

# Jonah

**Purpose:** To demonstrate Israel's prophetic role to the nations.

**Outline:** *Part One*

I. First Commission and Jonah's Reaction (1:1-16)

II. God's Response to Jonah (1:17-2:10)

*Part Two*

I. Second Commission and Jonah's Reaction (3:1-10)

II. God's Response to Jonah (4:1-11)

**Author:** Jonah

**Date:** Jonah ministered during the mid-eighth century around the same time as Amos and Hosea.

## Highlights:

This recorded prophecy of Jonah is unique in that it is not a series of divine oracles, but is a narrative account of an event in Jonah's life.

Jonah is also mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25. He is a prophet who lived and ministered in the Northern Kingdom during the reign of Jeroboam II – who was a strong military leader at a time when the Assyrians were relatively weak. This resulted in Israel's expansion and regaining their original borders and enjoying peace and prosperity.

This account begins with God telling Jonah to go to Nineveh, which is the capital of Assyria. Jonah attempts to run away from the Lord. Instead of going northwest to Nineveh, Jonah goes southeast (the opposite direction) to Joppa and gets on a boat heading east to Tarshish. [All of this happens in just the first 3 verses.]

On the boat, there is a violent storm. All of the sailors cried out to their gods for help. They cast lots to determine who was responsible for their calamity. The lots determine that Jonah is the reason (**Proverbs 16:33**: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." – even if the casters of the lot are not believers!)

Jonah confesses that he is running away from the Lord, the God of heaven, sea, and land. In a suicidal act, Jonah tells the crew to throw him overboard. After throwing him overboard, the sea grew calm and the crew feared the Lord, offered sacrifices to the Lord, and made vows to the Lord (*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom* – in all of this God may have caused the whole crew to be converted as believers in the Lord).

God rescues Jonah by sending a "great fish" to swallow Jonah.

Chapter two is Jonah's prayer of thanksgiving (not a prayer of lament) for his rescue. Following his prayer the Lord commanded the fish to vomit Jonah up onto dry land.

There are many who interpret this as an allegory (and do not think that Jonah was actually swallowed by a fish). Regardless, it is notable that Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights before being tossed up onto dry land. Jesus was entombed for three days and three nights before being resurrected (cf. Matthew 12:40).

The second part of this account begins with God, again, telling Jonah to go to Nineveh. This time Jonah obeyed (gee, I wonder if the last incident influenced Jonah's decision).

For three days (note, again, three days), Jonah went throughout Nineveh proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."

In an act of faith and repentance the Ninevites believed God and began a period of repentance. The king issued a decree commanding everyone to repent and call urgently on God.

Some have argued that the Ninevites did not truly convert and become believers in the Lord since there is no mention of a mass conversion in the capital of Assyria; and since Assyria – just a short time later – attacked the Israelites. However, it is not necessary to believe that the whole country of Assyria was converted; and it was the next king that led the attack on Israel.

**3:9 – “Who knows? God may yet relent” if we repent.**

Rather than responding with a prayer of thanksgiving, Jonah now laments over God’s compassion. God provides an incident of compassion to Jonah by providing a plant to give him shade. When God destroyed the plant (removed his compassion), Jonah complained. Jonah was angry that God removed his compassion from him, should he not be equally concerned with God removing compassion from a nation?

Jonah = Israel. Jonah, and all of Israel (and now the Christian Church) are called to be messengers of God. We are to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel – that Jesus Christ came to save sinners. The truth of God’s love is not just reserved for God’s People (i.e. the Israelites; and now Christians); the truth of God’s love is to be proclaimed to all people.

There may be some who reject God’s love; but that is not our concern. Our calling is to go into the world and make disciples of all nations, preaching and teaching all that Christ commanded. Jonah, and Israel, refused to do this – wanting to keep the message to themselves. We make the same mistake if we are not continually focused on evangelism and missions.

Jonah = Nineveh. Jonah, and all of Nineveh, was wrought with sin. They did not rightly fear and know the Lord. Neither the repentance of Nineveh, nor the repentance of Jonah was sufficient for their salvation – they were dependent upon the divine grace of God (which would cause them to repent, and would cause God to respond to their repentance with undeserved compassion).

Jonah received the very treatment that he desired God to show Nineveh. When this happened, Jonah truly realized who God was. It is possible that this story is, in effect, the conversion story of Jonah. Therefore, Jonah, went on to share his testimony of God’s grace in his own life – and in the lives of Nineveh – in encouraging Israel to turn to the Lord. Certainly, if God responded to with compassion and grace to Nineveh – the epitome of pagan wickedness – he would respond with at least the same compassion and grace to his chosen people, Israel.

Pastor Tim Keller calls Jonah “The Prodigal Prophet” – with clear connections of Jonah to the account of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32).

In **Matthew 12:38-42** (and Luke 11:29-32) the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus to give them a miraculous sign. Jesus responds by giving them the “sign of Jonah.” Here, Jesus connects the three days and nights that Jonah was in the belly of a huge fish, with his eventual three days and nights in the “heart of the earth.”

Jesus goes on to say that the men of Nineveh will eventually stand up at the judgment of this generation, since they responded to the preaching of Jonah. Meanwhile, one who is greater than Jonah is here (Jesus), and the people do not respond to his preaching.