

J O N A H

I. THE TITLE

The book is named for its chief character, Jonah, which means "dove".

II. THE PROPHET

All that we know about Jonah, besides what is told in this book, we learn from II Kings 14:25. He was the son of Amittai (Jonah 1:1), and a native of Gath-hepher (II Kings 14:25), a village of Zebulun. Hence he belonged to the Northern Kingdom. Jewish legend represents him as being the son of the widow at Sarepta whom Elijah restored to life, and the youth whom Elisha sent to anoint Jehu, king of Israel. Nothing is known of the time and place of his death. An old tradition says he was buried at Gath-hepher, whereas modern tradition places his supposed tomb near Nineveh.

III. THE DATE

The date of the prophecy is hard to determine. One view of II Kings 14:25, where Jonah prophesied the success of Jeroboam II in his war with Syria, places the prophecy in or before the reign of said king, or about 820 B.C.

IV. THE MOTIVE

The motive of the prophecy was to rebuke the exclusive spirit of Israel, and its rejoicing over the calamities of alien nations. The Jews claimed that God cared only for them. Their doctrine was upset when God offered forgiveness to Nineveh, capital city of Assyria, and most dangerous foe of Israel, when the Ninevites repented.

V. CONDITIONS IN ISRAEL

It was a time of political revival in Israel. If it was during the reign of Jeroboam II, outward prosperity was in evidence, and conquered territory was being restored to Israel. But destruction was imminent. Before long God used the Assyrians as a scourge upon Israel.

VI. PECULIARITIES OF THE BOOK.

In form, the book is not a prophecy in the ordinary sense. It differs from other Old Testament prophecies in that it is narrative in form. It is more "the history of a prophecy than a prophecy itself". Whereas other prophecies are filled with prophetic utterances, the book of Jonah narrates his experiences, but gives us few of his utterances. It has been called "the most 'Christian' of all the Old Testament books", since it gives the universality of God's plan of redemption, and shows "the capacity of the Gentiles for salvation, and the design of God to make them partakers of it."

VII. SUMMARY OF THE BOOK

God sent Jonah to prophesy against Nineveh, a wicked, alien city. The prophet shrank from the commission because he felt it would result in the sparing of a hostile city. He attempted to escape by ship to Tarshish. A storm arose, Jonah was cast into the sea, and a large fish prepared by Jehovah swallowed him. The prophet then executed his commission. The king of Nineveh commanded the Ninevites to repent and thereby averted threatened destruction. Moved by national prejudice, Jonah begrudged the mercy which was extended to Nineveh, a heathen city. By the lesson of the gourd, Jonah was shown that God cares for other nations besides Israel.

VIII. RESEARCH MATERIAL

- A. Elements of character noticeable in Jonah.
- B. Missionary lessons taught in this book.
- C. Jonah's influence on the sailors and the Ninevites.
- D. Map study of all places named or implied in the book.

IX. PRACTICAL LESSONS OF PERMANENT VALUE

1. God would have us love all men as He loves them and give ourselves to the task of winning them.
2. It is utterly impossible to escape from God.
3. No divinely given task may be lightly regarded.
4. One tends to limit God by disobedience.
5. It is tragic to have to meet the storms of life without God's presence.
6. One usually runs into a storm when he seeks to run away from God.
7. The path of self-will is always downward.
8. In the hour of distress one turns to the God he has grieved.

JONAH -Minor Prophet--Prophet of IsraelA. PERSONAL HISTORY

Johah was a native of Gath-hepher, a town of the tribe of Zebulun near Nazareth. (The name of the town means "Wine Press of the Well")..Johah was a servant of God and the son of Amittai, the prophet....He lived in the reign of Jeroboam II (790-749), and helped recover some of Israel's lost territory. Thus Johah was a famous statesman as well as a prophet. Chronically, Johah was the first of all the prophets, major and minor.

