

The Book of Jonah

Book of Jonah

1. This book is the fifth in order of what is called the minor prophets.
2. This book takes its name from its author, Jonah.
3. It is a very short book containing only four short chapters.
4. Some hold the book was written in or before the reign of Jeroboam II, about 793-753 B.C. (2 Kgs. 14:23-29).
 - a. He was northern Israel's most powerful king.
 - b. During his reign the borders of the nation of Israel were expanded to their greatest extent since the time of David and Solomon, about 1010-930 B.C..
 - c. Assyria, some 500 miles to the east of northern Israel, was a constant threat to Israel especially as the nation abandoned God.
5. The book of Jonah was likely written shortly after his return from Nineveh, written 8th century B.C..
6. This book is historical - not a book of myths, fiction or a mere parable or allegory as skeptics have charged.
 - a. Jesus placed His Divine sanction of this book. (Matt. 12:39-41; Lk. 11:29-32).
 - b. Those who believe in Jesus accept this book as authentic, historically accurate and inspired.
7. Jonah was also an actual historical person.
 - a. Jonah had helped restore some of Israel's borders through his work as a prophet. (2 Kgs. 14:25).
 - b. He had a part in restoring great prosperity to the nation of Israel.
 - c. This most likely made him a famous and recognized prophet by his nation.

Prophet Jonah

1. What we know about Jonah is mostly found in the book of Jonah itself, and the New Testament.
2. His name occurs over and over again in this book. (Jon. 1:1, 3, 5, 7,15,17; 2:1, 10;3:1, 3, 4; 4:1, 5,6,9).
3. He is mentioned several times by Jesus in Matthew and Luke.. (Matt. 12:39, 40, 41; 16:4; Lk. 11:29, 30, 32).
4. The book of Jonah records very few words of the actual preaching of Jonah.
5. Jonah's preaching is recorded in only eight words. (Jon. 3:4).

6. He was a pre-exilic prophet of the northern kingdom who worked during the days of Jeroboam II.
7. The book of Jonah reveals that Jonah hated the Ninevites and wanted them destroyed - not saved.
8. He hoped he would fail in his mission to bring the Ninevites to repentance and salvation.
9. It is interesting that Jonah did not seek to convert them to Judaism, but he reluctantly sought to bring them to repentance.
 - a. The Ninevites were under the Patriarchal system that had remained in force for Gentiles.
 - b. The Law of Moses was given only to the Jews. (Deut. 5:1-3).

DEU 5:1 Then Moses summoned all Israel, and said to them, "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully.

DEU 5:2 "The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb.

DEU 5:3 "The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with all those of us alive here today.

- 1) The Jews were not lawless before this time, but were subject to the Patriarchal law until Sinai.
- 2) Gentiles were not lawless before or after this law given only to the Jews.
- c. The rest of mankind remained under the same law that Noah, Abraham and the others beginning with Adam were expected to obey.
 - 1) This law demanded God alone be worshiped and demanded a high standard of morality. Such things as idolatry, murder, adultery, lying were clearly condemned by this law. (Gen. 6:5-7).

GEN 6:5 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

GEN 6:6 And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

GEN 6:7 And the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them."

- 2) The Ninevites had never been under the law of Moses, but they were still sinners who needed repentance.
- 3) They were sinners because like those who lived in the time of Noah they had committed every kind of abomination and had become idolaters worshiping the creation rather than the Creator.

10. The book of Jonah clearly reveals that salvation was not just for Jews.

11. God was willing and anxious to save Gentiles who repented and lived according to the laws of the Patriarchal system.

God Commissions Jonah To Preach To the Ninevites

JON 1:1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying,

1. The name "Jonah" is from the Hebrew "yonah" and means "dove."
2. There does not seem to be any significance to the meaning of his name.

3. Jonah was an Israelite and the son of Amittai who was born in Gath-hepher in the tribe of Zebulun located in what later became known as Galilee. (2 Kgs. 14:25).

2KI 14:25 He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.

a. "Gath-hepher" was about 4 miles northeast of Nazareth - the place where Jesus grew up.

