

## INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JONAH

- I.** Authorship and date of writing:
- A.** Nowhere in the book is it stated that the main character, Jonah, wrote the book.
  - B.** The majority of scholars today deny Jonah's authorship primarily pointing to its presentation of Jonah in the third person. *The Jerome biblical Commentary, vol.1,p.633*
  - C.** Many that hold this view are further renowned for regarding the book as fiction only to be allegorized or spiritualized in interpretation.
  - D.** These tend to date Jonah late ~400-200 BC.
  - E.** Internal evidence proves that Jonah was a historical figure and the events of this book a historical reality.
  - F.** Jonah, son of Amittai (Jon.1:1) is historically identified with the 8<sup>th</sup> century prophet of 2Kgs.14:25, living in the northern Kingdom under the reign of Jeroboam II c.793-753 BC.
  - G.** Jeroboam increased Israel's borders in accordance with Jonah's prophecy establishing his validity and notoriety as a prominent Prophet.
  - H.** Jonah is further recognized by Christ Himself as a historical figure and testifies to events of his book as reality. Mat.12:39-41; 16:4; Luk.11:29-32
  - I.** The literal historical interpreters have traditionally held Jonah as the author or possibly one of the sons of the prophets (2Kgs.2:3) that knew him and later wrote down the events.
  - J.** While external evidence is slight and late for Jonah as the author, internal evidence gives support.
  - K.** It is not highly unusual that an author would refer to himself in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person when recording historical events concerning his person. Cp. Moses authoring the Pentateuch in Exo., Lev., Num., Deu.; Solomon writing Ecc., Ecc.1:2; Cp. the introduction to other minor prophets in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person: Hos.1:1-2; Joe.1:1; Mic.1:1; Zep.1:1; Hag.1:1; Zec.1:1
  - L.** Jonah's prayer in 2:2-9 is presented in the 1<sup>st</sup> person as one having exact recall of the words spoken.
  - M.** That Jonah otherwise presents himself in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person throughout the book fits the profile of an author recounting events with the perspective of an open and honest intellectual critiquing.
  - N.** In other words, he tells the story viewing himself with all his faults in an impersonal way to avoid subjectivity for his own personal analysis after the fact.
  - O.** This fits the fact that the book of Jonah was recorded in part to highlight the intellectual honesty of otherwise +V adjusted believers scrutinizing aspects of their life that include their personal failings under the STA. Jon.2:4
  - P.** Yet they are regarded +V and God effectively uses them in ministry of his plan.
  - Q.** It views life of a +V believer looking from the outside internally to their spiritual disposition with a complete and intellectually honest evaluation.

- R. Tradition places Jonah's writing during the reign of Jeroboam II, while an exact date remains greatly debated.
- S. A major plague is recorded in Assyria in the reign of Assurdan III ~771-754 BC.
- T. This fits a cycle of national discipline one might expect before impending judgment. Cf. Deu.28:21-22 cp.Lev.26:25b cp.Jon.3:4
- U. In addition, Assyria was weakened by internal dissension during this period and experienced a notable defeat in the North that was marked by a sign of "ill omen" with the eclipse of the sun in 763 BC. *Tyndale New Bible Dictionary p.99*
- V. These combined events could feasibly provide an atmosphere among the Assyrians readily sensitive to Jonah's message of destruction placing the events of his book and writing sometime around or not long after 762 BC.

## II. Genre, classification and canonization.

- A. Jonah is different from the rest of the Minor Prophets written as an historical narrative (except for 2:2-9 as prose or prayer in poetic form, and a brief prophecy in 3:4).
- B. Ancient Jews regarded the book as historical (cf. Tobit 14:4ff; Josephus, Ant.IX, 12:2).
- C. Jonah is the only book in the OT that records anyone from Israel evangelizing a gentile nation (Israel's national role was passive evangelizing).
- D. The book is read every year by the Jews on *Yom Kippur* (The Day of Atonement) recognizing its message of repentance for salvation.
- E. Jonah's message teaches the theological truth that salvation is provided for all people, even pagans and realized wherever +V exists.
- F. It has historically been included as part of the "Minor/Latter Prophets" (*Ecclesiasticus 49:10*) as evidenced in its grouping (a.k.a. The Twelve) in the Masoretic and Septuagint texts.

## III. Historical setting and background.

- A. Jeroboam II was the 13<sup>th</sup> King of Israel and while one of their most illustrious rulers was a reversionist. 2Kgs.14:23-29 esp.vs.24
- B. Amos, who also lived during this time (Amo.1:1), condemns Israel for their reversionism. Amo.2:6-7; 5:21-24,26; 6:1-8; 7:10-17
- C. During his reign, Jeroboam carried on his father's campaign of aggressive expansion restoring Israel's boundaries back to their Solomonic scope fulfilling Jonah's prophecy.
- D. This is the setting of Israel as Jonah is commissioned to go evangelize the Ninevites.
- E. The irony can't be missed as Israel rejects the call of repentance from her prophets and God evangelizes pagans as the alternative.
- F. It appears that Jonah, as a type of Christ (Mat.12:39-41) serves as a precursor warning to Israel that failure to repent from their reversionism may ultimately cost them their administrative (dispensational) status as God turns to another nation (Mat.21:43).