B. INTERNAL SITUATION:

Jonah lived in the kingdom of Israel (the northern kingdom) during the 41 year reign of Jeroboam, son of Joash. Jeroboam "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord". (II Kings 14:24) The Northern Kingdom had fallen into idoltry and the worship of Baal during the reign of Ahab and succeeding kings.

While the nation was disobedient, it formally accepted God and considered itself to have exclusive right to His promises. It rejoiced in the misfortunes of neighboring gentile nations, espically the Assyrians who had been the dominant world power for many years.

C. INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

The Assyrian nation was the leading world power during the time of Jonah. It was a world-Empire for about 300 years, 900-607 B.C. It began its rise to world power about the time of the division of the Hebrew Kingdom at the close of Solomon's reign. It gradually absorbed and destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Ninevah, the capital city of Assyria, was a magnificent city which rivaled the glory of Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar's day. As described by Diodorus Siculus, a pagan historian, "The circumference of Nineveh was 60 miles...It was surrounded by walls 100 feet high and so broad that three chariots might drive abreast upon them, having 1,500 towers 200 feet in height." The great pagan city, also renowned for its cruelty and wickedness, was the setting for Jonah's notable work.

D. CHRONOLOGY AND CONTEMPORARY KINGS

1. As earlier noted, Jeroboam II was king of Israel during Jonah's recorded work. (790-749 B.C.)
2. Kings of Judah during this period were Amaziah, followed by his son Azariah who became king of Judah during the 27th year of the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel and reigned for 52 years. He was a good king.
3. The king of Assyria during Jonah's visit probably was Adad-Nirari.

E. OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF JONAH:

Chapter I---Commission to Nineveh

- a. Jonah's first commission to proclaim the doom of Nineveh and his refusal to obey;
- b. His flight westward--his fear that God would be gracious to Nineveh(4:2)..
- c. The storm, the cause and the lot; and
- d. Jonah's preservation in the great fish.

Chapter II---Psalm of Thanksgiving

- a. Jonah's terrible experience in the deep;
- b. His remembrance of God and his prayer;
- c. His thanks for deliverance.

Chapter III---Jonah's second commission

- a. The proclamation of doom;
- b. The action of the people;
- c. The king's decree;
- d. Judgment is averted.

Chapter IV---The Angry Prophet Divinely Instructed

- a. Jonah's displeasure with God's mercy;
- b. The incident of the gourd;
- c. Jonah reproved---God's compassion for human souls.

CONSEQUENCE---Nineveh's destruction was averted and Assyria again became a great world power through which God later brought about the downfall of Israel.

KEY LESSONS---Israel, representing God's chosen race, refused to heed the repeated warnings of Jehovah to turn from sin and idolatry while a wicked, pagan nation repented after the first warning...The incidents in Jonah's experiences demonstrate the universality of God's people---the fact that He is GOD of all nations and races of people, not of the Jews alone.....

JONAH---MINOR PROPHET-Israel

Introduction

The book of Jonah is unique in the Minor Prophets in many ways.

1. It is chiefly a book about a prophet instead of being a collection of oracles of the prophet.
2. Only eight words are needed to report Jonah's preaching (Chap. 3:4).
"Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown!"
3. The book is the only latter prophet cast in narrative form, though there are many narrative sections in others, and the former prophets in the Hebrew Bible (Joshua-Kings) are narrative.
4. Jonah is the only Minor Prophet:
 - a. In whose career the miraculous plays a prominent role.
 - b. Whose major activity is on foreign soil.
 - c. Who preaches exclusively to a foreign people.
 - d. Jonah is the only O.T. character represented as taking a trip on the Mediterranean.
 - e. Jonah is also the only Minor Prophet mentioned by Jesus and is the only O.T. character likened by the LORD to HIMSELF (Matt. 12:38-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32).
5. The book stresses universalism more than any other prophet (minor).
6. In the synagogue it is a part of the liturgy for the day of Atonement. The Jews have esteemed it very highly.....
7. GREAT COMMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE ABOUT THE BOOK...
we do not agree with all the comments.
 - a. The German scholar CORNILL says,
 "I cannot take up this marvelous book, or even speak of it, without the tears rising in my eyes."
 - b. Someone has given the following outline:
 - (1). Chp. 1. Disobedience --running from GOD
 - (2). Chp. 2. Prayer--Running to GOD..
 - (3). Chp. 3. Preaching--Running with GOD.
 - (4). Chp. 4. Complaints--Running ahead of GOD.
 - c. Cadman says, "...There is not a more modern book in the O.T. than that of Jonah. Its ingenious mode of narration and dramatic strength are born of the religious imagination in which it was composed. It sets forth as self-evident the truth that the CREATOR of the whole human family can know no distinction of race, creed or physical boundaries since all peoples are HIS offspring.....The prophet who wrote this document stretches forth a helping hand to all who love their fellow men."

