

Jonah

Authorship: The book is anonymous. On the other hand, according to uniform Jewish and early Christian belief, Jonah wrote this narrative of which he was the central human figure. If so, he likely wrote down the account of his ministry shortly after completing it.

Date: The language of 2 Kings 14:25 suggests that Jonah was a contemporary of Jeroboam II, and the events reported in his book were most likely recorded soon after they occurred (794 B.C. – 753 B.C.).

Background: Jeroboam II, king of Israel's northern kingdom from 794-753 B.C., was not only Israel's longest-reigning king but also one of its most successful, expanding Israel's borders back to what they had been more than 200 years before in the time of David and Solomon (see 2 Kings 14:23-29). At the same time, however, Assyria was growing in strength and pushing its way southward toward Israel, which it would conquer in 722 B.C. Jonah, from the northern town of Gath-hepher, had been used by God to predict Jeroboam's military successes (2 Kings 14:25). Now, however, the Lord had another mission for him: to travel to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and call that mighty and threatening nation to repentance. Although Nineveh would later repent at Jonah's preaching, its conquering Israel some 30 years later suggests the revival did not endure. Nineveh would itself fall in 612 B.C.

Recipients: Since Jonah was from the northern kingdom, the book is usually considered to have been written to the north. Since Assyria was clearly a threat to both kingdoms, however, Jonah's story would have been interesting reading for all Israelites.

Purpose: Jonah is not the story of a man and a fish. Rather, it is the story of a man and his God. It has much to teach about the personal relationship between God and believers:

- Jonah was nationalistic in his faith, but God wanted him to see that God's compassion extends to non-Israelites as well (4:11);
- Jonah's nationalistic zeal was probably selfish, as he saw Assyria as a threat to Israel's prosperity. God wanted to show Jonah that compassion for sinners was more important than prosperity.
- Jonah was selfish on an individual level as well. If he could not control world events, at least he would try to control his shade plant (4:5-10)! God sought here as well to counter Jonah's attitude of control and anger.

Unique Feature: (1) Except for one short sentence (3:4), the book of Jonah is actually a book about Jonah's prophetic ministry, rather than a record of his actual prophecies; (2) Jonah, like Habakkuk, consists largely of a dialogue between God and the prophet.



Outline:

- I. The Word of God (1:1-16)
 - A. Jonah's Secret Rejoicing (1:1-2)

The inescapable missionary challenge of:

 1. The Man (1:1)
 2. The Multitude (1:2a)
 3. The Message (1:1:2b)
 - B. Jonah's Swift Rebellion (1:3-5)
 1. The Prophet Paying (1:3)
 2. The Pagan's Praying (1:4-5)
 - a. The Mariners were Alarmed (1:4-5a)
 - b. The Missionary was Asleep (1:5b)

Key Verse

"Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, saying, 'I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice' (Jonah 2:2 ESV).

Meaning of Name

Jonah, the eighth-century Israelite prophet against Nineveh, has given his name to this book as its central character and composer. His name means: "Dove" in Hebrew.

Key Term: "Fish"

Although this book is not about the fish, clearly Jonah's being swallowed by the fish is the most exciting and memorable incident in the book. This is what keeps interest in the book alive and makes the best known of all the minor prophets.

Themes:

"God's Mercy" and "God's Sovereignty Over Nature"

The mercy of God to those who do not deserve it is one of the great themes of the Bible. In this book it is cast in a new light. God's sovereignty is seen explicitly in four things. God prepared in the book: (1) a great fish; (2) a gourd; (3) a worm; (4) a vehement east wind.

- C. Jonah's Sudden Realization (1:6-9)
 - 1. Jonah's Shame (1:6)
 - 2. Jonah's Blame (1:7-8)
 - 3. Jonah's Claim (1:9)
- D. Jonah's Stubborn Resolve (1:10-16)
 - 1. His Decision (1:10-12)
 - a. The Sailor's Questions Asked (1:10-11)
 - i. Why? (1:10)
 - ii. What? (1:11)
 - b. The Sailor's Questions Answered (1:12)
 - 2. His Doom (1:13-16)
 - a. What the Sailor's Did (1:13)
 - b. What the Sailor's Desired (1:14)
 - c. What the Sailor's Discovered (1:15-16)
- II. The Word with God 1:17-2:10)
 - A. Jonah's Dreadful Prison (1:17)
 - B. Jonah's Desperate Prayer (2:1-8)
 - 1. What Jonah Reaped (2:1-6)
 - a. A Feeling of Horror (2:1-3)
 - b. A Flash of Hope (2:4)
 - c. A Foretaste of Hell (2:5-6)
 - 2. What Jonah Remembered (2:7)
 - 3. What Jonah Realized (2:8)
 - C. Jonah's Dying Promise (2:9-10)
 - 1. His Surrender (2:9)
 - 2. His Salvation (2:10)
- III. The Word for God (3:1-10)
 - A. Revelation (3:1-4)
 - 1. The Prophet (3:1-2)
 - 2. The Prophecy (3:3-4)
 - a. A Word about the Place (3:3)
 - b. A Word about the Proclamation (3:4)
 - B. Revival (3:5-10)
 - 1. Faith (3:5)
 - 2. Fasting (3:6-9)
 - a. Its Vast Extent (3:6-7)
 - b. Its Vital Expression (3:8)
 - c. Its Valid Expectation (3:9)
 - 3. Forgiveness (3:10)
- IV. The Word about God (4:1-11)
 - A. Jonah's Displeasure with God (4:1-9)
 - 1. Jonah and His God (4:1-4)
 - a. Jonah's Rage (4:1)
 - b. Jonah's Resentment (4:2)
 - c. Jonah's Request (4:3-4)
 - 2. Jonah and His Gourd (4:5-8)
 - a. His Decision (4:5)
 - b. His Discomfort (4:6)
 - c. His Dismay (4:7-8)
 - 3. Jonah and His Grudge (4:9)
 - B. Jonah's Discovery about God (4:10-11)
 - 1. An Appeal (4:10)
 - 2. An Application (4:11)

One Sentence Summary

After Jonah's disobedience to God's command for him to preach in Nineveh resulted in his being swallowed by a fish, he then obeyed God and preached in Nineveh, with the result that the entire city repented and turned to God.

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