

# **THE BOOK OF JONAH**

By

Bob Stewart

And the Bible study group.

Winter-Spring 2022

## INTRODUCTION

The Book of Jonah may be one of the most intriguing books in the Old Testament. At face value, it seems like a simple miraculous story about God's call of a prophet to go and preach to a city of wickedness and the leaders and population of the city of Nineveh repent and are saved from destruction. But is that all it is? Scholars have come to many conclusions about Jonah and what transpires in the book. Let me begin by saying that the point of this book and its message is NOT how a great fish could swallow a man and he survive. Nor does the "great fish" have to be a whale. Sermons, books, articles, opinions, and all other attempts at trying to explain this anomaly are a total waste of time in my opinion. But there are a number of events happening in the book that are unusual. To the close observer, the book is an enigma in any case.

So, taking the book at face value, let's ask, "What actual impact did it have in the history of Assyria and the city of Nineveh?" Given a date of approximately 800 B.C.E. for Jonah's visit, Assyria was conquering lands during that period and, just a half century later, that included Israel, the nation Jonah was from. Was there some spiritual move in Nineveh prior to that? There is no record of that or of any decree for the people to repent outside of this book. Plus, in the overall picture of things, the impact on Nineveh from Jonah's mission was historically a zero. We are faced with a lot of thoughts as we investigate this account. What is this book really about?

That is the real question. "What is the purpose or point of the book, that is, the lesson contained therein and God's intent in having it told and written down for all to read." This ought to be followed with "What kind of literature are we dealing with here considering that the ancient Hebrew writers employ dozens of styles and techniques to express God's message." "Is there more to the story than is at first apparent?" Or, as many believe, "Is it a straight up documentary of a prophet's reluctant mission?" These are the better questions. And we will do our best to address them, and yes, the "great fish" will also be addressed.

I will say without equivocation that all the books of the Bible are intended to be didactic. That is, the books are there to teach the reader an important truth God wants to convey through His inspired writers. We learn about God and His nature, characteristics and His goals as we see what he is doing and why, His desires for us as His creation in His image, His thoughts and so on.

In Jesus we see even more about God and his feelings about us and His desire to bring us into His kingdom. The book of Jonah then, may well fall into this genre as well and is included in the Old Testament canon for this reason. Otherwise, at face value, it has little to offer to really be of great benefit to us. So, like the proverbial onion, we need to peel back the outer skin, (the story narrative itself) and see if there is more that the Lord wishes us to see. This process should be apparent to us as we see so much literature that is a vehicle to the message contained within - such as Jesus' parables, the Book of Revelation, the clever use of the plays on words in the first

chapters of Genesis, Jotham's "satire"<sup>1</sup> and so many more literary masterpieces.

James D. Smart, in his introduction to the Book of Jonah makes this statement,

"Before a reader can rightly understand the book, he must make up his mind what kind of literature he has before him. Is it history or is it a great parable such as the prophets, and later Jesus used so cunningly? There is no reason to prejudice the issue on dogmatic grounds as though some dishonor would be done to Scripture if the decision should be that the book is parable, not history. The scriptures contain many different kinds of literature – psalms, proverbs, histories, sagas, sermons, parables, letters, apocalypses – and it is important for any sound interpretation that a book or a portion of a book be placed in its proper category. Only then when this is done can it be read as it was originally intended to be read."<sup>2</sup>

I am in full agreement with this observation with the exception that the book is not a parable but a satire in my opinion. More on that later. But it is true that the Hebrew writers often use picturesque words and phrases to convey the intent of the message of God to the people. We must remember that they had very limited communication tools and most everything in the early days was word of mouth with pictures and stories to get God's point across. For example, Dr. Eli Lazorin-Eyzenberg, of the Israel Bible Center recently wrote an article asking the question, "Does God have a long nose?"

He notes the Hebrew in Psalm 103:8 אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם (arech apaim) translated "slow to anger" and notes,

"If you can't read Hebrew, don't feel bad (although God knows you owe it to yourself to start learning some Hebrew already). Not many in attendance knew the meaning of this Ancient Hebrew phrase. You see, the phrase arech apaim means, "[He] has a long nose." What in the world could that possibly mean in reference to God? The answer is actually very simple. When a person gets angry his nose is visibly enlarged as he/she expresses his/her indignation. The fact that God has a very long nose (nose is even plural here) is a beautiful ancient Hebrew expression signifying that God is very slow to anger. I am so happy that most of our English translations get it right:

"The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin." (Psalm 103:8)

"May God's very long nose be felt by us during the next cycle of His immense mercy and grace! And may our noses also get longer and longer as we get to know Him in an even more intimate way!"

---

<sup>1</sup> Judges 9:7-15

<sup>2</sup> James D. Smart, the Book of Jonah, The Interpreter's Bible, volume 6, page 871, Abingdon Press, 1956

In more modern times, authors have couched their political, social or spiritual themes within their stories. Among them are: *Moby Dick*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Frankenstein*, and many more. More recently Frank Herbert, author of the "Dune" science fiction novels noted that the thrust of his stories was to rebuild distrust of government and those who gain political or military power.

Therefore, understanding the culture, language, literature and style of the ancient writers is critical to attaining this goal. Not to do so results in all the different teachings and doctrines we are drowning in as these all become opinions of people who have not cared about the thought process or understanding these ancient writers possessed and thus not cared about what God wishes us to understand as well. So, we will look carefully at that aspect as well as the book presents some fascinating material and clever clues.

So, again, could it be that this book is not just a story about Jonah and his mission, but perhaps also a symbolic portrait in some way written in satirical form. The composition is so unique in its style and format that it does not quite fit the form and characteristics of a parable, allegory, metaphor or standard structure of anything we are familiar with yet is distinctly didactic and forthrightly simply. For an example of this kind of presentation the book of Hosea is not just an account of the life of the prophet but also an allegory where Hosea becomes the personification of God and Gomer the personification of Israel.

Was the story of Jonah, written long after the time of the event, rewritten to include elements producing an even more compelling message? Or not? In the appendix following the commentary, we will discuss the pros and cons of whether the book can be taken literally or is a story really sending a message about something else or a combination of the two.

