



# THE LOOKOUT

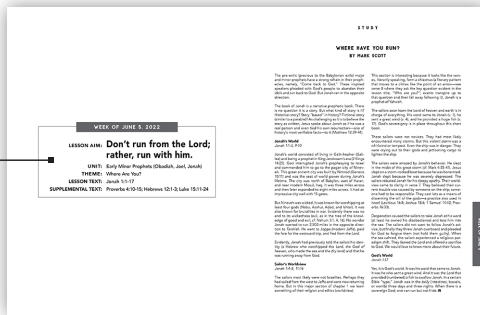
JUNE 2022

## Unit: Early Minor Prophets (Obadiah, Joel, Jonah) Theme: Where Are You?

**Overview:** Sometimes they are just called “the Twelve,” the minor prophets (minor in size, not in inspiration) who the hound of heaven uses to pursue his people. Obadiah (845 BC) is the tale of two mountains (Mount Edom and Mount Zion). Joel (835 BC) shows how a locust plague can help bring about genuine repentance. Jonah (755 BC) is the struggle of a prejudiced prophet to love the nations as God does. Students will learn where Edom is, where Israel is, and where Jonah is.

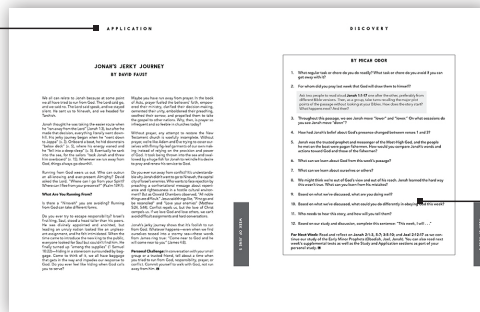
## HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JUNE 5, 2022

**LESSON AIM:** **Don't run from the Lord;  
rather, run with him.**

**UNIT:** Early Minor Prophets (Obadiah, Joel, Jonah)

**THEME:** Where Are You?

**LESSON TEXT:** Jonah 1:1-17

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Proverbs 4:10-15; Hebrews 12:1-3; Luke 15:11-24

## STUDY

### WHERE HAVE YOU RUN?

BY MARK SCOTT

The pre-exilic (previous to the Babylonian exile) major and minor prophets have a strong refrain in their prophecies, namely, “Come back to God.” These inspired speakers pleaded with God’s people to abandon their idols and run back to God. But Jonah ran in the opposite direction.

The book of Jonah is a narrative prophetic book. There is no question it is a story. But what kind of story is it? Historical story? Story “based” in history? Fictional story (similar to a parable)? As challenging as it is to believe the story as written, Jesus spoke about Jonah as if he was a real person and even tied his own resurrection—one of history’s most verifiable facts—to it (Matthew 12:39-41).

#### Jonah’s World

Jonah 1:1-3, 9-10

Jonah’s world consisted of living in Gath-hepher (Galilee) and being a prophet in King Jeroboam’s era (2 Kings 14:25). God interrupted Jonah’s prophesying to Israel and commanded him to go to the pagan city of Nineveh. This great ancient city was built by Nimrod (Genesis 10:11) and was the seat of world power during Jonah’s lifetime. The city was north of Babylon, east of Haran, and near modern Mosul, Iraq. It was three miles across and then later expanded to eight miles across. It had an impressive city wall with 15 gates.

But Nineveh was wicked. It was known for worshipping at least four gods (Nabu, Asshur, Adad, and Ishtar). It was also known for brutalities in war. Evidently there was no end to its *wickedness* (evil, as in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; cf. Nahum 3:1, 4, 16). No wonder Jonah wanted to run 2,500 miles in the opposite direction to *Tarshish*. He went to Joppa (modern Jaffa), paid the fare for the westward trip, and fled *from the Lord*.

Evidently, Jonah had previously told the sailors his identity (a Hebrew who worshipped the *Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land*) and that he was running away from God.

#### Sailor’s Worldview

Jonah 1:4-8, 11-16

The sailors most likely were not Israelites. Perhaps they had sailed from the west to Jaffa and were now returning home. But in this major section of chapter 1 we learn something of their religion and ethics (worldview).

This section is interesting because it looks like the verses, literarily speaking, form a chiasmus (a literary pattern that moves to a climax like the point of an arrow—see verse 8 where they ask the key question evident in the lesson title, “Who are you?”; events transpire up to that question and then fall away following it). Jonah is a prophet of Yahweh.

The sailors soon learn the Lord of heaven and earth is in charge of everything. His word came to Jonah (v. 1), he sent a great wind (v. 4), and he provided a huge fish (v. 17). God’s sovereignty is in place throughout this short book.

These sailors were not novices. They had most likely encountered many storms. But this *violent storm* was a whirlwind or tempest. Even the ship was in danger. They were crying out to their gods and jettisoning cargo to *lighten the ship*.

The sailors were amazed by Jonah’s behavior. He slept in the midst of this great storm (cf. Mark 4:35-41). Jesus slept on a storm-rocked boat because he was bone tired. Jonah slept because he was severely depressed. The sailors rebuked Jonah for his sleepy apathy. Their worldview came to clarity in verse 7. They believed their current *trouble* was caused by someone on the ship; someone had to be *responsible*. They cast lots as a means of discerning the will of the gods—a practice also used in Israel (Leviticus 16:8; Joshua 18:6; 1 Samuel 14:42; Proverbs 16:33).

