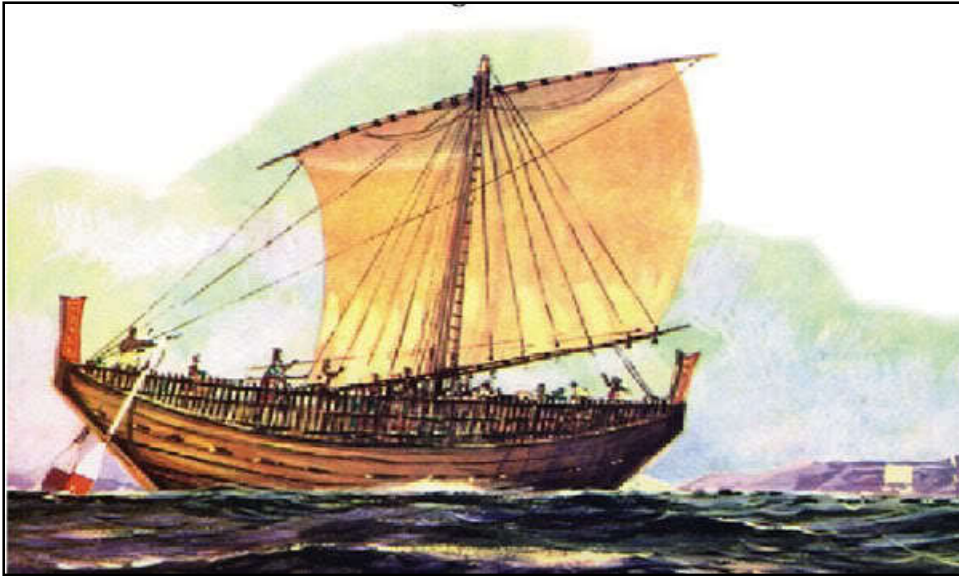


Jonah: The Rebellious Prophet

1. Jonah: Background



Introduction to Jonah

Have you ever felt like doing one thing when you know God wanted you to do something else? Jonah was just such a man; he had his reasons to reject God's plans. God also had his reasons to send Jonah on a mission to enemy territory to deliver his message. Jonah learned the hard way to make his will submissive to the will of God. Sometimes that is hard thing to do, it took Jonah to be swallowed by a fish to change his mind.

There is a message in the book of Jonah for all people who are struggling with God's will in their

Figure 1 Phoenician vessel like the one Jonah might have been on

lives. Before we can really understand the book of Jonah, we need to understand the circumstances around his life.

The Author of Jonah

The name Jonah means "Dove" in Hebrew, he was from the town of Gath-hepher in the tribe of Zebulun (Josh. 19:10,3). Jonah live during the time of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.) the king of the northern tribes, known as Israel. Jonah foretold the expansion of Israel's border, he was the son of Amittai, which means "my true one".

Jesus refers to the ministry of Jonah (Matthew 12:41, Luke 11:32) as example of his ministry. He attests to the reality of work in Nineveh and the testimony of those in the city who will one day speak out the event that took place.

39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

40 "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

41 "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. Matthew 12:39-41

Jonah along with Elijah and Elisha ministered to Israel and Gentiles peoples. Elisha and Elijah also reached out to Phoenicians and Arameans people Jonah would also have made contact.

Date of Jonah:

Jonah is linked to the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.) in 2 Kings 14:25, he prophesied the expansion of Israel's borders. Jonah lived during the days of Hosea and Amos both prophets sent to the Kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II.

He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hepher. 2 Kings 14:25



Historical setting of Jonah

Jonah lived during a time of Israel's prosperity, during the reign of Jeroboam II, who was able to expand Israel's borders and power. During the days of Jonah, Amos and Hosea, Jeroboam II was able to take advantage of Assyrian weakness.

Prior to Jeroboam II, Assyria was able to dominate the whole of the Middle East including Israel. Jehu King of Israel (841-814 B.C.) was forced to pay tribute Shalmaneser King of Assyria. The image of Jehu can be seen on the archeological artifact *Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser*, Jehu is bowing at the feet of the Assyrian king. However, because of internal fighting, after beating the Arameans (Kingdom of

Figure 2 King Jehu bowing before King Shalmaneser (841-814 B.C.)