1) Nazareth did not exist in the time of Jonah.

2) The origin of Nazareth is not known, but it is mentioned several times in the New Testament. (Matt. 2:23; 4:13; 21:11; 26:71; Mk. 1:9, 24; Lk. 1:26; 2:4, 39, 51; 4:16, 34; 18:37; Jn. 1:45, 46; Acts 10:38; 26:9).

b. This city is mentioned only one other time in the Bible. (Josh. 19:13).

c. It has been identified with the modern el-Meshed, a village on the top of a rocky hill.

4. Jonah called himself "a Hebrew." (Jon. 1:9).

5. Jonah was called "the prophet" meaning he was a spokesman for God.

a. In the book of Jonah he was giving the people of Nineveh the message of God.

b. He was not speaking in own words.

6. Jesus referred to him as "a prophet." (Matt. 12:39).

"Arise, Go To Nineveh"

JON 1:2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me."

1. He is directed to "go to Nineveh."

a. Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire that was a world empire for about 300 years, 900-612 B.C..

b. Assyria was Israel's enemy during the ministry of Jonah, and it later destroyed the nation of Israel, 721 B.C..

c. Assyria had no love for Israel, and it wanted to exterminate or make slaves of Israel.

d. Nineveh was a large city 500 miles to the east of the northern kingdom of Israel.

2. Nineveh is called "the great city."

1) This was a famous city located on the eastern bank of the Tigris river.

2) Nimrod, "the mighty hunter," was the founder of this city. (Gen. 10:8-11).

GEN 10:8 Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth.

GEN 10:9 He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord."

GEN 10:10 And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

GEN 10:11 From that land he went forth into Assyria, and built Nineveh and Rehoboth-Ir and Calah,

3) It is affirmed ,by some, that Nineveh was a walled city about three miles in length and less than a mile and a half in breadth.

4) Its population was about 600,000. (Jon. 4:11). See notes Jon. 4:11 regarding 120,000 small children.

3. He is instructed to go there alone and “cry against it.”

a. He was to proclaim the destruction of Nineveh because of its “wickedness.”

1) The term “wickedness” reveals they, the Gentiles, were accountable to divine law. (Rom. 4:15; 1 Jn. 3:4).

ROM 4:15 for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

1JO 3:4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

2) God had not left Gentiles without any law.

3) Romans 1:18-31 shows Gentiles were lost sinners and were without excuse.

b. This would take a lot of courage and faith to approach a wicked city like Nineveh and demand it repent.

c. Jonah probably had some fear, but his reluctance in accepting what seemed to be an impossible mission was because he despised the Ninevites .

4. God says “for their wickedness has come up before Me.”

a. Nineveh was a very wicked city and God was fully aware of their wickedness.

b. They had totally abandoned God, and there is not any evidence that even a single righteous person lived in that wicked city.

5. Notes

a. God chose Assyria to invade the northern kingdom of Israel. (Hos. 11:5; Amos 5:27).

HOS 11:5 They will not return to the land of Egypt; But Assyria-- he will be their king, Because they refused to return to Me.

AMO 5:27 "Therefore, I will make you go into exile beyond Damascus," says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts.

b. Jonah might have been excited about delivering a message of doom to the enemy of his nation.

c. He chose to disobey God and fled rather than preaching to the Ninevites who might repent and be saved from God’s wrath.

Jonah Flees To Tarshish

JON 1:3 But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

1. Jonah fled to Joppa and boarded a ship to Tarshish, a Phoenician city.

a. "Joppa" was an old city on the Mediterranean Sea, about 30 miles northwest of Jerusalem and 55 to 60 miles from Gath-hepher.

1) It is interesting that Jonah fled to Joppa to avoid preaching to Gentiles, but some 800 years later Peter was instructed in Joppa to go the home of Cornelius in Caesarea where he learned that salvation was available to Gentiles. (Acts 9:42; 10:5).

