

Snapshot of Jonah

The Prophet:

The name Jonah means “dove.” Jonah, the son of Amittai, is mentioned not only in the book which bears his name but also in 2 Kings 14:25.

He was a resident of Gath-hepher (a town of Galilee located about four miles north of Nazareth) in the Northern Kingdom. Jonah was an early contemporary of the prophets Hosea, Amos, and Micah.

Jesus mentions Jonah as an historical character and compares the events of his life to His own burial and resurrection (Matthew 12:40).

The Date:

The date is determined with reference to Jeroboam II who was king of Israel when Joel prophesied. Jeroboam II's reign was from 782 to 753 B.C. It is uncertain when in this time frame the events of the book took place.

The Message:

The book of Jonah is unique among the Minor Prophets. It tells us the story of Jonah rather than focusing on the prophetic teaching of Jonah. The preaching of Jonah takes up only eight words in the book (3:4).

The book of Jonah tells the story of God calling the prophet to go and preach to the city of Nineveh. Jonah rebels and refuses to do as God commanded him. Instead he attempts to flee from God. He is shown in a most graphic way that one cannot run from the presence of God. He repents and then does as God had directed him, preaching to the city of Nineveh. The people of Nineveh believe based on the preaching of Jonah and therefore God does not punish them. This angers Jonah who would have preferred that God destroy them. God then tries to get Jonah to see the proper place for pity.

The primary message of the book of Jonah is the universal love of God. Remember that Jonah preaches not to his fellow Israelites but to the nation of Assyria. This illustrates God's willingness to save even the heathen nations if they repent. Jehovah is God of the whole earth.

The Book:

The chapter divisions mark the natural divisions of the book:

Chapter 1: Jonah's disobedience: “running away from God.”

Chapter 2: His prayer: “running to God.”

Chapter 3: His preaching to Nineveh: “running with God.”

Chapter 4: His complaints: “running ahead of God.”

Outline of Jonah

- I. Jonah's call and flight to Tarshish (1:1-16)
 - A. Jehovah's charge and the prophet's disobedience (1-3)
 - B. The great wind-Jonah's confession (4-10)
 - C. Jonah punished-cast into the sea (5-16)
- II. Jonah's miraculous preservation (1:17-2:10)
 - A. The fish prepared by Jehovah (1:17)
 - B. Jonah's prayer from the deep (2:1-9)
 - C. Jonah's deliverance (2:10)
- III. Jehovah's second call-Jonah to Nineveh (3)
 - A. The call, response, and message to Nineveh (1-4)
 - B. Repentance, and Jehovah's gracious change (5-10)
- IV. A narrow prophet vs. a merciful God (4)
 - A. Jonah's anger at Nineveh's repentance (1-5)
 - B. The gourd vine and the worm (6-8)
 - C. Jehovah's rebuke and lesson of the gourd vine (9-11)

Lessons For Today

1. We cannot run away from God and our spiritual obligations toward Him. God's omniscience and omnipresence will find us.
2. God is concerned with the spiritual well-being of all men, regardless of their nationality or race. His universal concern should be ours, too.
3. We learn the conditional nature of prophecy. When the prophets went out preaching doom and gloom, they were really preaching repentance. Repent and turn or God will judge you. When the people of Nineveh repented, God did not overthrow the city.