Now some important notes about the book. Though among what is called "The Minor Prophets" it must be stated that this does not refer to the importance of the prophet or the book, but it's size. In the Hebrew Bible, the twelve books of the so-called minor prophets are one book called, "the Book of the Twelve."

Let's observe a few things about the book and ask a few questions. While other books in this collection (and among the prophets in general) are named after and largely written by the author. Jonah is written about the prophet, not written by the prophet. In chapter two there is the record of Jonah's prayer from the belly of the great fish in which is framed in the third person although Jonah is portrayed as praying in the first person. It reads "Jonah prayed" not "I prayed." It is therefore a quote and not a first-person narrative. Then we have the oddity that no other biblical character in the two thousand plus years of Biblical history is named Jonah. Our Jonah here is the only one.

His story is told by a narrator and written well after the event perhaps more than two-hundred years after the time of the actual story takes places as will be discussed later on. This also suggests that there may be more than a biographical message being told here. It is a story about someone named "Jonah" who is a prophet whose adventure is told in the narrative, and it is not complimentary. Of course, perhaps Jonah would not wish to write this about himself. Still, we cannot say for certain that the book is about a fictional character as some suggest.

Jonah's name means "dove" or "pigeon." Could it be that his name is suggestive of his mission? He reluctantly becomes a messenger of the word of the Lord to a lost city. The "dove" is used in the story of Noah as a messenger of good news, safety and a new beginning. There are many places in both testaments where the "dove" is a symbol of peace and safety as well as a symbol of the Holy Spirit empowering people to be messengers of the good news.

Outside of the book that bears his name, Jonah is only mentioned one other time in the Old Testament. This is in II Kings 14:25 where Jeroboam II king of Israel (793-753 B.C.E.) who extended the border of Israel from the south end of the Dead Sea, to north of Damascus restoring the land taken by Syria. Jonah's name is mentioned because though Israel was in the throes of evil (idolatry) under Jeroboam the Lord did not bring judgment but, like with Nineveh he saved Israel under the hand of Jeroboam. But later, a letter from Elijah (II Chronicles 21:12 ff.) came to Jeroboam stating that the Lord is bringing judgment and death to him. We have one added note that Jonah was from Gath-hepher, a town north of Nazareth in the territory of Zebulun. So, when the Lord commissioned Jonah for his journey, it would have been there.

Then we have the quote by Jesus seen in Matthew chapters 12, 16, and Luke, chapter 11. There Jesus tells the scribes and Pharisees who seek a sign of His legitimacy,

"But He answered and said to them, An evil and adulterous generation craves a sign; and so no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as JONAH WAS IN THE STOMACH OF THE SEA MONSTER FOR THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, *something* greater than Jonah is here." Matthew 12:39-41

He goes on to say in verse 42,

"*The Queen of the South* will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, *something* greater than Solomon is here."

This is likely the Queen of Sheba we read about in I Kings 10:1-13. She came to Jerusalem having heard of his fame, and apparently skeptical, she tested him. But in conversations with him, she was very impressed and heaped wealth upon him. The point is, that like Nineveh, she heard the message and believed. She, with them, will stand in judgement of the Jews who reject belief in Christ because someone greater than Solomon is before them.

So, with this and the comment in II Kings 14:25, we would have a difficult time stating that Jonah was a fictional character. But, with the minute amount of information about Jonah and his work, we can assume he is a prophet of considerable insignificance, and that, perhaps, is why he is chosen for this narrative and lesson.

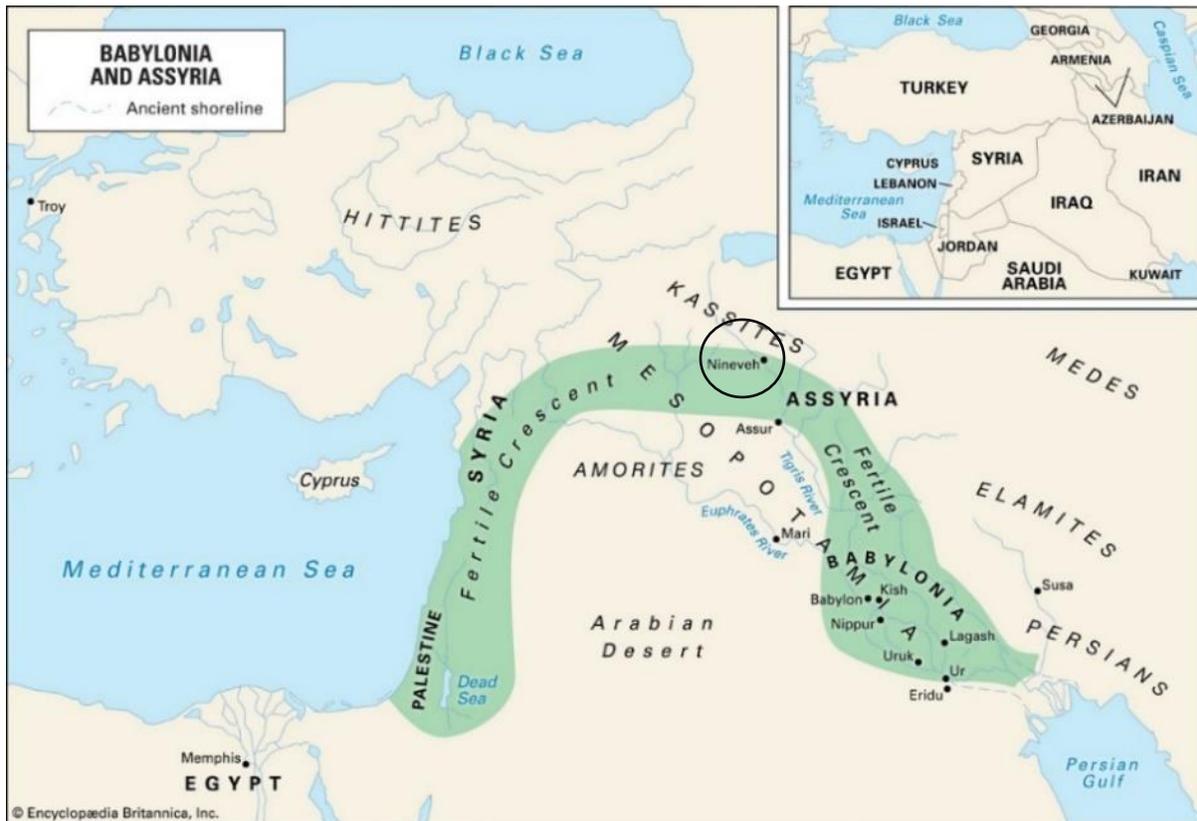
The date of writing is suggested for us by Jonah's name in II Kings. Because the Book of II Kings<sup>3</sup> concludes with the release of Jehoiachin from Babylon, it is likely to have been written after that event. This would place the writing of II Kings around 500 B.C.E. during the reconstruction of Jerusalem.