Desperation caused the sailors to take Jonah at his word (at least he owned his disobedience) and toss him into the sea. The sailors did not want to follow Jonah’s advice, but finally they threw Jonah overboard and pleaded for God to forgive them (not hold them guilty). When the sea calmed, the sailors experienced a religious paradigm shift. They *feared the Lord* and *offered a sacrifice* to God. We would love to know more about their future.

#### God’s World

Jonah 1:17

Yes, it is God’s world. It was his word that came to Jonah. It was he who *sent a great wind*. And it was *the Lord* that provided (numbered) a fish to swallow Jonah. In a certain Bible “type,” Jonah was in the *belly* (intestines, bowels, or womb) *three days and three nights*. When there is a sovereign God, one can run but not hide. ■

## APPLICATION

### JONAH'S JERKY JOURNEY

BY DAVID FAUST

We all can relate to Jonah because at some point we all have tried to run from God. The Lord said go, and we said no. The Lord said speak, and we stayed silent. He sent us to Nineveh, and we headed for Tarshish.

Jonah thought he was taking the easier route when he “ran away from the Lord” (Jonah 1:3), but after he made that decision, everything literally went downhill. His jerky journey began when he “went down to Joppa” (v. 3). Onboard a boat, he hid downstairs “below deck” (v. 5), where his energy waned and he “fell into a deep sleep” (v. 5). Eventually he sank into the sea, for the sailors “took Jonah and threw him overboard” (v. 15). Whenever we run away from God, things always go downhill.

Running from God wears us out. Who can outrun an all-knowing and ever-present Almighty? David asked the Lord, “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” (Psalm 139:7).

#### What Are You Running From?

Is there a “Nineveh” you are avoiding? Running from God can take different forms.

Do you ever try to escape responsibility? Israel’s first king, Saul, stood a head taller than his peers. He was divinely appointed and anointed, but leading an unruly nation looked like an unpleasant assignment, and he felt intimidated. When the time came to introduce the new king to the public, everyone looked for Saul but couldn’t find him. He finally turned up “among the supplies” (1 Samuel 10:22)—hiding in a storeroom surrounded by baggage. Come to think of it, we all have baggage that gets in the way and impedes our response to God. Do you ever feel like hiding when God calls you to serve?

Maybe you have run away from prayer. In the book of Acts, prayer fueled the believers’ faith, empowered their ministry, clarified their decision-making, cemented their unity, emboldened their preaching, soothed their sorrow, and propelled them to take the gospel to other nations. Why, then, is prayer so infrequent and so feeble in churches today?

Without prayer, any attempt to restore the New Testament church is woefully incomplete. Without prayer, we’re like Adam and Eve trying to cover ourselves with flimsy fig-leaf garments of our own making instead of relying on the provision and power of God. It took being thrown into the sea and swallowed by a huge fish for Jonah to rekindle his desire to pray and renew his service to God.

Do you ever run away from conflict? It’s understandable why Jonah didn’t want to go to Nineveh, the capital city of Israel’s enemies. Who wants to face rejection by preaching a confrontational message about repentance and righteousness in a hostile cultural environment? But as Oswald Chambers observed, “All noble things are difficult.” Jesus said things like, “First go and be reconciled” and “Love your enemies” (Matthew 5:24, 5:44). Conflict repels us, but the love of Christ compels us. If we love God and love others, we can’t avoid difficult assignments and hard conversations.

Jonah’s jerky journey shows that it’s foolish to run from God. Whatever happens—even when we find ourselves tossed into a stormy sea—these words from James ring true: “Come near to God and he will come near to you” (James 4:8).

**Personal Challenge:** In conversation with your small group or a trusted friend, tell about a time when you tried to run from God, responsibility, prayer, or conflict. Commit yourself to walk with God, not run away from him. ■

## DISCOVERY

### BY MICAH ODOR

1. What regular task or chore do you do readily? What task or chore do you avoid if you can get away with it?
2. For whom did you pray last week that God will draw them to himself?

Ask two people to read aloud **Jonah 1:1-17** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then, as a group, take turns recalling the major plot points of the passage without looking at your Bibles. How does the story start? What happens next? And then?

3. Throughout this passage, we see Jonah move “lower” and “lower.” On what occasions do you see Jonah move “down”?
4. How had Jonah’s belief about God’s presence changed between verses 1 and 3?
5. Jonah was the trusted prophet and messenger of the Most-High God, and the people he met on the boat were pagan fishermen. How would you compare Jonah’s words and actions toward God and those of the fishermen?
6. What can we learn about God from this week’s passage?
7. What can we learn about ourselves or others?
8. We might think we’re out of God’s view and out of his reach. Jonah learned the hard way this wasn’t true. What can you learn from his mistakes?
9. Based on what we’ve discussed, what are you doing well?
10. Based on what we’ve discussed, what could you do differently in obeying God this week?
11. Who needs to hear this story, and how will you tell them?
12. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: “This week, I will . . .”

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Jonah 2:1-3, 5-7; 3:5-10**; and **Joel 2:12-17** as we continue our study of the Early Minor Prophets (Obadiah, Joel, Jonah). You can also read next week’s supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■