets were preaching God’s anger towards and judgement to come to the Northern Kingdom.*

1. **Read Jonah 1:1-17.** Jonah would have agreed with **Ps 139:7** (read). What is he trying to do in v3?

*Obviously not “hide” from God! But escape from God’s prophetic call and commission. The prophet stands “before” God to receive his word (eg see Elijah’s statement in* ***1 Kg 17:1****). Jonah doesn’t want to be the one to carry out God’s will His motive will become clear in chpt 4..*

1. Make a list of the contrasts between Jonah and the sailors. What can you conclude?

Jonah Sailors

*Sleeps during storm, no prayer, no fear Active, praying to gods, afraid*

*Doesn’t seem to care if he dies Desperate to live*

*Knows the cause of the storm Don’t know but think there’s a*

*spiritual cause.*

*Worships (“fears”) God Pagans / worship other gods*

*No obvious “fear” of God “Fear greatly” the Lord*

*No concern for the life of the sailors Try to save even Jonah’s life*

*Says he ‘fears’ God but is disobedient. v.16 Greatly fear God – and make*

*a sacrifice and vows*

*Jonah is shown up by these pagans, having no compassion for others or fear of God despite all he knows – and they with their little knowledge respond more appropriately to the Lord.*

1. Jonah’s offer in v12 *might* be a generous act of self-sacrifice. Is there another possible motive at work?

*Can’t say with certainty, but from what we know of Jonah, self-sacrifice seems unlikely. It seems more probable that this is a “death wish” – he’d rather die than carry out God’s command.*

1. With very limited revelation of God’s word (from Jonah), it seems that the sailors are still converted! From their prayer, what can you say they have understood and believed about God?

*At least that: he’s the God of the sea and land ie whole world; they are answerable to him and no other gods; he is right to judge them; they have no bargaining power with this God, but maybe he will show mercy; the God is completely sovereign – he does as he pleases (see Ps 115:3); he is to be worshiped and ‘feared’ above all else (the implication of their “sacrifice and vows”).*

1. Fear and the fear of God are key themes in Jonah 1. Consider:

Jonah - v.9 “I am a Hebrew and I fear the Lord…”

Sailors – v.5 The sailors feared

v10 The men feared with great fear

v16 The men feared, with great fear, the Lord

What can we learn about fear from this chapter? Would it be helpful to use the phrase “I fear the Lord” for our own relationship with God? Read also Luke 12:4-7.

*Fear can be terror at circumstances beyond our control. Fear can be a pious claim about your relationship with God but contradicted by our actions. And fear can be a deep conviction that the one who controls everything holds my life in his hands. He could destroy me effortlessly, but he can be merciful and gracious towards me too, and this is his preference!*

1. From Jonah 1, what can we say about the purposes of God? (compare this with your answers from Q1). Is this a challenge or a comfort?

# *God will bring about his purposes no matter what – he will not be out-manoeuvred or thwarted by our failings or disobedience. While this might challenge our human notions of “free will”, it is comforting to know that God is sovereign – the one in charge, not obliged to anyone and not limited by anyone. It also means that he is not reliant on us being perfect in obedience to bring about his will – hopefully we won’t rebel as Jonah did, but our weaknesses and limitations are no problem for God – so press on in faith and obedience!*

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