Damascus), the Assyrians were weakened. Jeroboam II was able to take advantage of this weakness and advance the Kingdom of Israel to the gateway of Hamath near Damascus. This was as far as Israel stretched since the days of King David.

Despite having financial prosperity, Israel was an apostate nation. Following the death of Solomon (971-931 B.C.), Jeroboam I son of Nebat (931-909 B.C.) rebelled against the house of David and established a northern kingdom. He also established a pagan system of worship in Bethel and Dan so the people of Israel might not go to Jerusalem to worship (I Kings 12:28). Jeroboam II continued this false system spiritual apostasy.

Amos and Hosea delivered the message of warning to the northern kingdom of impending judgment. Amos warned Israel would go into captivity beyond Damascus (Amos 5:27). Hosea specifically proclaimed Assyria would be the instrument of God's judgment against Israel.

5 "He shall not return to the land of Egypt; But the Assyrian shall be his king,
Because they refused to repent.
6 And the sword shall slash in his cities, Devour his districts, And consume them,
Because of their own counsels. Hosea 11:5-6



Figure 3 King Sargon II with subject

Therefore, despite Assyria's weakness in Jonah day, one day they would make Israel captive. This was fulfilled in 722 B.C. when King Sargon (722-705 B.C.) of Assyria took Israel captive (2 Kings 17). Understanding the prophecies of impending judgment on Israel at the hands of Assyria, might explain Jonah attitude. By helping Nineveh, he was helping the people who would one day destroy Israel.

Nineveh was 550-miles from the Israelite capital of Samaria on the east bank of the Tigris River. The city had two walls, an outer and an inner wall, the inner wall measured 8-miles around and was 50-foot wide and 100 feet high. The city was immense and might have seemed impregnable.

Three events occurred before Jonah arrived in the city, these events could have humbled the city. The city suffered two plagues, one in 765 B.C. and the other 759 B.C. Third, on June 15th, 763 B.C. the city experienced a total eclipse of the sun. Maybe these events prepared the hearts of the people for Jonah in 759 B.C. when he arrived in the city. To this day, in the city of Mosul (Modern day Nineveh) the tomb of Jonah the prophet is highly venerated by Muslims, now destroyed by Isis.

The Message of Jonah

Jonah was a historical figure, the events recorded are real according to Jesus. What was the message of Jonah? What can we draw from the book? The nation had become apostate with Jeroboam I construction calf idol temples at the cities of Bethel and Dan. However, true worshippers of God in Israel such as Jonah, Amos, Hosea and others.

Throughout the book of Jonah, God “Supernaturally” intervenes to reach the people of Nineveh through the not so “evangelist” minded Jonah. First God commands Jonah to go (Jonah 1:1-2), then when he refuses God sends a storm and a fish for Jonah to turn around. (1:4,17).



God then commands the fish to vomit Jonah (2:10). God then compassionately withdraws His judgment when the city repents (3:10). Finally, to make Jonah and everybody else understand the point, God raises up a plant to shade Jonah and then lets the plant die and scorching wind to discomfort Jonah (4:7,8). God loves the people of Nineveh; he wants them to know Him. Therefore, God is intervening in their lives through Jonah. We are

Figure 4 Nineveh along the Tigris as pictured in Jonah’s day

called to do the same, we to learn from the life of Jonah. There are several messages we can draw from Jonah.

The **first** is the love of God’s for all people. Israel was God’s representative to the nations (Gentiles) to bring the message of God’s love. Israel had failed in doing this, so God had to force a disobedient Jonah to demonstrate it for the world.

Second, God’s sovereignty in accomplishing his purpose. Even though Jonah rebelled, it did not matter. God chose Jonah to deliver His message despite Jonah wish to not deliver it. So it stands Jonah is a type of Israel, Israel will deliver the message of God to the nations despite its rebellion against God. Jonah was a disobedient messenger of God’s love, in the same way Israel will also be a disobedient messenger of God’s love.