So, Jonah would have been on his mission well before then and during the existence of the nation of Israel. Israel was conquered and destroyed around 722 B.C.E. The consideration of the date of the writing of the Book of Jonah would have to be in conjunction with the history of Israel, the exile period (585-535 B.C. E.) and the history of Nineveh.

Nineveh is first mentioned in Genesis 10:8-12 where we read,

8: "Now Cush fathered Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth. 9: He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." 10: And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. 11: From that land he went to Assyria, and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, 12: and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city."

Nineveh is located at present day Mosul, Iraq, on the east bank of the Tigris Rivers as we see in the map below.<sup>4</sup> The ruins have not been extensively excavated and following are a few pictures of what has been excavated.



<sup>3</sup> I and II Kings are one book in the Hebrew Bible as are I and II Samuel and I and II Chronicles.

<sup>4</sup> Map copied from: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nineveh-ancient-city-Iraq>



The Mashki Gate as it appears today. Lower stones are original, but much of the rest is reconstructed.<sup>5</sup>

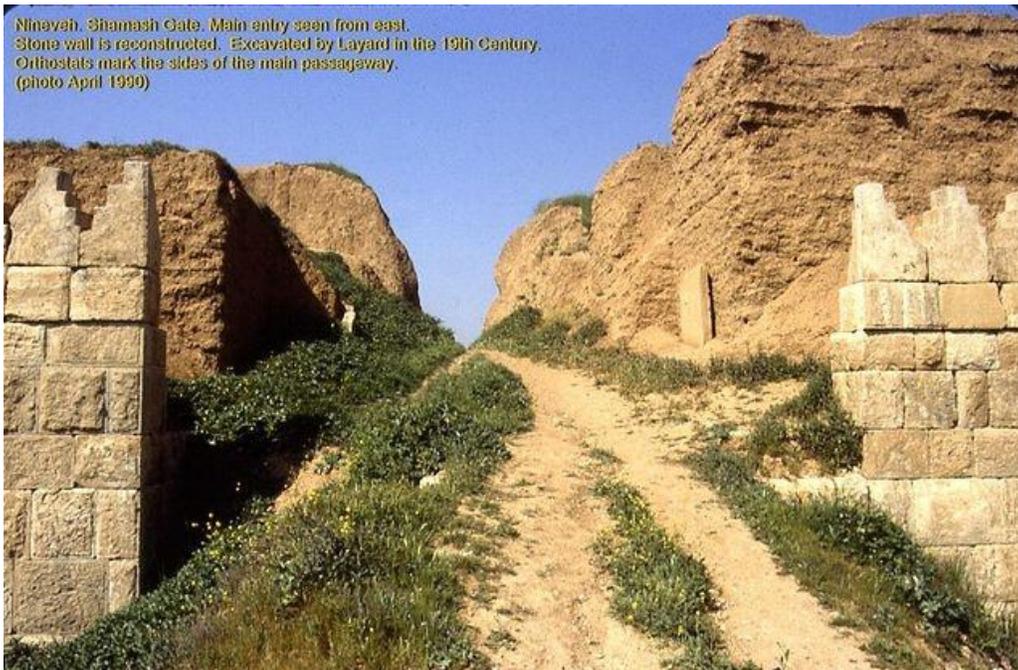


The Adad Gate (above), reconstructed on original foundation.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Picture from: Picture from: All Things Assyrian; Saving Ancient Nineveh  
By Dan McLerran  
<http://www.popular-archaeology.com>  
Posted 2011-08-23 23:45 GMT

<sup>6</sup> Picture from: Picture from: All Things Assyrian; Saving Ancient Nineveh  
By Dan McLerran  
<http://www.popular-archaeology.com>  
Posted 2011-08-23 23:45 GMT



The reconstructed Shamash Gate. Main entry to the city as seen from the east.<sup>7</sup>



Aerial view of work in progress in the palace.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Picture from: All Things Assyrian; Saving Ancient Nineveh

By Dan McLerran

<http://www.popular-archaeology.com>

Posted 2011-08-23 23:45 GMT

<sup>8</sup> From: Popular Archaeology on line: <https://popular-archaeology.com/article/end-of-empire-the-archaeological-excavations-at-ziyaret-tepe/>

Due to a constant war-torn environment and vandalism, the excavation of Nineveh has faced many challenges and progress has been very slow and limited.

Nineveh was first a small village founded about 7,000 years B.C.E. Over the next 5,000 years, the small cities of the Sumerian and Mesopotamian territories were trading and growing in size and strength. Around 2,000 B.C.E. Nineveh became the central city in the east west trade industry and by 1,300 B.C.E. was the largest city in ancient Mesopotamia.

Having gained strong leadership and power, Assyria began a campaign to conquer the mid-east. But in due time, because of an internal conflict over rulership, Assyria weakened. This was around 1,200 B.C.E. but regained power within 200 years largely due to the effort of Tiglath-pileser I (c.1,114–1076 B.C. E.). Succeeding rulers continued to build the empire and Sennacherib, son of Sargon II became the most powerful king of the period around 730 B.C.E.<sup>9</sup> By then Nineveh boasted several hundred thousand people. Jonah 1:2 notes it as a “great city.” In its day, Nineveh was the largest, richest, most powerful and greatest city in the mid-east.