d. Ward says,.. "Over against the narrow prejudice of that early day, set the breadth of God's compassion and the profound mercy He proffers to the penitent. All men, whatever their time or clime, are His children. Their sin is God's sorrow, their salvation HIS concern. And the book is intended to inculcate worthier views of God and man by removing the exclusiveness of Jewish thought, and the idea that grace was the sole possess of the covenant people.

e. Cohon says,.. "The book is clearly an attack on the narrow, tribal Judaism of the day, and a plea for universality. God is one and mankind is one. Obviously to read the book of Jonah as history is to become involved in a mesh of highly embarrassing miracles and to pervert a great prophetic message into ludicrous nonsense. The book is Hebrew prophecy at its highest level, told in the form of a parable."

f. Montefiore says: "It is the triumph of Judaism. The author of Jonah takes rank with the Second Isaiah as a master builder of Judaism. The one teaches the doctrine of absolute monotheism, the other the doctrine of human brotherhood to which the divine unity leads us on. The one lays down the nature of Israel's mission, the other illustrates it.. Service and not privilege, or rather, the privilege of service; that is the reason of Israel's separateness and that is its justification."

g. George Adam Smith says,

"The truth which we find in the book of Jonah is as full a revelation of God's will as prophecy anywhere achieves. That God has granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life is nowhere else in the O.T. so vividly illustrated. This lifts the teaching of the Book to equal rank with the second part of Isaiah, and nearest of our Twelve to the N.T."

8. Jonah, son of Amittai, is said to have preached in the Northern Kingdom in the days of Jeroboam II (2Kings 14:25) and predicted victories over Syria. This episode, however, forms no part of the prophets book... Jeroboam's reign was a time in which Israel extended her borders farther than at any period following the days of Solomon. It was a time of ease and prosperity, but at the same time on the horizon was Assyria who would eventually swallow up Israel.

Already before this time Ahab and his allies had fought Shalmaneser III at Karkar and Jehu had paid tribute, which latter episode is depicted on the black obelisk left behind by Shalmaneser.

Jonah was from Gath-hepher, which is a few miles north of Nazareth.

He is thereby a prophet from Galilee. Nineveh is 500 miles east of Palestine, therefore Jonah was fleeing the opposite direction as he attempted to go to Tarshish.... It is thought by many that Tarshish is Tartessus in Spain, about 2,000 miles west of Palestine, and one of the most western points of call of the Phoenician trade. Jonah embarked from Joppa (modern Yaffo), 50 miles from Gath-hepher, whose harbor, though small and unsafe, is the only one on the Palestinian coast below Mt. Carmel.

MIRACLES

So much has been said or made of the "fish story" that one is tempted to forget all else about the book of Jonah. The facts are that the book is a book of numerous miracles..... at least four (4) -- in which stress is great upon the fact that each event comes about as the direct act of God.....

One is not actually more natural than the other. They are:

- (1). The storm
- (2). The calm
- (3). The fish
- (4). The gourd, in all of which the power of God is displayed.

It is not out of place to take a look at the fish, which in Hebrew is dag gadol and is referred to only in three (1:17; 2:1; 10) out of the 48 verses of the book.

