The Book of Jonah

Zanesville, OH | Sunday AM Bible Study

**Introduction**

* The book of Jonah is titled after the principal character in the story. His name means *“dove.”*
* **Date:** The contents of this minor prophet can be dated somewhere between 783-753 BC. We know this because Jonah prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (793-753) and Uzziah of Judah (792-740). He prophesied of the expansion of the Kingdom of Israel in **2 Kings 14:25.**
* Jonah’s hometown was Gath-hepher. A village about 4 miles north east of what would later be known as Nazareth.
* **Political Climate:** Assyria was the ruling world power during this time and they would continue to expand and conquer nations and peoples up until the time of ca. 630BC. The capital of Assyria was Nineveh and it was considered to be the most powerful city as well as the most wicked city during the reign of the Assyrians. This is expressed both in the book of Jonah and the book of Nahum.
* Israel was considered to be a vassal in terms of their relationship to Assyria. Jehu, King of Israel (841-814) paid tribute to Shalmaneser III, King of Assyria. This is pictured on the archaeological artifact known as the **Black Obelisk**.
* **Key Passage: Jonah 4:2b–** “…I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.”
* **Key Message:** God extends His lovingkindness and grace to all nations.
* **Typology in Jonah:** Some bible scholars and commentators suggest that while Jonah is a historical book telling of the repentance of a great heathen nation, it serves a typological purpose for the nation of Israel. Others suggest it is simply allegorical in nature and not historical at all. They arrive at this conclusion based on the meaning of Jonah’s name and the events as they happen in the book. The prophet’s name as indicated above means “dove” and the imagery of a dove is used to represent the nation of Israel a couple times in the book of Hosea (Hos. 7:11; 11:11). As a result, many believe that Jonah is the nation of Israel and the message of the book is primarily to stir up the Israelites to repent or they will experience calamity.

**Typology in Jonah (Lange)**



* It is not uncommon for the scriptures to be riddled with typology throughout its messages. However, I would suggest that the book of Jonah, while it does point to several aspects in the future, should be viewed historically as testified to by our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 12:38-40; 16:1-5). Jonah was an actual prophet (2 Kings 14:25).
* Secondly, God preparing the fish to swallow up Jonah was not an act of punishment, but it was an act of deliverance! Therefore, to suggest that Jonah being swallowed by the fish is a picture of Israel going into captivity isn’t reconcilable with God’s purpose of the fish.
* Thirdly, God’s lovingkindness and grace to the Gentile nations and in particular to the city of Nineveh should not be thought of as far-fetched and unbiblical since God extended His grace to all men (Psa. 103:13-14).

**Outline of the book of Jonah**

1. Jonah flees his mission (1:1–2:10)
2. Jonah’s Commission and Flight (1:1-3)
3. The Sailors cry out to their gods (1:4-6)
4. Jonah’s disobedience comes to light (1:7-10)
5. Jonah takes drastic measures and God delivers (1:11-17)
6. Jonah prays to God and makes a vow (2:1-10)
7. Jonah fulfills God’s will but is displeased (3:1–4:11)
8. Jonah’s Commission and Acknowledgement (3:1-4)
9. The wicked city repents and turns to God (3:5-9)
10. God relents concerning the calamity according to His lovingkindess (3:10–4:2)
11. Jonah pleads to have his life taken away (4:3-4)
12. God appeals to Jonah (4:5-11)

**Chapter 1**

* **1:1-3– Jonah’s Commission and Flight**
* Jonah is called by God to go to Nineveh and cry against it
* Use of the phrase “*their wickedness has come up before Me”* common of nations that turned from God and practiced evil (Gen. 18:20, 19:13; Hos. 7:2)
* Jonah seeks to run away from God and His command to Tarshish
* Tarshish is emphasized three times in verse 3. The significance of this place is that it was the limits of the western world known to Israel (Isa. 23:6). Jonah is trying to run as far away as possible from God and the task
* Does Jonah think he can really run away from God? (Psa. 139:7-12; Heb. 4:13)
* **1:4-6– The sailors cry out to their gods**
* The LORD causes a great storm to bring Jonah to his senses. This demonstrates that the LORD (YHWH) is in control of the weather. The false god, Baal, was often thought to have controlled the weather in the ancient near east (1 Kings 16:31–17:1). God demonstrates time and time again that He is completely in control of the weather and Baal is not God at all! (See: Psa. 107:23-30; Matt. 8:23-27; Mk. 4:35-41; Lk. 8:22-25)
* The storm was so bad that the ship was about to break up (verse 5) (Acts 27)
* Sailors became very fearful (Matt. 8:26) and began to cry out to their gods (Elohim).
* The sailors were desperately praying while Jonah was asleep (Mk. 4:38). He was not praying, and his God was the only one that could save. Jonah was sound asleep as if he had nothing to worry about. What a grave mistake!
* Captain is astounded that Jonah can be sleeping during this chaos (verse 6). Pleads with him to call on his god since they have gotten no response from theirs.
* **1:7-10– Jonah’s disobedience comes to light**
* The men decided to cast lots to decide whose caused this mess (verse 7). Casting of lots was common in the ancient near east and in the Old Testament to determine the will of God or the “gods” (Josh. 7:14; Prov. 16:33).
* Jonah is found out and the men intensely question him (verse 7-8)
* Jonah’s response to them brings even more fear than they had before (verse 9-10). *“I fear the LORD…”* (YHWH– The I AM). Notice the irony in this statement
* Sailors are afraid and wonder how Jonah can possibly flee God’s presence (verse 10). They seem to have more sense than he does!
* **1:11-17- Jonah takes drastic measures and God delivers**
* The storm continues to intensify, and the sailors seek to find a solution (verse 11)
* Jonah’s response is to have him thrown into the sea. He knows it because of him this has all happened (verse 12)
* They seem to ignore this idea because they are concerned for him. Gentiles have had more concern for Jonah and Jonah has had for them! Prominent theme in the book (verse 12, 14). Storm keeps getting worse.
* The sailors call on the LORD God (YHWH) for mercy. Notice they have transitioned from the use of Elohim to YHWH. They acknowledge God is in control (*“You have done as You pleased”*)
* They throw Jonah into the sea and it stopped its raging (Mk. 4:39). Notice the sailors have come full circle in terms of their confidence in their gods and now their worship of the LORD God (verse 16). They seem to have more fear for Him now than Jonah has had since the chapter began!
* God delivers Jonah from certain death (verse 17). Three and three nights (Matt. 12:38-41). Several hints of Jesus the Messiah throughout this first chapter (5, 6, 15, 17)