It was about 722-721 B.C.E. that Assyria attacked Israel under the rulership of Sennacherib and destroyed it taking captive hundreds of thousands of prisoners and transporting them to locations all over the mid-east. He and this account are mentioned thirteen times in the Old Testament as well as the failed attempt to take Jerusalem. He returned to Assyria and took up residence in Nineveh (II Kings 19:36; Isaiah 37:37). He made Nineveh the capital of Assyria and it remained in force until it was destroyed in 612 by the rising strength of Babylonia accompanied by the Medes and Persians who had been conquered by Assyria in their past. There was no capital or king in Nineveh until this time, a hundred years after the Jonah narrative.

So where does Jonah fit in? The earliest and latest time period for Jonah would have been from 900 B.C.E. to 700 B.C.E. Can we narrow it down? Well, Elisha, (c. 860-800 B.C.E.) is seen to travel to Damascus in II Kings 8:7 to confront king Ben-hadad showing that the Lord had His prophets travel outside of Israel. In Amos 1:3, (c.760 B.C.E.) the prophet also traveled to Damascus and confronted the same king, Ben-hadad. Both pronounced judgment upon Damascus and this was carried out by the encroaching Assyrians, likely led by king Shalmaneser IV in 744 B.C.E. So, there were traveling prophets and the prophet Jonah is mentioned in II Kings 14:25. But II Kings was apparently compiled around 500 B.C.E.<sup>10</sup> over 200 years after these prophets and does not mention any time period for Jonah’s mission.

Then, after the time of Elisha and Amos we have Assyria in determined conquest to the south and into Israel from around 750 B.C.E. to 722 B.C.E. Somewhere before this period is most likely when the tale of Jonah took place. Most scholars place the story of this prophet’s journey

---

<sup>9</sup> “Assyria” means “people of Asshur.” Asshur is noted in Genesis 10:22 as the second son of Shem. Assyria is called “Asshur” in Numbers 24:22-24; I Chronicles 1:17 and Ezekiel 27:23. Asshur was the earlier capital of Assyria.

<sup>10</sup> See introduction bottom of page 2. There is considerable debate over this date and some place the writing of II Kings during the exilic period, but this would only expand the timeframe a century earlier, still long after the time of these prophets.

around 900 -760 B.C.E. or so. [The writing of the book, however, is uncertain, but can be anywhere from 850 to the four hundreds B.C.E.]

Outside of Jonah, chapter three, is there any evidence of a turning to God by the city of Nineveh during this period? In chapter three of Jonah, the king of Nineveh is mentioned as prompting the city to repent and turn from its evil ways after hearing of Jonah's message that destruction would be immanent in forty days unless the city repents. In our investigation we must consider the difference between "a king in Nineveh" and "the King of Assyria." This discussion is well researched by Paul J.N. Lawrence in an article noted in footnote nine.

So, assuming that Jonah visited Nineveh a few decades prior to the advance of Assyria upon the kingdoms to the south, this would mean that the king (or kings) of Assyria at the time would have possibly been: 1. Shalmaneser III (c. 850-824) 2. Shamshi-Adad V (c. 824-811) 3. Adad-nirari III (c. 811-783); 4. His son Shalmaneser IV (782-772); 5. Adad-nirani's son Ashur-dan III (773-755) and another son 6. Ashur-nirani V (755-745) 7. Tiglath-pileser III (745-727). The capital of Assyria before Sennacherib made Nineveh the capital in c.700 B.C.E. was Asshur, some 75 miles south of Nineveh and on the south-west side of the Tigris River.<sup>11</sup>

"The name of two Assyrian kings important for the history of ancient Israel are: 1. Shalmaneser III, the son of Ashurnasipal II and king of Assyria 858-824 BCE. Though not mentioned by name in the Bible, Shalmaneser III was the king opposed by Ahab of Israel in 853. Later, in 841, King Jehu rendered tribute to Shalmaneser III, following the latter's defeat of Hazael of Damascus. 2. Shalmaneser V, son of Tiglath-pileser III, king of Assyria 727-722 BCE, who figures prominently in (I Kings 17:1-6). In 726, Hosea of Israel recognized him as overlord and rendered tribute (II Kings 17:3). Shortly thereafter, a rebellion against Assyria led to Hosea's imprisonment in 724. Shalmaneser laid siege to Samaria and the city fell to him in the autumn of 722, but Shalmaneser's death left the fate of Samaria undetermined. The "king of Assyria" who exiled Israelites from Samaria (II Kings 17:6) was Shalmaneser's successor, Sargon II, who reconquered the city in 720 BCE."<sup>12</sup>

During this period there are no records outside of the book of Jonah of any event corresponding to his mission or it's effect. The activities of the rulers of Assyria and Nineveh are wrapped up in conquest and territorial rule for the sake of monetary gain or the gain of natural resources.

"No Royal Annals survive for the reign of Adad-nirari III; instead, a number of display inscriptions such as stelae and slabs survive, several of which are of provincial origin. Interestingly, Adad-nirari III is also known to have issued a number of royal decrees. Only one royal inscription can definitely be assigned to Shalmaneser IV. However, a number of inscriptions, many of provincial origin, erected by powerful provincial governors, provide much valuable and additional evidence."<sup>13</sup> But there is nothing reflecting the "decree" seen in Jonah,

---

<sup>11</sup> See footnote 9, page 9 for more on this name.

<sup>12</sup> Bible Odyssey.org – Shalmaneser.

<sup>13</sup>Paul J. N. Lawrence; [https://legacy.tyndalehouse.com/tynbul/Library/TynBull\\_1986\\_37\\_06\\_Lawrence\\_AssyrianNobles\\_Jonah.pdf](https://legacy.tyndalehouse.com/tynbul/Library/TynBull_1986_37_06_Lawrence_AssyrianNobles_Jonah.pdf)

chapter 3.

“This period also extends throughout the reigns of his two immediate successors, his brothers Ashur-dan III (r. 773–755 BC) and Ashur-nirari V (r. 755–745/744 BC). By the end of Adad-nirari III's reign, the Neo-Assyrian Empire was in decline. In particular, the power of the king himself was being threatened due to the emergence of extraordinarily powerful officials, whom while they accepted the authority of the Assyrian monarch in practice acted with supreme authority themselves and began to issue their own inscriptions, similar to those of the kings.”<sup>14</sup>

It appears that the Assyrian dominance began to decline between 800 and 745 B.C.E. due to internal strife and battles for the throne. Within this timeframe is probably where the story of Jonah would have been placed. Is it possible that his story coincides with the period of decline in the dominance of Assyria? There is no Assyrian record of Jonah's visit but there were numerous decrees by lesser officials than the kings of Assyria, and possibly by the “king” of Nineveh as noted in Jonah, chapter 3, though no evidence exists of this specific decree.

