

# THE BOOK OF JONAH – AN INTRODUCTION

*“Salvation belongs to the LORD.” Jonah 2:9*

**AUTHOR:** though not explicitly stated, the author is almost certainly Jonah (**1:1**) whose name means “dove”

- He was from Gath-Hepher, a town of Zebulun located 4 miles NE of Nazareth in Galilee (**2 Kings 14:25; Josh. 19:10**).
- If Jonah was the author, it likely indicates that he later came to a measure of repentance from his sinful posture.
- If Jonah was not the author, he likely spoke with the author to relay much of the information recorded in the book.
- Jonah is the only recorded OT prophet whom God sent to a Gentile nation with a call to repentance.
- Jonah has the undistinguished award of being the only recorded prophet who ran from God’s call.

**PURPOSE:** To display the sovereign saving power of YHWH who pursues all sorts of rebels with surprising mercy.

- YHWH’s pursuing mercy is directed at a running prophet from Israel, sinking sailors on the sea, and the wicked people of Nineveh. All people need God’s mercy, and He delights in giving it.

**AUDIENCE:** Jonah and the Israelites he typified

- While Jonah’s preaching was directed at the Ninevites of Assyria, God’s revelation was first directed toward Jonah and then to the entire the nation of Israel who were characterized by the same self-righteous pride as the prophet.

**DATE:** likely composed between 780-760<sub>BC</sub>

- Jonah lived during the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. in the Northern Kingdom.
- Jonah ministered during the reign of Israel’s 14<sup>th</sup> king, the wicked Jeroboam II (**782-753BC; 2 Kings 14:23-29**)

**BACKGROUND:**

1. Jonah lived roughly 50 years after Elisha, was a contemporary of Amos and Hosea, and preceded Isaiah by 50 years.
2. Jonah rightly prophesied that Jeroboam II would be used by God to restore Israel’s boundaries (**2 Kings 14:24**).
3. Jonah ministered during a time of financial prosperity and moral poverty under Jeroboam II (**782-753BC; 2 Kings 14:25**).
4. Israel became marked by wicked idolatry, oppressive injustice, deceitful greed, and heartless religious ritualism (cf. **Amos**).
5. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria located 220 miles NW of modern-day Bagdad along the eastern bank of the Tigris River. Wicked Nimrod built the city in the days following God’s scattering of people at the Tower of Babel (**Gen. 10:11**).
6. Its residents were idolaters who worshipped Ashur and Ishtar, the chief deities of the Assyrians.
7. The city of Nineveh boasted of 100-foot walls that were nearly 50 feet thick. The main wall was 7 ½ miles long.
8. Nineveh’s population is debated with estimations ranging between 120,000-600,000. Those with low estimations view Jonah 4:11 as speaking about all the inhabitants while others view that that verse to be referring to children.
9. The Assyrians were known for their cruel and brutal treatment of captives they collected during their conquests.
10. It appears God providentially weakened Nineveh before Jonah’s arrival. In 783BC King Adad-nirari III died leaving them without strong leadership until 745BC when Tiglah-pileser was enthroned. The nation was also hit with deadly plagues in 765 and 759BC and was frightened by a solar eclipse in 763BC. The weak leadership and plagues left Nineveh susceptible to attacks from the people of Mannai and Madai who lived to the north. (*Constable, 2017*)
11. Following Jonah’s visit Assyria grew in power and became the world’s strongest military by the end of the century.

## MISCELLANEOUS

- Jonah is not an extended parable. Its miraculous account of the fish is simply a supernatural act of God to save Jonah.
- Jesus believed and taught that Jonah and the events in this book were historical realities (Mt. 12:39-42, 16:4; Lk. 11:29-32).
- The prophetic book does not record any prophecies, but focuses on a selected historical narrative from the life of Jonah.

## THEMES

- Sovereignty: storm (1:4, 1:15), lots (1:7), fish (1:17, 2:10), waves (2:3), salvation (2:9), plant (4:6), worm (4:7), wind (4:8)
- Gentile's Response: captain (1:6), sailors (1:5, 1:14, 16), people of Nineveh (3:5), King of Nineveh (3:6-9)
- Nature: sea (2:3), storms (1:4, 1:15), fish (1:17, 2:10), plant (4:6), worm (4:7), wind (4:8), cattle (4:11)
- Prayer: sailors to idols (1:5), captain requests (1:6), sailors to YHWH (1:14), Jonah (2:1), Nineveh (3:8), Jonah in anger (4:2-3)
- Word of the LORD: came to Jonah (1:1), came to Jonah a 2<sup>nd</sup> time (3:1), Nineveh believed the Word of the LORD (3:4-5),

## AN OUTLINE OF JONAH: PROPHET ON THE RUN

### (1:1-2:10) JONAH RUNS AND GOD SAVES

(1:1-17) *The Protesting Prophet and the Pursing God*

(1:1-3) God Calls and Jonah Runs

(1:4-17) God Pursues and Jonah Swims

(2:1-10) *The Praying Prophet and the Saving God*

(2:1-6a) Jonah's Distress and God's Deliverance

(2:6b-10) Jonah's Thanksgiving and God's Salvation

### (3:1-4:11) JONAH PREACHES AND GOD SAVES

(3:1-10) *The Preaching Prophet and the Saving God*

(3:1-3) God Calls and Jonah Obeys

(3:4-10) Jonah Preaches and Nineveh Repents

(4:1-11) *The Pouting Prophet and the Correcting God*

(4:1-4) Jonah's Anger and God's Question

(4:5-11) Jonah Pouts and God Teaches Compassion



### GEOGRAPHY IN JONAH

Jonah was from **Gath-Hepher** (1:1) a town of the tribe of Zebulun, located 4 miles NE of Nazareth in Galilee.

**Samaria** was the capital city of the Northern Kingdom. **Joppa** (1:3) was a port town 35 miles SW of Samaria.

God called Jonah to go to **Nineveh** (1:2, 3:2), the capital city of **Assyria**, located approximately 550 miles NE of Israel.

Jonah fled from God toward **Tarshish** (1:3), a city located on Spain's coast, approximately 2500 miles W of Joppa.

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