2) Peter learned that God is not a respecter of persons. (Acts 10:34,35). See 2 Pet. 3:9.

b. "Tarshish" is employed in the Old Testament in connection with ships, merchants and trade. (1 Kgs. 10:22; 22:48).

c. This city is mentioned twice in this book. (Jon. 1:3; 4:2).

d. Tarshish was on the southwest coast of Spain two thousand miles to the west of Joppa.

4. He chose to flee the presence of Jehovah rather than to obey Him. (Jon. 1:3).

5. How vain, how stupid of this prophet!

6. In essence Jonah was seeking to resign as a prophet by running away from God.

7. It was impossible to flee the presence of God. (Psa. 139:7-10).

"A Great Storm On The Sea"

JON 1:4 And the Lord hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up.

1. God caused "a great wind" and "a great storm on the sea."

2. "The ship was about to break up," that is, be destroyed.

"Sailors Became Afraid"

JON 1:5 Then the sailors became afraid, and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down, and fallen sound asleep.

1. The sailors were "afraid" (terrified) by the fierce storm and "every man cried to his god."

2. They also threw the cargo into the sea "to lighten it for them." This was done in an effort to save the ship. See Jon. 1:13

3. It is strange in all of this that Jonah had laid down, and had "fallen sound asleep" in the innermost parts of the ship.

a. It may be he was totally exhausted both mentally and physically from seeking to flee God.

b. No explanation is given for his calm conduct.

c. Surely a man fleeing from his God would be frightened!

d. Surely a man of God should have been praying earnestly to God!

Captain Asked Jonah How He Could Sleep

JON 1:6 So the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish."

1. The captain likely assumed Jonah was an idolater like himself.
2. He wanted Jonah to immediately and urgently call upon his "god" for help.
3. He had no concept of the one God of heaven or Jonah was a prophet of this great God.

Sailors Cast Lots

JON 1:7 And each man said to his mate, "Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity has struck us." So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

1. Casting of lots was an ancient way to select, gamble and determine guilt.
2. In reality it was total chance except if God was behind it. (Prov. 16:33).

PRO 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the Lord.

3. It is certain God intervened in this casting of lots since "the lot fell on Jonah."
4. The lot did not by chance fall on Matthias. (Acts 1:21-26).

Sailors Ask For An Explanation Of The Calamity

JON 1:8 Then they said to him, "Tell us, now! On whose account has this calamity struck us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

1. The frightened sailors quickly asked multiple questions.
2. The only recorded reply of Jonah is found in the next verse where Jonah revealed his identity.

Jonah Revealed His Faith In The Lord God Of Heaven

JON 1:9 And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."

1. Jonah revealed his race - "I am a Hebrew." "Abram" and his ancestors through Isaac and Jacob were called "Hebrews."

GEN 14:13 Then a fugitive came and told **Abram the Hebrew**. Now he was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and these were allies with Abram.

2. He also acknowledged he feared "the Lord God who made the sea and the dry ground."
 - a. God had made "the sea and the dry ground" and had sent the storm.

- b. It is sad he did not “fear the Lord God of heaven” enough to obey Him.
- c. He knew what he should have done and just did not want to do it.
- d. Jonah has many so-called people of God who have followed in his steps, that is, knowing God’s commandments but ignoring them. See Jas. 4:17.

“How Could You Do This?”

JON 1:10 Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, "How could you do this?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.

1. Even the heathen men recognized the foolishness of seeking to flee from the Creator of all things.
2. Jonah was completely honest and revealed to them that he was fleeing from this God who had made everything.

They Wanted To Know What To Do With Him

JON 1:11 So they said to him, "What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?"-- for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy.

1. They seemed certain they would not live if the storm continued.
2. They had come to the conclusion that something needed to be done to Jonah to stop the raging storm.

Jonah Informed Men How To Stop Storm

JON 1:12 And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you."

1. Jonah manifested courage in telling them exactly what they need to do to calm the storm.
2. Jonah had no concept of God’s plan to save him once cast into the sea, but was willing to give up his life to stop the storm.
3. It is strange he was willing to die to save these idolatrous sailors, but had refused to preach to the Ninevites.
4. He had a special hatred for the Assyrians.

