

JONAH

Main Idea of Jonah

The Lord is a God of boundless compassion not just for “us” (Jonah and the Israelites), but also for “them” (the pagan sailors and Ninevites).

Title

The title of the book is the name of the main character, Jonah. The book is anonymous, and there are now indicators elsewhere in Scripture to identify the author.

Background and Setting

Jonah is the fifth of the Minor Prophets in our English Bibles. Jonah is unique among the Latter Prophets (in Hebrew: Isaiah through Malachi) in that it is almost completely narrative, similar to the histories of Elijah and Elisha. As with his two predecessors, Elijah and Elisha, Jonah also ministered in and to Israel, as well as in Phoenicia and Aram. The exceptional section of this book, of course, is Jonah's psalm in 2:2-9 (cf. Hab. 3). Jonah is the only Old Testament prophet on record whom God sent to a heathen nation with a message of repentance. Nahum's later ministry to Nineveh consisted of announcing certain overthrow, although, had the Ninevites repented again, God might have relented.

Nineveh stood on the eastern bank of the Tigris River. It had walls 100 feet high and 50 feet thick, and the main one, punctuated by 15 gates, was over seven and one-half miles long. The total population was probably about 600,000—including the people who lived in the suburbs outside the city walls (cf. 4:11). The residents were idolaters and worshipped Asur and Ishtar, the chief male and female deities, as did almost all the Assyrians. Assyria was a threat to Israel's security (cf. Hos. 11:5; Amos 5:27). This is one reason Jonah refused to go to Nineveh. He feared the people might repent and that God would refrain from punishing Israel's enemy (4:2).

Since the rise of critical scholarship in the nineteenth century, many writers and teachers now believe that the events recorded in this book were not historical. They interpret this book as an allegory or as a parable.

Key Themes

There are five:

- A. God's sovereign control over events on the earth.
- B. God's determination to get His message to the nations.
- C. The need for repentance from sin in general.
- D. The need for repentance from self-centeredness and hypocrisy in particular.
- E. The full assurance that God will relent when people repent.

Key Verse(s)

Jonah 2:9: But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation *is* of the Lord.

Jonah 4:11: And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?

Jonah in the Bible

Jonah is one of ten Old Testament books never quoted in the New Testament (Judges, Ruth, Ezra, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Obadiah and Zephaniah). However, Jesus referred to Jonah as a historical person and to his experience as real (Matt. 12:38-42; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32). Jonah is the only Old Testament character with whom Jesus Christ compared Himself directly. Jesus did refer to other prophets, however, namely: Elijah, Elisha, and Isaiah—besides quoting and alluding to many others.

Matthew 12:38-42: Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah *is* here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon *is* here.

Key People in Jonah

There are basically two:

1. Jonah-reluctant missionary to the Ninevites; needed to be swallowed by a whale in order to comply with God's command.
2. The captain and crew of Jonah's getaway ship-tried to avoid killing Jonah; threw Jonah overboard to stop the storm.

Simple Outline

- I. The disobedience of the prophet (1-2).
- II. The obedience of the prophet (3-4).

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	Running from God First commission of Jonah ————— Results of disobedience ————— <i>CHAPTER</i> 1	Running to God Prayer of Jonah ————— Communication with the Lord ————— <i>CHAPTER</i> 2	Running with God Second commission of Jonah ————— Results of obedience ————— <i>CHAPTER</i> 3	Running against God Prejudice of Jonah ————— Lessons from the Lord ————— <i>CHAPTER</i> 4
Theme	God's infinite mercy for all people; our reluctance to share His mercy			
Key Verses	2:9; 4:11			
Christ in Jonah	Jonah's three days in the fish anticipates Christ's death and resurrection. The Ninevites' salvation represents the salvation available to all people in Christ.			

The Book of Jonah

Focus	“Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.” (2:8)			
Divisions	Jonah in the Ship 1	Jonah in the Fish 2	Jonah in the City 3	Jonah in the Suburbs 4
Topics	Protesting	Praying	Preaching	Pouting
	Jonah Disobeying	Jonah Praying	Jonah Obeying	Jonah Learning
Place	Israel & Nineveh			
Time	Eighth Century B.C.			
Author	The Prophet Jonah			