

Introduction for Jonah

Author: The author of the book of Jonah is uncertain. While some believe Jonah penned the book himself, others remain unsure. One argument against Jonah being the writer is that the book is written entirely in third person. Other prophets didn't write entirely in the first person, but theirs were not exclusively in third person. Some contend it is unlikely Jonah would have written such a brutally honest account about himself. We do know "the word of the LORD came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai" – [Jonah 1:1](#), but we cannot be dogmatic about the author. No other book in the Bible refers to Jonah as the author, as is the case with some other books and authors.

Regardless of the actual author, we do know Jonah was an actual prophet, and the book should be regarded as divinely inspired. [2 Kings 14:25](#) – He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher. Jonah was a prophet of God, called unto the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He was from Gath-hepher, located just west of the Sea of Galilee in Nazareth.

The book should be received as a historical narrative, as opposed to fiction, allegory, or parables. It refers to real people and real places – Tarshish, Joppa, and Nineveh. Josephus and the early church fathers viewed Jonah and the book of Jonah as historical. Jesus also referred directly to the book of Jonah and the events which it recorded. [Matt.12:40-41](#) – For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ^[41] The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

Date Written: While the date of the writing of the book of Jonah is uncertain, we do know the time-period in which he lived. Jonah served as prophet during the reign of King Jeroboam II over Israel, 794-753 BC. This was a time of prosperity and expansion of the kingdom. During his reign, Jeroboam II expanded Israel's borders to where they had been 200 years prior, during the reigns of David and Solomon. Jeroboam's reign coincided with King Uzziah in Judah. Amos and Hosea, would have been contemporaries of Jonah.

During this time, Assyrian brutality and force had become legendary. Their armies often numbered in the hundreds of thousands. They were skillful in infantry, cavalry mounted troops, and chariot corps. They were notorious for encamping against cities, forcing their starvation, which occasionally resulted in cannibalism. Those spared death from starvation, or at the hands of their captors, were often carried away captive to other parts of the kingdom.

To whom it was Written: Jonah was a prophet in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. This would have been written primarily to them, but it is almost certain that Judah would have read it as well. The Assyrians would conquer Israel in 722 BC, and Judah will deal with them during the reign of King Hezekiah. Although written thousands of years ago, it is clearly given to all people of every generation.

Purpose of Jonah: The book of Jonah reveals two primary purposes. The first of which is:

A Historical Purpose – Jonah was sent to Nineveh to preach a message of impending judgment to bring the people to repentance. This may seem unusual for a Jewish prophet to go unto a Gentile people, and have his work recorded in Scripture that was read primarily by Jews. However, God had a plan and purpose for this.

1. Jonah's mission to Nineveh served as a reminder to Israel of their responsibility to be a witness for the Lord among the nations. They were called to be an example of God's love for mankind and to reveal the requirements necessary to have a right relationship with Him.

2. Jonah going to Nineveh to preach should have reminded Israel of God's love for all people, even those considered their enemies. Knowing the brutal reputation of the Assyrians, and the danger they posed to Israel, Jonah's work in Nineveh must have been shocking for those within Israel. It served to showcase the love and mercy of God, being extended to the human race. God was willing to offer an opportunity for repentance to those considered vile and barbaric.

3. Jonah's rebellion against the will of God and hard-heartedness toward the Assyrians is well documented in the book. His trip to Nineveh served to convict Jonah of his disobedience and sound an alarm for Israel regarding their rebellion and lack of compassion. Like Jonah, Israel had become callous and hard-hearted toward other people and their need for the Lord.

A Doctrinal Purpose – The doctrines within the book of Jonah and the great spiritual truth it reveals is often overshadowed by his miraculous encounter with the great fish. Most are familiar with his time spent in the belly of the whale, but they fail to recognize the profound doctrine revealed in the book. The primary doctrines include:

1. The desire of the Lord for all people to be saved – even those considered our enemies. [2 Peter 3:9](#) – *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* We must guard against an attitude similar to Jonah's. We too must be willing to share our faith with all people, even those we assume have no desire for the Lord. We are to completely surrender to the call of God.