In the case of Sennacherib, being turned back from conquering Judah by a devastating loss of life among his troops, he returned to Nineveh sometime around 721 B.C.E.

II Kings 19:35-37 records the following as Sennacherib approached Jerusalem,

35: “Then it happened that night that the angel of the LORD went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when *the rest* got up early in the morning, behold, all of the 185,000 were dead. 36: So, Sennacherib the king of Assyria departed and returned *home*, and lived at Nineveh. 37: Then it came about, as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword; and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And his son Esarhaddon became king in his place.”<sup>15</sup>

Jonah would have visited Nineveh some time before this event, but probably not more than fifty to eighty years. If there was a spiritual revival during this time, it may have had an effect on the military dominance and expansion of the empire. On the other hand, there is no historical evidence of this either, and, the decline is attributed to internal political conflicts.

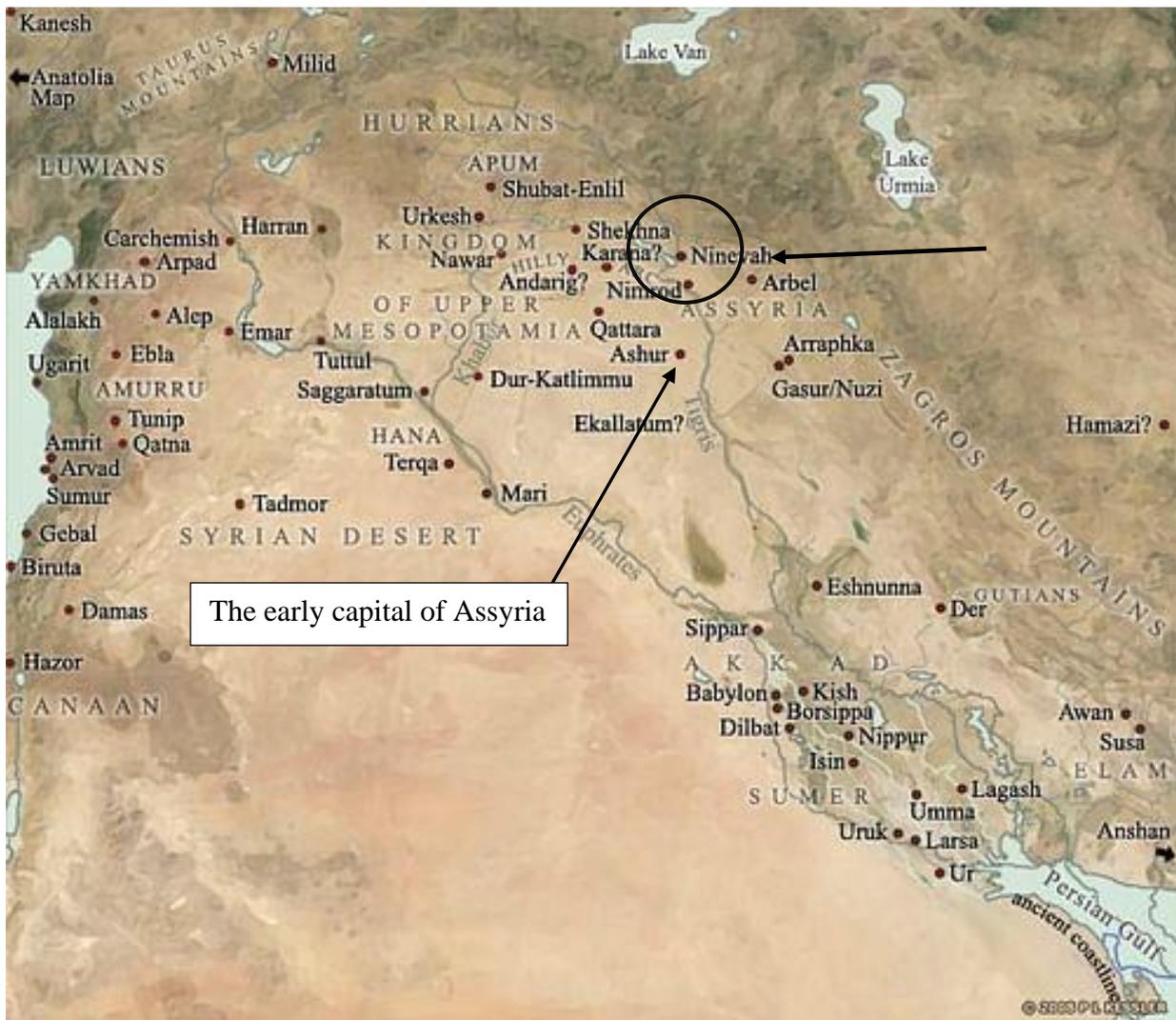
Below is look at the map relating to this time period.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Wikipedia under: Shalmaneser IV.

<sup>15</sup> There is some discrepancy in the names of the Assyrian kings who were involved in the defeat and destruction of Samaria. Isaiah 20:1 notes that Sargon was involved. This history includes campaigns against Egypt, Israel, Judah and other nations by a succession of Assyrian kings causing some of the different names in the various accounts.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.worldhistory.org/assyria/> I highly recommend this website for a comprehensive history of the Assyrian empire.



Nineveh is seen at the center of the map near it's top as the orange line indicates.

We will see in the book itself the events that guide the reader to understanding that this book could be more than a documentary of Jonah's mission. In just forty short verses, this story illustrates much more than appears with a superficial reading. There are also details that, as is often the case in Hebrew literature, that the narrative is not always to be taken literally but may have a higher purpose as well. Again, the best question is, "To what end did God have this book written?" Let's see if we can discover that answer.

# THE BOOK OF JONAH

## CHAPTER ONE

1-2:

1: “The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2: ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and cry out against it, because their wickedness has come up before Me.’”

