

JONAH

Introduction

Author. Whether Jonah himself or some other prophet recorded his saga is impossible to determine. An isolated reference to "Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet . . . of Gath-hepher" in 2 Kings 14:25 places his ministry to the northern kingdom in the early part of Jeroboam II's reign before the king's expansionist efforts. Jonah's role among the prophets is in some ways transitional between the pre-classical prophets such as Elijah and Elisha to that of Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah. Unlike the former, but like the latter, Jonah preached to the masses rather than simply to the king and his court.

Date. While the life of Jonah can be dated with precision, the recording of his story may have been later. Some would date the book much later (400-200 B.C.), but this is based largely upon the assumption that its universalistic emphasis was meant to balance the particularism of the Ezra/Nehemiah corpus. It is probably best placed in the latter half of Jeroboam II's reign, circa 760 B.C.

Structure. The book is well structured and symmetrical. The action of the story is initiated by God's words to Jonah (1:1-17). When the action has reached a climax then Jonah's deliverance ensues which is followed by a prayer (2:1-10). A second cycle is initiated by God's command again in 3:1-3. When the action climaxes once again, Ninevah is rescued, followed by a prayer of Jonah. Then an additional object lesson is added which summarizes the essence of the story.

Purpose/Occasion. Because the date of the writing of Jonah is in question, the identification of a specific audience and occasion is difficult. It is clear that later in the prosperous years of Jeroboam II's reign (after Jonah's prophecy, 2 Kings 14:25, but not necessarily after his trip to Ninevah) Amos found it necessary to rebuke a nationalistic spirit which longed for vengeance upon her enemies (Amos 5:18-20). It is conceivable that Jonah may have been penned as an answer to the self interest which was rampant in the latter days of Jeroboam II.

Message Statement. Many diverse themes have been suggested for Jonah, including: God's love for

heathen nations, the irresistibility of God's will, and the repentance of Ninevah. However, any summary of the book of Jonah must place a priority upon Jonah's attitude toward God's directive. The city of Ninevah was the epitome of Gentile opposition and savagery. Clearly, Jonah's reluctance to preach was not due to a fear of man or any other reason rather than his hatred of the Assyrian people. As his statements (4:2), and actions (fleeing from Ninevah, 1:3; removing from the city to await its fate, 4:5) demonstrate, his personal hatred for the Assyrian people was such that even after reluctant obedience, his compassion for the Assyrian people was less than his concern for a plant. Just as surely as Jesus invites our scorn as we view the older brother in the parable of Luke 15, so also we are to reel with disdain at the vengeful attitude of Jonah which is continually in total disharmony with the desires of a compassionate God. Thus the message is probably better summarized as: *Self-interest on the part of the people of God will prevent them from fulfilling their God-ordained role as channels of blessing.*

Argument

- 1A JONAH FLEES HIS MISSION 1:1--2:10
Jonah's disobedience in the first two chapters is reknown. His destination of Tarshish is 180° from God's intention of Ninevah. In chapter 4 we are informed that Jonah's reluctance came from the fear that God would relent of his destruction of Ninevah and have compassion on her.
- 1B God's Design and Jonah's Disobedience 1:1-3
This statement of God's command is repeated in 3:1-3, but the second time it is met with at least reluctant obedience.
- 2B Jonah's Discipline 1:4-16
In this section the heathen sailor's compassion toward Jonah stands as a condemning contrast to his spiteful spirit which caused him to flee in the first place. When the pagan sailors identified Jonah as the source of their misfortune and he insisted that they throw him into the sea, they ill-advisedly, but humanely, attempted to row out of the trouble. Only when they could not possibly avoid it did they consent to his destruction. On the other hand, it was only when Jonah could not avoid it that he consented to Ninevah's deliverance.
- 3B Jonah's Deliverance 1:17--2:10
Although the "great fish" is sometimes considered punishment for Jonah, he actually considers it his deliverance from drowning. Jonah then cries out with an eloquent praise to God for his rescue and vows to obey the Lord. This one who has been such an undeserving recipient of God's grace surely ought to be a willing ambassador to others, eager to see them benefit in the same way as he. Thus, his later reluctance to fulfill the mission of God is all the more heinous when viewed against this backdrop of grace.
- 2A JONAH RELUCTANTLY FULFILLS HIS MISSION 3:1--4:11
Although Jonah fulfills God's command with his feet, his heart is obviously not in the procedure. His obedience is reluctant at best and more likely forced.

- 1B God's Design and Jonah's Obedience 3:1-3
This section is parallel to the first call of Jonah with the exception of Jonah's obedience this time.
- 2B Ninevah's Response of Repentance 3:4-9
Although Ninevah was a city of "three day's walk," massive revival broke out after Jonah had only journeyed one day into the city. The repentance of the city was apparently both genuine and total.
- 3B Jonah's Rebuke 3:10--4:11
As a result of the city's repentance God relented of his anger and Jonah's worst fears were realized. The bitterness of his soul is seen in his request to die rather than see his enemies treated God's compassion, which heretofore had been the dominion of Israel. Jonah then proceeds outside the city in hope that it would yet experience the judgment of God. At this point God raises up a shade plant for Jonah and then providentially removes it. Jonah, still fueled by his resentful attitude toward his enemies, speaks to God with anger and with bankrupt priorities. The book then ends with the startling comparison of the value of a plant and 120,000 people and animals. With this conclusion the reader is obviously invited to agree with God who values life and would treat it with compassion and condemn the selfish attitude which would allow personal bitterness to quarrel with God's compassionate heart.

Outline

1A	JONAH FLEES HIS MISSION	1:1--2:10
1B	<u>God's Design and Jonah's Disobedience</u>	1:1-3
2B	<u>Jonah's Discipline</u>	1:4-16
3B	<u>Jonah's Deliverance</u>	1:17--2:10
1C	God's provision	1:17
2C	Jonah's praise	2:1-9
3C	God's redirection	2:10
2A	JONAH RELUCTANTLY FULFILLS HIS MISSION	3:1--4:11
1B	<u>God's Design and Jonah's Obedience</u>	3:1-3
2B	<u>Ninevah's Response of Repentance</u>	3:4-9
3B	<u>Jonah's Rebuke</u>	3:10--4:11
1C	God's compassion on Ninevah	3:10
2C	Jonah's bitterness	4:1-3
3C	God's final words	4:4-11
1D	His question	4:4
2D	His object lesson	4:5-11
1E	the situation	4:5-9
2E	the application	4:10-11