- G.** Nineveh, to where Jonah is sent, is a city of the Assyrian empire reigning during the Neo-Assyrian period (900-612 BC).
- H.** While Nineveh was not the capital at the time of Jonah (Calah was), from dim antiquity (time of Nimrod) it had been a dominant city-state comprising the city proper and suburban areas under its jurisdiction. Cf. Gen.10:11-12
- I.** During the time of Jonah, the Assyrian empire comprised the Mesopotamian region (parts of present day Turkey and Iraq) and Syria under the rule of Assurdan III.
- J.** Their government was a military monarch with their warrior king also the religious leader.
- K.** All men, no matter class or distinction were compelled to conscription in the military.
- L.** The Assyrians were a Semitic people, with full lips, somewhat hooked nose, high forehead, black hair and eyes, fresh complexion and abundance of beard.
- M.** In character they were cruel and ferocious in war, keen traders, and stern disciplinarians and practiced polytheism.
- N.** Their warrior reputation as an empire was so fierce and consistent that Assyria has been deemed the most warlike empire in history by historians.
- O.** Their cruelty and domination by terror is unsurpassed.
- P.** Their very name became a byword for cruelty and atrocity.
- Q.** Assyrian policy was to deport conquered peoples to other lands within the empire, to destroy their sense of nationalism, and break any pride or hope of rebellion and replace them with strangers from far away
- R.** They skinned their prisoners alive, and cut off various body parts to inspire terror in their enemies.
- S.** There are records of Assyrian officials pulling out tongues and displaying mounds of human skulls all to bring about stark horror and wealthy tribute from surrounding nations.
- T.** Nowhere are the pages of history more bloody than in the records of their wars.
- U.** The Hebrews harbored deep-seated hostility against this nation.
- V.** This attitude is clearly revealed in the book of Jonah demonstrated through Jonah. Jon.4:2
- W.** It helps explain his initial rejection of his missionary duty demanded by God.
- X.** Further, Hosea, also a contemporary with Jonah and Amos (Hos.1:1) gives indication that Israel's judgment would be at the hands of the Assyrians. Cp.Hos.9:3; 10:5-6; 11:5
- Y.** It is not beyond reason to think that Jonah was not privy to this reality adding fuel to his fire of contempt for the Assyrians.
- Z.** Assyria defeated the Northern Kingdom of Israel under Shalmaneser IV, who died during the siege of Samaria, with Sargon II finishing the job in Israel's dispersion of 721 BC.
- AA.** It was the Assyrians that dispersed the Jews to such degree that the tribes of Israel became known as the "Ten Lost Tribes".

- IV. Summary outlines:**
- A.** The book is clearly divided in half with chapters 1-2 dealing with Jonah's disobedience to God and chapters 3-4 his obedience and concluding actions.
  - B.** The 4 chapter divisions in the NAS further cleanly dissect the book:
    - 1. Jonah's fleeing. Chptr.1
    - 2. Jonah praying. Chptr.2
    - 3. Jonah's preaching. Chptr.3
    - 4. Jonah's continued maladjustment. Chptr.4
  - C.** Each paragraph in the Masoretic text deals with a dominant subject:
    - 1. The 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph (1:1-3), Jonah's disobedience.
    - 2. The 2<sup>nd</sup> (1:4-6), God's intervention through nature and men on the ship to Tarshish.
    - 3. The 3<sup>rd</sup> (1:7—16), the sailors and Jonah dealing with the situation throwing Jonah overboard.
    - 4. The 4<sup>th</sup> (1:17-chptr.2), Jonah swallowed by the great fish with his prayer and deliverance.
    - 5. The 5<sup>th</sup> (chptr.3), Jonah's obedience concluding with the repentance of the Ninevites.
    - 6. The 6<sup>th</sup> (4:1-3), Jonah's bad attitude and complaining.
    - 7. The 7<sup>th</sup> (4:4-11), Final discourse between God and Jonah.
  - D.** A further detailed outline via the NAS:
    - 1. Jonah's fleeing. 1:1-17
      - a. The Lord's command. Vss.1,2
      - b. A ship to Tarshish. Vs.3
      - c. A storm at sea: Vss.4-14
        - 1) Asleep during the storm. Vss.4-6
        - 2) The culprit found. Vss.7-10
        - 3) Sailors in distress. Vss.11-14
      - d. Thrown overboard. Vss.15-17
    - 2. Praying: 2:1-10
      - a. Cast out. Vss.1-4
      - b. Brought up. Vss.5-6
      - c. Paying vows. Vss.7-9
      - d. Delivered. Vs.10
    - 3. Preaching: 3:1-10
      - a. The Lord's 2<sup>nd</sup> command. Vss.1-2
      - b. Declaring the message. Vss.3-4
      - c. Nineveh's repentance: Vss.5-9
        - 1) In sackcloth and ashes. Vss.5-6
        - 2) The king's proclamation. Vss.7-9
      - d. Judgment withheld. Vs.10
    - 4. Jonah's continued maladjustment: 4:1-11
      - a. Complaining. Vss.1-3
      - b. The plant and the worm. Vss.4-7
      - c. The wind and the sun. Vs.8
      - d. A lesson taught. Vss.9-11