1: “Lord” is “Yahweh,” the covenant relationship name of God indicating that “Jonah” is one of His own. This would also resound with readers who still worship Yahweh. “Jonah” means “dove” and may indicate not just his name, but his purpose as well as the characteristics and demeanor Jonah is to adopt as he goes on his mission to the Gentile capital of Assyria, Nineveh.

Jonah is the son of “Amittai.” “Amittai” means “true” or “faithful.” So, Jonah is the dove of truth and faithfulness. However, his actions prove he is not as his heritage notes. One cannot ignore that the period this account is set in one of chaos in Israel. Israel was always in some sort of crisis.

In II Kings 14:25 we are told that Jonah is from Gath-hepher, a city in Northern Israel, in the territory of Zebulun just a few miles north east of Nazareth.

Though the period of the writing of the book is uncertain,<sup>17</sup> his calling is possibly set either during the times of the kings of Israel around 874-750 B.C.E. during the reigns of Omri, Ahab, Joram, Jehu, Jeroboam II or Menahem. The Assyrian Empire was about to advance southward and would attack Israel in about twenty-five years and destroy the kingdom. Sennacherib, king of Assyria would lead this conquest, but be repelled as he and his troops approached Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup> After that time no activity took place in the northern nation of Israel. And since Jonah is mentioned in II Kings 14:25, the book of Jonah would have to have been written before II Kings was composed. But as Israel was destroyed, his mission would have to have been earlier.

2: The “wickedness of Nineveh” is not described here, nor is the reason for the intense interest in this city mentioned. It was the largest and most prosperous city at the time and the most powerful and influential. And Nineveh is indeed mentioned nineteen times in the Bible, with two of those in a quote of Jesus in Matthew 12:38-41 repeated in Luke 11:32 where he answers the scribes and Pharisees,

38: “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ 39: “But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation craves a sign; and *so* no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet; 40: for just as JONAH WAS IN THE STOMACH OF THE SEA MONSTER

---

<sup>17</sup> See comments on page 3 of the introduction, PP 1.

<sup>18</sup> See footnote 14

FOR THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.” 41: “The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, *something* greater than Jonah is here.”

However, the book of the prophet Nahum has a great deal to say about the evils of Nineveh. Writing around 700-625 B.C.E. he outlines the wickedness of the city, God’s disgust with it and its impending downfall that took place in 612 B.C.E.

Some of the wickedness in Nineveh is described by Nahum in 3:1-4 of his prophecy.

1: “Woe to the bloody city, completely full of lies *and* pillage; *Her* prey does not leave.  
2: The sound of the whip, The sound of the roar of the wheel, Galloping horses And bounding chariots! 3: Horsemen charging, Swords flashing, spears gleaming, Many killed, a mass of corpses, And there is no end to *the* dead bodies— They stumble over the dead bodies! 4: *All* because of the many sexual acts of the prostitute, The charming one, the mistress of sorceries, Who sells nations by her sexual acts, And families by her sorceries.”

So, Jonah is commissioned by God to, “Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and cry out against it.” One might understand Jonah’s reluctance to do so after reflecting on Nahum’s brief description of the mess the city is in. Jonah is not a courageous or brave man. And this might give us another insight as to us as we ourselves face some very threatening challenges. We also begin to see the harsh prejudice and hatred toward the “Gentiles” so often mentioned in the bible and in Jonah’s demeanor.

3:

3: “But Jonah got up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship that was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and boarded it to go with them to Tarshish away from the presence of the LORD.”

Jonah was according to II Kings 14:25, from the village of Gath-hepher, in the tribe of Zebulun, which is the present village of Meshed, to the north of Nazareth. This village is also mentioned in Joshua 19:13. It is about 70 miles from Joppa as the crow flies but more like 90 miles travel by road. How does one escape the presence of the Lord? This shows Jonah’s foolish desperation.