Men Reject The Offer Of Jonah

JON 1:13 However, the men rowed desperately to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming even stormier against them.

1. The likely believed him, but they still wanted to save themselves and Jonah.
2. Failure to cast him into the sea could indicate they did not believe casting Jonah into sea would immediately stop the storm or it may have been an act of mercy.
3. No explanation is given for their reluctance to cast him into the sea.

Sailors Pray To God

JON 1:14 Then they called on the Lord and *said*, "We earnestly pray, O Lord, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for Thou, O Lord, hast done as Thou hast pleased."

1. Rather than each man crying out to his own god as they had previously done, they earnestly prayed to God.
2. They prayed that they would not perish because of Jonah.
3. "And do not put innocent blood on us" may suggest they held to the innocence of Jonah.
4. They recognized, however, the Lord could do as He pleased.

Jonah Thrown Into The Sea

JON 1:15 So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging.

1. This book of Jonah does not record any response from the Lord.
2. They proceeded to follow the suggestion of Jonah and cast him into the sea.

Three-Fold Response Of The Sailors

JON 1:16 Then the men feared the Lord greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

1. The immediate cessation of the storm confirmed to the men that the Lord had stopped the storm and this led "the men" to fear "the Lord greatly."
2. "They offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows."
 - a. No information is given about the kind of sacrifice they offered and the nature of the vows they made.
 - b. It is very probable this indicates repentance on the part of the sailors.
3. It seems that all who had contact with Jonah were converted.

"A Great Fish"

JON 1:17 And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.

- Chapter and verse divisions are man-made except for the book of Psalms that was originally divided into psalms.
 - Chapter 1:17 should be a part of what was divided into chapter 2.
1. The words "the Lord appointed" are of great significance.
 - a. The word "appoint" here does not mean "create."
 - 1) "Create" is from the Hebrew "bara" and means to bring into existence from nothing. (Gen. 1:1, 26).
 - 2) In scripture it never has a human as its subject. Only God can create, and all of His creation was done

through Jesus in six days. (Gen. 1:1-2:4; Jn. 1:1-3; 1 Cor. 8:6).

- b. It is best rendered “appoint,” and means God used a fish already in existence to save Jonah.
 - c. God made sure “the great fish” was in the right place at the right time to do His bidding of saving Jonah.
2. What is recorded is not a chance event, but describes a miraculous event.
 3. It would seem impossible to remain alive in “the stomach of the fish three days and three nights” without divine intervention.
 4. Jonah does not use the word “whale,” but called the fish that swallowed him “a great fish.”
 - a. Some interpret “the great fish” to be “a whale,” but “a whale” is a mammal - not a fish.
 - 1) A mammal is “any of various warm-blooded vertebrate animals of the class Mammalia, including humans, characterized by a covering of hair on the skin and, in the female, milk-producing mammary glands for nourishing the young.
 - 2) Mammal “any animal of the Mammalia, a large class of warm-blooded vertebrates having mammary glands in the female, a thoracic diaphragm, and a four-chambered heart. The class includes the whales, carnivores, rodents, bats, primates, etc.”
 - 3) Definitions take from the **Free Dictionary**.
 - b. The Old Testament never calls “the fish” a whale. (Jon. 1:17; 2:1, 10).
 - c. The Hebrew word “dag” denoted an undefined large fish or sea-monster.
 - d. Most translators simply translate “dag” as “fish.”
 - e. The Greek Septuagint translate the Hebrew “dag” with the word “ketos” [**kay** tos] the word Jesus used in Matthew 12:40. The NASB translate “ketos” “sea-monster,” and the NIV has “a huge fish.” (Matt. 12:40).
 - f. Children’s books that depict Jonah being swallowed by a whale seem innocent, but they are sowing seeds that later develop into skepticism about the book of Jonah and sometimes the whole Bible.
 - g. It is important that parents teach their children actually what the Bible teaches, and point out Jonah was not swallowed by “a whale.”
 - h. Parents who do not do this should not be surprised if their children grow up thinking the story of Jonah is a mere fairy tale and then conclude that much of the Bible is a “myth” or “fairy tale.”

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