Third we see a contrast between the men on the ship and the people in Nineveh, both groups are open to hear the message, yet Jonah is reluctant to tell them. The spiritual hunger is waiting to be filled by the messenger. This contrasts with Israel which rejects the messages of Hosea and Amos.

Fourth, Jonah is a symbol of Israel, the nation was callous toward God and not moved by the lost state of nations around her. Hosea pictured God’s love toward Israel with his marriage to his unfaithful wife Gomer (Gomer represented Israel).

Fifth, Jonah ministry is a metaphor the ministry of Jesus. Jesus came from Israel like Jonah. Israel was hard and disobedient in the days of Jesus rejecting the message of salvation. Jesus spent three days in the grave, like Jonah spent three days in the “fish”, after the three days, Jesus was resurrected, and the Gospel went forth to the Gentiles. After Jonah was in the fish for three days, he went to the Gentile nation to preach a message they were willing to hear. The Gentiles received the message while Israel did not.



Figure 5 Tomb of Jonah the prophet in Mosul



Authenticity and Historicity:

The book of Jonah is attacked by liberal scholars for several reasons.

First, the idea of a fish swallowing a person and living for three-days inside a fish seems impossible. Critics reject the supernatural view of scripture. These same scholars/critics also reject the prophetic aspects of prophecy along with the other miracles in the Bible. The point is God allowed a supernatural event to occur, God prepared the "fish" that swallowed Jonah and God preserved Jonah in the fish for a purpose. The same God who called Jonah from the fish, will also call people from the

graves.

Second scholars have questioned the size of the city of Nineveh and its population, the city according to Jonah is 3-days journey (Jonah 3:3). The city according to archeologists in Jonah's day was had 8-mile inner wall around the city. They say if that were the case, the city could not be a 3-days journey. There are a couple of ways to reply to this charge. 1. The city included towns and villages (suburbs) on the outskirts of the city. 2. Jonah did not just walk and not stop; Jonah was preaching and stopping along the way to deliver the message. Regarding the population of 120,000 children, which would put the size of the city at 500,000 this again is not hard to imagine, when you consider the immense size of just the inner walled part of the city. An 8-mile wall, 50-feet wide and 100-feet high around the city was just the inner wall and did not include the outer wall or the suburbs.

Third, the book of Jonah refers to the "king of Nineveh" (3:6), scholars question this reference. The answer here is simple, the ancient world was ruled by city-states, these later expanded into nations including many cities ruled by one city. For example, Damascus was a city and a states so Ben-Hadad of Aram is called the "king of Damascus (2 Chron 24:23). King Ahaziah is called the "king of Samaria" (1 Kings 21:1).

Fourth, scholars also question the sudden repentance of the city to Jonah's message. Again, the power of God's spirit is really the question. Putting that aside, we know from the historical events what was happening to the city in Jonah's day. The city had gone through two plagues (765, 759) and a total eclipse of the sun (June 15, 763 B.C.) in the time preceding Jonah's arrival. Assyria was also being attacked from the north by the Kingdom of Urartu (Ararat). The city during the reign of Ashur-dan III (772-754 B.C) would have felt the impending doom and been prepared for repentance.

Fifth, some question whether a plant could grow that fast and give shade to Jonah (Jonah 4:6). Again, what is at question is the supernatural nature of God intervening for us to understand Him. If God can create life from non-life (creation), why would we question his ability to raise up a plant and then prepare worm kill the plant. The point God was making to Jonah all his readers is that plant is here today and gone tomorrow, people are of greater value than plants, we should care for those who are lost.

Evidence for the historicity of Jonah can be found throughout the book. Known cities are mentioned in the book; Nineveh (1:2, 3:2-4, 6-7;4:11), Tarshish (1:3; 4:2), Joppa (1:3). Jonah is a noted historical figure mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 as coming from the city of Gath-Hepher, living in the reign of Jeroboam II. Jesus recognized Jonah as a real person, who went to Nineveh (Matthew 12:40). Jesus modeled his ministry after Jonah's, being in the belly of the fish.