The area described as Jonah's home

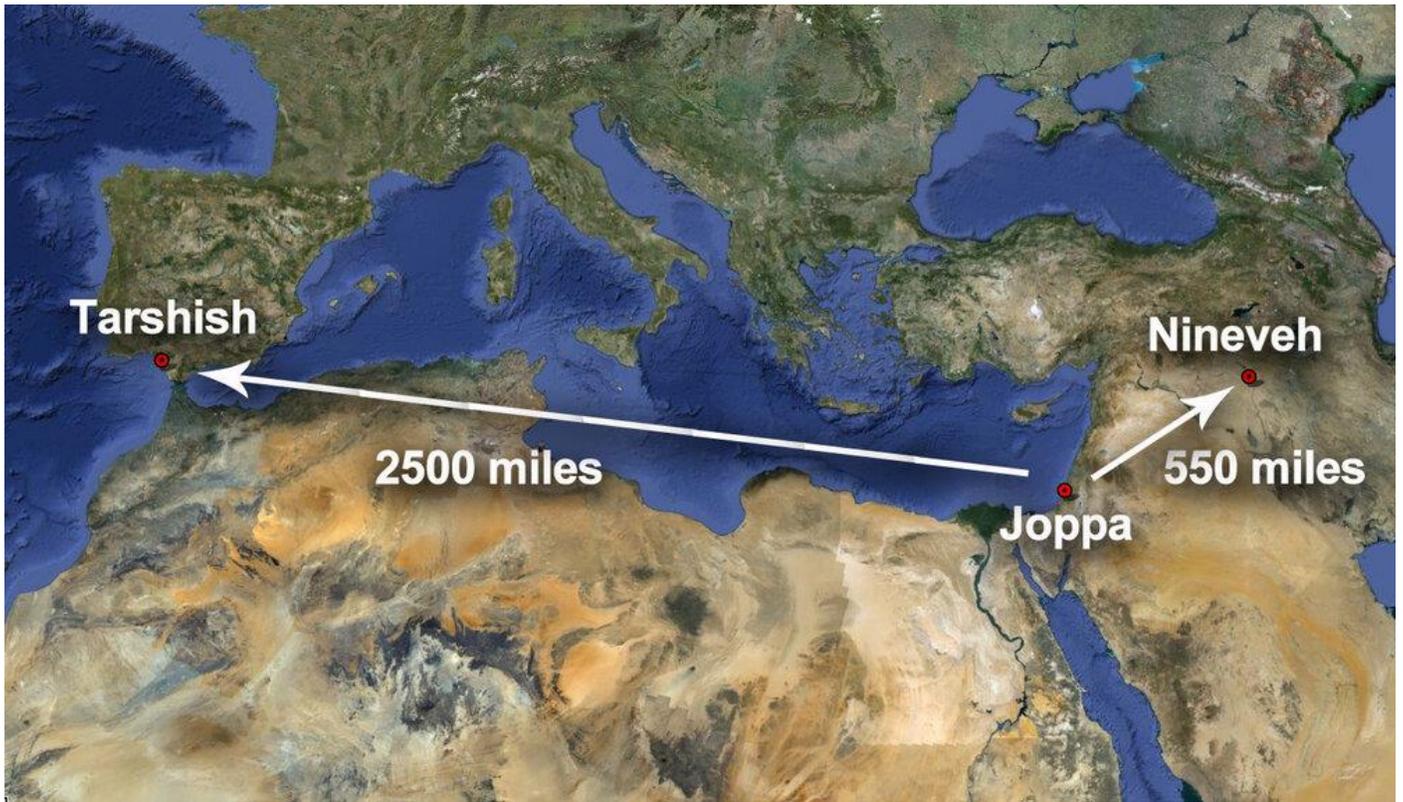
Joppa

Jonah does not want to do the Lord's bidding and later begs to be let out of it. In 4:2-3 we read,

2: "Then he prayed to the LORD and said, 'Please LORD, was this not what I said when I was still in my *own* country? Therefore in anticipation of *this* I fled to Tarshish, since I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in mercy, and One who relents of disaster. 3: 'So now, LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.'"

So, back to his attempt to flee.

"Tarshish" cannot be located with absolute certainty. It has been thought to exist anywhere in the Mediterranean including Tarsus (Josephus' idea which is a doubtful location as Jonah was heading away from that territory) as far as to a city in Spain, some 2,500 miles west of Israel.



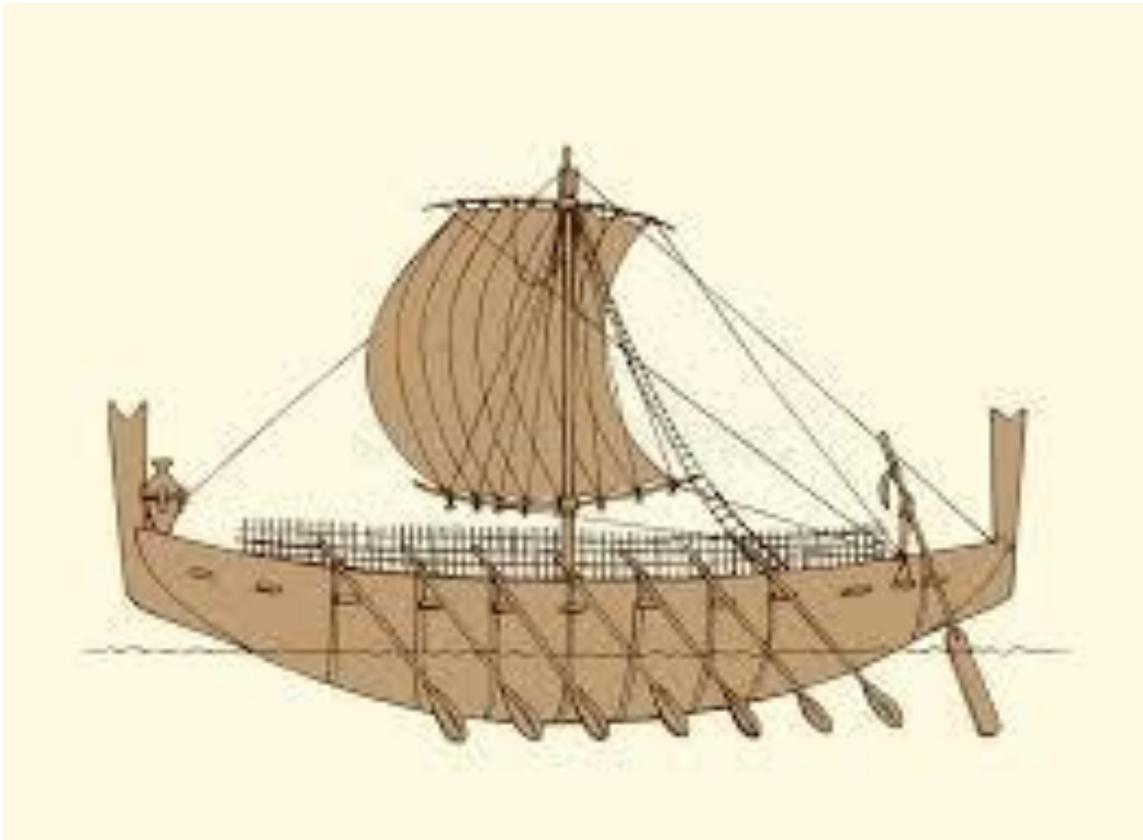
Google images: "Tarshish and Nineveh"

1:4-7,

4: "However, the LORD hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea, so that the ship was about to break up. 5: Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried out to his god, and they hurled the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten *it* for them. But Jonah had gone below into the stern of the ship, had lain down, and fallen sound asleep. 6: So the captain approached him and said, 'How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps *your* god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish.' 7: "And each man said to his mate, 'Come, let's cast lots so that we may find out on whose account this catastrophe *has struck* us.' "So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah."

4: So much for the attempt to flee from the Lord's presence. There were no passenger liners in those days, so anyone wishing to take a ship somewhere would find passage on cargo ship and rest somewhere below decks in an uncomfortable place with the cargo. These were sailing ships with oar locks. Once a storm approached, the sails would be lowered, battened down and cargo on deck secured as much as possible. The crew would take steps to protect both the ship and its cargo as well as people onboard. It was getting to be a nasty windblown storm with the sea swelling up and waves crashing onto the deck.

Picture and reconstruction of Phoenician ships below.