Dag may be a fish of any species, including the whale (Gen. 9:2; Num. 11:22; Neh. 13:16). In the Greek Bible the term becomes ketos megalos, which is the term also used in 3 Maccabees 6:8; Josephus, Antiquities 9.10.2; Matthew 12:40 for Jonah's fish.

KETOS is a monster of unidentified fish species, as is the Latin piscis. Nevertheless, a host of English versions of the N.T. follow the K.J.V. in rendering it "whale". The N.E.B.; Phillips; A.R.V. margin and others have recognized that we need not identify the beast with a whale.

The continuous debate over whether there are fish in the Mediterranean that could swallow a man is actually beside the point since it is said that the Lord prepared the fish....

There are of course, white sharks of adequate size to swallow a man while some species of the whale could not.. More interesting is the question whether there are cases in which a man survived such an experience..... THE PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL REVIEW XXV (Oct. 1927), page 636, cites the case of a certain James Bartley, which case has often been appealed to.

The INTERPRETER'S BIBLE, vol. 6, page 874, denies that this is an authentic case and insists that there is no known case of a man

swallowed by a fish and later being cast forth alive. The issue of the book of Jonah is not to be decided on whether Bartley was or was not swallowed.

THE CONVERTED PROPHET

Jonah's experience with the storm and the fish converted him. The second command to preach against Nineveh was obeyed. Jonah arose, went to the city, entered in, and raised his cry which is eight words in Hebrew: "...Yei forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

A converted prophet made a powerful preacher. The effect upon the superstitious population was phenomenal. From the king on down the people repented, fasted and sat in sackcloth and ashes. The psychology of fasting is to say to the Lord: "I am already humble, You need not afflict me further." ... The Lord relented and did not the evil which He had threatened.

A CITY OF THREE DAYS' JOURNEY

Nineveh, though an exceedingly old city, came to its heyday later than the time of Jonah and reached its peak under Sennacherib. Nineveh is today represented by two mounds which are in Iraq across the Tigris River from the modern city of Mosul: Quyunjiliq, a mound about one mile in length and 650 yards wide and 90 feet high, and Nebi Yunus, a smaller mound. Quyunjiliq has been intermittently excavated since the time of Layard, now more than 100 years ago, and the secrets of its palaces revealed. (See A. Parrot, Nineveh and the O.T.). Nebi Yunus has a Muslim cemetery and a modern village on it so that it cannot be excavated. It is easy to trace out the defensive wall of the ancient city.

The wall in appearance somewhat resembles a river levee of earth with breaks in it where gates were. The circumference of this wall is 7½ miles and a journey of 1½ miles would take one to the center of the enclosed area. One is left wondering what "a city of three days' journey in breadth" meant. ... Several efforts have been made to explain the phrase. One suggests that it means it would take three days to see the principal sights of the city, but the fact that Jonah went one days' journey into the city (3:4) is not really favorable to this view.

We must admit that the phrase still puzzles us.

Some attempt to bring the entire Assyrian triangle into the picture with Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen (Gen. 10:11 f.) which would of course, give a very large area.

THE LESSON OF THE GOURD VINE

Jonah's bitterness at the out come of the affair was such that he would have been happier dead. He makes it quite clear (plain) that it was not preaching to Nineveh that he minded, nor the dangers and the hardships of the journey, but it was the possibility that the people might repent and ^{be} spared that he resented.

He was afraid of God's mercy, and that fear drove him to Tarshish. If he did not preach to Nineveh, then the people would not repent, and God would have no alternative but to destroy Nineveh.

Jonah, despite his wrath at the Lord's sparing Nineveh, built himself a booth on the east of the city to wait for the outcome... He is in the peculiar position of being a preacher who hoped that he would not succeed.

The plant that the Lord caused to grow up pleased him no end, but made his anger all the more bitter when it was cut off by the worm. Ibn Ezra made quite plain that one does not have to know the species of the plant that shaded Jonah to understand its lesson.

