

The Book of Jonah

Introduction

The book of Jonah is the fifth in a group of twelve minor prophets. In the Hebrew Tanakh, equivalent to our Old Testament, the minor prophets are combined into one book called “The Twelve.” Jonah was a contemporary of both Amos and Hosea, and he lived fifty years before Elisha and his ministry was fifty years before Isaiah.

His ministry was unique, in that Jonah is the only recorded prophet God ever sent to a Gentile nation with a call to repentance. He is also the only recorded prophet who ran away from God’s call.

The book was written sometime between 793 and 753 BC. We know that Jonah lived in the 8th century BC in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of Israel’s 14th king, the wicked Jeroboam II. Jonah is described as the son of Amittai, coming from a town called Gath Hepher, near Nazareth in an area later known as Galilee. He is one of the few prophets that came from the northern kingdom of Israel. He is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:23-25, where his prophecy to Jeroboam II is recorded, that the Lord would use him to recover the territories of Israel between Lebo-hamath and the Dead Sea. This was a time of expansion in Israel, which was in process for nearly two generations. Many scholars believe that the land of Israel even rivaled the splendor of David and Solomon during this time.

According to **The Way of Truth Blog**, in the time this book was written, Israel was experiencing political success but spiritual decay. The Assyrian Empire, with its capital at Nineveh, was the great and feared power of the east, known for its brutality, arrogance, and oppression of surrounding nations. God’s command to Jonah to “*Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it*” (Jonah 1:2) would have been shocking to any Israelite patriot. Nineveh was the embodiment of everything hostile to Israel. Yet the call of God demonstrates His universal sovereignty and compassion even for those far from His covenant people.

Most scholars believe that Jonah, himself, is the author of the book, although he writes it in the third person. If he is the author, which is most likely, his authorship indicates that sometime after his extraordinary experience, he came to a true repentance of his own sinful attitude as he reflected back on it.

Pastor Gene Cunningham, in his study of this book, states, “There is a little Jonah in all of us, and a lot of Jonah in some of us.” And I’m sure we will find that statement to be true as we dig into this small, but important and relevant book.

Some critics would say the book is simply a parable rather than historic, but Jesus confirms the book of Jonah as **both historical and true** in Matthew 12:39-41 and in Luke 11:29-32. In fact, Jonah is only one of four prophets Jesus mentions by name, and he is the only prophet that Christ identifies Himself with in Jonah’s experience of being three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, just as Jesus was three days and three nights in the earth before His resurrection.

This book is the shortest book in the Old Testament, but it is a book with great themes, focusing on the attitudes of our hearts in contrast to the heart of God.

I have primarily used the NKJV in writing this study, unless otherwise indicated. As you answer the questions, please keep that in mind and regardless of which version you prefer, make sure to refer to the NKJV for the best clarification of the question being asked.

Please have the first lesson completed when you come to the first study. We strongly encourage you to complete your lesson each week. Don’t try to do it all in one sitting but spread it out throughout the week. That will give you more time to glean all that the Lord has for you and to come prepared to share your thoughts in our discussion time.

If for some reason you were not able to complete your study, **we want you to come anyway.** I know that you will receive much from the overview message and discussion each week and you can always go back to complete the lesson later.

Take a few moments before you begin your time of study in God’s Word to ask Him to quiet your mind from all other distractions and open your heart to the things He wants to show you. Take notes as you read, jotting down those things the Lord impresses on your heart. Keeping a study journal is a good way to do this and I encourage you to use one, or you can use the blank sheet at the back of each lesson for that purpose, as well as for taking notes from the overview.

We are so excited that you are joining us in this study, and we look forward to all the Lord wants to speak to our hearts.

*Shawn Van Hook
And the LT Women’s Ministry Team*