2. Jonah also reveals the radical love of God for humanity. God desired to show mercy unto the Assyrians more than He desired to judge their sin. In His great mercy, God provided an opportunity for a wicked, barbaric people to repent and turn unto Him. As His children, we are called to share and show His love for all people, regardless of their situation or actions. God does not love their sin, but He desires they hear of His great love through the Gospel.

3. Jonah beautifully displayed the need for repentance. We live in an age when repentance is often overlooked and few are called to repent. Repentance is essential for salvation. Following salvation, even believers must be willing to repent of rebellion and disobedience, seeking renewed fellowship with the Lord. If the barbaric Assyrians were willing to repent, how much more should God's people be willing to deal with sin in their lives?

4. Finally, but certainly not least significant, Jonah declares the absolute sovereignty of God. Israel had failed in their commitment unto the Lord. They were not being the witness He desired them to be before the nations. God's sovereign plan will not be thwarted due to man's disobedience. If Israel refused to show the Assyrians God's love and grace, He would send a personal servant to them specifically for that purpose. Jonah, like many in Israel, sought to rebel against the will of God, trying to escape unto Tarshish. God pursued Jonah, allowing him to be swallowed by the great fish, and preserved his life within the fish. God determined Jonah would minister to Nineveh, and His plans would not go unfinished. (We must understand that God will accomplish what He desires. If He has spoken to us in regard to His will, the best course of action is obedient submission. He will pursue us until we submit to His authority.)

Christ in the book of Jonah: Some scholars claim Jonah is one of the books Satan hates the most. While many overlook its spiritual significance, it beautifully points to the coming Messiah – His death, burial, and triumphant resurrection. Jonah is the only prophet whom Jesus likened unto Himself. [Matt.12:40-41](#) – *For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

We also see the great love of Christ and His abundant grace foreshadowed in the book of Jonah. Christ came to redeem fallen humanity, not just the nation of Israel. Following the Lord's ascension and the church receiving the Spirit at Pentecost, the Gospel was even taken unto the Gentiles. Peter shared with them initially, and God called Paul to minister almost exclusively to the Gentile nations. Through the book of Jonah, we also see a foreshadowing of the Great Commission given of the Lord to the church. We are to take the Gospel unto the nations, making disciples for the Lord.

Key Verses: Jonah 2:8-9 – They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. ^[9] But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay *that* that I have vowed. Salvation *is* of the LORD. Jonah 4:2 – And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, *was* not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou *art* a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

Divisions of the book of Jonah: Dr. H.L. Wilmington shared a breakdown of the divisions within the book. It can be divided by chapters.

- I. The Refusal: Jonah Protests; a demonstration of God's patience.
- II. The Resolution: Jonah prayed; a demonstration of God's power.
- III. The Revival: Jonah Preached; a demonstration of God's pardon.
- IV. The Resentment: Jonah Pouted; a demonstration of God's pity.

I look forward to moving through this powerful Old Testament book. I pray as we do, we will discover much more than the miracle of the Jonah and the whale. While that is certainly worthy of our time and conversation, if that is all we receive from this study, we will miss much truth God intended for our lives. Again, drawing from Dr. Wilmington's wisdom, he declared: "THIS BOOK CONTAINS THE BIGGEST FISH STORY OF ALL TIME. BUT IT ISN'T WHAT YOU THINK IT IS. Almost everyone has heard the story of the huge sea creature that swallowed Jonah, and about Jonah's pitiful prayer for deliverance while inside its stomach (ch. 1-2). But the real fish story takes place in chapter 3. To understand this, consider an event that would transpire some seven centuries later in northern Israel: "And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him" (Matt. 4:18-20). In this passage Jesus taught that the "fish" God is looking to catch are sinful men, and the real "fishermen" are soul-winners. In Jonah 3, after the prophet's preaching, history's greatest revival took place. In other words, Jonah caught more "fish" in his net than ever before thus we have the greatest fish story of all time."