

NAME

The book is named after its principal character Jonah. The name "Jonah" means "dove." The simile is used of Ephraim in Hosea 7:11 to portray the northern kingdom as "without sense." See also Psalm 68:13; 74:19.

AUTHOR

Though the book does not identify its author, tradition has ascribed it to the prophet himself, Jonah son of Amittai (1:1), from Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14:25) in Zebulun (Joshua 19:10,13). He lived in the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.) and helped recover some of Israel's lost territory (2 Kings 14:25). Jonah was probably a statesman as well as a prophet. His mission to Nineveh might even have been considered treasonous by some.

Aside from the brief reference in 2 Kings 14:25 we really know very little about Jonah.

DATE

Halley (page 423):

Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, which dominated the Ancient East for about 300 years (900's - 605 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.

NASB - Introduction to Jonah:

In the half-century during which the prophet Jonah ministered (800-750's B.C.), a significant event affected the northern kingdom of Israel: King Jeroboam II (793-753) restored her traditional borders, ending almost a century of sporadic seesaw conflict between Israel and Damascus.

Jeroboam, in God's good providence (2 Kings 14:26,27), capitalized on Assyria's defeat of Damascus (in the latter half of the ninth century), which temporarily crushed that center of Aramean power. Prior to that time not only had Israel been considerably reduced in size, but the king of Damascus had even been able to control internal affairs in the northern kingdom (2 Kings 13:7). However, after the Assyrian campaign against Damascus in 797, Jehoash, king of Israel, had been able to recover the territory lost to the king of Damascus (2 Kings 13:25). Internal troubles in Assyria subsequently allowed Jeroboam II to complete the restoration of Israel's northern borders. Nevertheless, Assyria remained the real threat from the north at this time.

The prophets of the Lord were speaking to Israel regarding these events. About 797 B.C. Elisha spoke to the king of Israel concerning future victories over Damascus (2 Kings 13:14-19). A few years later Jonah prophesied the restoration that Jeroboam II accomplished (2 Kings 14:25). But soon after Israel had triumphed, she began to gloat over her new-found power. Because she was relieved of foreign pressures - relief that had come in accordance with the encouraging words from Elisha and Jonah - she felt jealously complacent about her favored status with God (Amos 6:1). She focused her religion on expectations of the "Day of the Lord" (Amos 5:18-20), when God's darkness would engulf the other nations, leaving Israel to bask in His light.

It was in such a time that the Lord sent Amos and Hosea to announce to His people Israel that He would "*spare them no longer*" (Amos 7:8; 8:2) but would send them into exile "beyond Damascus" (Amos 5:27), i.e. to Assyria (Hosea 9:3; 10:6; 11:5). During this time the Lord also sent Jonah to Nineveh to warn it of the imminent danger of divine judgment.

For a number of reasons, including the preaching to Gentiles, the book is often assigned a postexilic date. At least, it is said, the book must have been written after the destruction of Nineveh in 612 B.C. But, these considerations are not decisive. It is hard to imagine whether the mention of the repentance of Nineveh and the consequences the city averted would have had such a significance for the author had Nineveh been overthrown. In addition, to question the proclaiming of God's word to the Gentiles in the eighth century B.C. is to overlook the ministry of Elijah and Elisha which had previously extended their ministries to Gentile lands in the eighth century B.C. (1 Kings 17:7-24; 2 Kings 8:7-17). Moreover, the prophet Amos (c. 760-750) set God's redemptive work in behalf of Israel in the context of His dealing with the nations (Amos 1:3-2:16; 9:7,12). Perhaps the third quarter of the eighth century is the most likely date for the book, after the public ministries of Amos and Hosea and before the fall of Samaria to Assyria in 722-721 B.C.

THEME

Halley (page 43): *"An Errand of Mercy to Nineveh"*

Mitchell: *"Jehovah is concerned with all peoples - His love knows no bounds"*

This book is unlike any of the other minor prophets. In its style and content it is strictly an historical narrative. It is not so much an oracle of prediction as a type. The interest concerns not so much in the message of the prophet as in Jehovah's dealings with the prophet himself.

Perhaps more than any other book it has been assailed by the critic. Jonah did not get lost in the fish, "but the critical school today tries to digest him." The current attitude is to laugh the book out of the Bible. The critic finds three things absolutely unpalatable in this historical narrative:

1. The great fish
2. The sudden repentance of Nineveh
3. The remarkable growth of the gourd

Note Matthew 12:39 and Jesus' authentication of Jonah. (see also handout "Popular Mechanics, December 2001 - Jonah and the Whale)

Key Word (Nelson's): The Revival in Nineveh - God's loving concern for the Gentiles is not a truth disclosed only in the New Testament. More than seven centuries before Christ, God commissioned the Hebrew prophet Jonah to proclaim a message of repentance to the Assyrians.

Key Verses (Nelson's):

"Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to You; what I have vowed I will pay" (Jonah 2:8,9).

"And he prayed to the Lord and said, 'O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster'" (Jonah 4:2).

Key Chapter (Nelson's): 3 - The third chapter of Jonah records perhaps the greatest revival of all time as the entire city of Nineveh believes in God, proclaims a fast, and cries out to God.

Outline:

- I. Jonah's First Commission 1,2
 - A. The Prophet's Disobedience 1:1-3
The act of disobedience
 - B. The Prophet's Distress 1:4-17
The consequences of disobedience
 - C. The Prophet's Deliverance 2
Restoration of the backslider

- II. Jonah's Second Chance 3,4
Jehovah is the God of the second chance
 - A. The Prophet's Obedience 3:1-4
 - B. The People's Repentance 3:5-10
 - C. The Prophet's Displeasure 4
In the last chapter we find a dialogue between Jonah and Jehovah which contains the supreme message of the book

RECIPIENTS

Nineveh, and us...

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

1. God is concerned about all peoples - God is the God of the nations
2. God cannot be frustrated by our stupidity
3. God is sovereign and we are not
4. The importance of surrendering our wills to God's compassionate purposes
5. Jonah - spending 3 days in the belly of the Sea Monster - is a sign and type of Christ (Matthew 12:38-41; Luke 11:29-30)

RESOURCES

Gromacki, Robert C. *New Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1978

Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House

Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoizian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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