It was at this point that the Lord called Jonah's attention to his concern for a comparatively worthless plant for which he had not labored.... Could he not then understand God's concern for the 120,000 innocent people of Nineveh who knew neither right or wrong--- doubtless infants--- as well as the much cattle God had created which, of course, were not capable of sin?.... The contrast of the whole is between Jonah's attitude to Nineveh and the Lord's attitude.. Here in the plainest way is taught "God so loved the world."

Traits of God comparable to those of Exodus 34:6 are emphasized.

INTERPRETATION

A question in the interpretation of Jonah, second only to the "fish question" is that of the nature of the book.

Is the book Fiction, Allegory, or History? As early as the 18th century it was proposed that Jonah (whose name means "DOVE" while Israel is compared to a dove, Cf Hos. 7:11; 11:11) represents the disobedient people of Israel who failed to carry God's message to the nations of the world.... The sea represents the tossing heathen ready to engulf Israel.... Israel is swallowed up by Babylon (cf. Jer. 51:34) and then spit out in the return from captivity (cf. Jer. 51:44). Obvious difficulties in this sort of interpretation are that it deals with only the first half of the book and neglects Jonah's journey to Nineveh and Nineveh's repentance. In addition no other O.T. allegory is spun about a historical figure. It really has only the imagination to commend it.....

More relevant^{is} the question of history or fiction. Until fairly recent both JEW and Christian thought of the book as history. The need for a historical story seems bound up in the N.T. use of the book. The Bible believer has always felt that the comparison Jesus made between Himself and Jonah demanded that Jonah be historical. The effort to say that Jesus was only a man of His day and accepted certain views prevalent among those about Him carries implications that we are not ready to accept. The question is heatedly discussed by J.W. McGarvey in his book Jesus and Jonah....

THE HISTORY OF THE BOOK

Jonah had already been accepted into the book of the Twelve by the time of Sirach (Sir. 49:10). Small scraps of the book have been found in Cave 2 of Qumran, which would be the oldest text of the book in existence.... It is also represented in the leather Greek text that has been found near the Dead Sea.)

The story of Jonah is appealed to in Tobit 14:4 where Jonah's threat of the destruction of Nineveh is considered to be an unfulfilled prophecy that must be fulfilled. (This passage has a textual problem. Codex Sinaiticus reads "Nahum" rather than Jonah). In 3 Macc. 6:8, Jonah's deliverance is one in a series of God's great acts of mercy of the past that forms a part of the prayer of Eleazar.... In his Antiquities 9.10.2., Josephus identifies the minor prophet with the prophet of 2 Kings 14:25 and summarizes the book, but neglects to mention its main theme of repentance...

GREAT LESSONS FROM JONAH

1. The universality of God's presence... Compare Psalm 139:7-12; Amos 9:2-4; and the ideas of the localized God (Isam. 26:19f; 1 Kings 20:23, 28; 2 Kings 5:15f).
2. The universal concern of God for man... Compare Acts 10:34, 35; John 3:16.
3. The conditional nature of prophecy.. Compare Jeremiah 18:7f.....

JONAH AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

The book of Jonah contains no Messianic predictions. At the same time Jesus directly compares His approaching experiences in the grave to those of Jonah in the fish Matt. 12:39f.... The resurrection on the third day is "according to scripture" (1 Cor. 15:4), may allude to Jonah's experience.

The idea that Jesus was crucified on Friday requires that one interpret "three days and three nights" as portions of three units of time rather than as three periods of 24 hours each.

A second is made in the New Testament in calling attention to the repentance of Nineveh at the preaching of Jonah; therefore Nineveh will condemn the Lord's generation in judgment:
"A greater than Jonah is here" (Matthew 12:41).

Buried on Friday Evening
He arose on Sunday morning -
Acts 10 - 4 days ago -
Counts less than 3 hours of 1st day

math. 27:63-64
why say - "Till the third day"
if he was to arise after the third day.

Jewish writers used qualifying terms
for exact number of years, month, days.

a. Stephen says "Moses was full 40 years old"
when he slew the Egyptians.

B. "Paul & Barnabas remained with church
in Antioch a "whole year" -