[www.dreamstime.com](http://www.dreamstime.com)>Illustrations



Rafaela- Naji·Phoenicia - February 14, 2020

5: The sailors were from different places and the “gods” they cried out to were probably Baal, Astarte, Melquat, and other minor gods in the Phoenician culture. The Phoenicians were the major shipping peoples of ancient times. It was common in a bad storm to attempt to save the

ship when capsizing was imminent. It was loaded to capacity, and sometimes more, and rode low in the water. With the threat of capsizing, they would throw cargo overboard to lighten and thus raise the ship. As they were doing this and hanging on for dear life they cried out to their pagan gods for help and no help came.

While this is happening, Jonah, thinking he was safely away from the Lord, was asleep in the stern cargo hold.

6: The cry to various gods for help did no good in the raging storm. So, the captain of the ship woke Jonah up and asked him to pray to his God to rescue them. There is no indication that Jonah was inclined to do this as he was fleeing from his God.

7: The crew had only one last resort. They concluded that someone on board was the reason for this unusual and violent storm. So, they cast lots to see if this could be determined. The “casting of lots” is mentioned many times in the Bible. What they were and how this was done is never fully described. Some historical and archaeological evidence helps as some ancient discoveries have found these numerous pieces of material to be made of small colored stones, different lengths or types of wood or broken shards of pottery with symbols on them. It seems a collection of these would be placed in a jar, prayers made, and the jar shaken and then either poured out in front of a group of people and the key “lot” for the decision would fall in the direction of the chosen person or, each person would draw a lot from the jar.

Whatever method was used, Jonah became the “allotted” person.

1:8-10,

8: “Then they said to him, ‘Tell us, now! On whose account *has* this catastrophe *struck* us? What is your occupation, and where do you come from? What is your country, and from what people are you?’ 9: “So he said to them, ‘I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land.’ 10: Then the men became extremely afraid, and they said to him, ‘How could you do this?’ “For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.”

8: The questions reveal that they must find out why this is happening. Who is causing this disaster? Some indiscretion by someone on board? Why did the lot fall on you? Who are you? What do you have to do with this?

9-10: So, Jonah tells them and that he is attempting to flee from the Lord. This strikes fear into them. They know about the power of the God the Israelites worship. They also know that Jonah’s presence on board is causing the terrible storm (verse 12).

1:11-17,

11: “So they said to him, ‘What should we do to you so that the sea will become calm for

us?’—for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy.” 12: “And he said to them, ‘Pick me up and hurl me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, because I know that on account of me this great storm *has come* upon you.’ 13: “However, the men rowed *desperately* to return to land, but they could not, because the sea was becoming *even* stormier against them. 14: Then they cried out to the LORD and said, ‘We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man’s life, and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, LORD, have done as You pleased.’” 15: “So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. 16: Then the men became extremely afraid of the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.” 17: “And the LORD designated a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish for three days and three nights.”

11-12: In answering the question of the crew as to what they should do Jonah’s answer is that they should throw him into the sea. This answer shows the extent of Jonah’s fear. He would rather perish in the sea than continue on in his life anymore as we see in 4:2-3. Yet, he did throw himself into the sea. The weak, cowardly man is a disgrace. Yet, God used him for great purposes though he despised the mission. There may be a lesson for us right there. Several perhaps.

13: But the men, more courageous than Jonah, and in a gallant effort to save both the ship, themselves, and Jonah, were commanded to man the oars and stroke back to the mainland. They gave it a valiant effort to be sure, but the storm was powerfully against them, and things were looking impossible. They made no headway. These heathen pagans are showing more mercy to the Israelite than the Israelite would ever show to them.

14-15: In a last desperate prayer, they cried out to Jonah’s God for mercy and acknowledging His power and will, cast Jonah into the sea.

16: Well, in spite of Jonah’s cowardice, the ship’s crew was strongly moved to acknowledge the Lord as supreme and offered a sacrifice and made “vows.” These vows would, in essence, be promises to place the Lord at the top of their religious recognitions and sacrifices believing Him to be supreme. Would they abandon their other gods? Unlikely, but they now took a back seat.

So even in Jonah’s worse moment, he was an instrument to bring the Word of the Lord to the people of paganism. The crew were probably quite open to telling this story once they landed and took a deep breath.

17: Being thrown into the sea would not solve Jonah’s situation as much as he would probably hope for. And now we come to a part of the narrative that causes us pause. Rightly so. Critics of those who cast doubt on this part of the tale or at least question it need to be silenced. It is a difficult tale to swallow (pardon the pun). We still stand in wonder at this.

The narrative is clear. God designated (appointed, prepared) a great fish to swallow Jonah. No

question there. The Hebrew word is “Dag”, meaning “fish.” There is no word for “whale” in the Bible no is one ever mentioned. This “fish” would not be a whale in the strictest terms as baleen whales eat microscopic organisms called “plankton” and krill, a tiny shrimp. Toothed whales will consume small fish, small octopi, and small crustaceans. It is impossible for any whale to swallow a human. No question there. The throats of all whales seldom get larger than a basketball and are normally the size of a softball. But the question is, of course, is this possible, and even if it were, could a man survive three days and three nights in the stomach of such a creature? We know this is impossible in any natural manner or means by any creature ever known - the adventure of Pinocchio, Geppetto and Jiminy the Cricket’s sojourn in the belly of Monstro the whale notwithstanding. So, this is something else.

So, we come to a double thought.<sup>19</sup> First, it is as it says, God prepared such a unique sea creature to swallow Jonah and he was able to survive because the Lord made it so. Nothing is impossible with God. On the other hand, Jonah’s disappearance from his home town to be never seen again<sup>20</sup> produced a story that was designed for the people of Israel to grasp the intent and message God has for them. Consider that the writing of the story took place some 200 or more years after the historical setting. There are hints that the latter could be possible. The beginning of chapter two gives us more insight.

The obvious question is, “Would Jesus quote this story if it were not a historical fact?” A good question. We will look at this later on.

---

<sup>19</sup> This is not the idea of a “double minded man unstable in all his ways” but an honest view at a challenging narrative.

<sup>20</sup> At the end of the book, there is no record of Jonah’s travels from Nineveh.

# THE BOOK OF JONAH

## CHAPTER TWO

2:1-10,

1: “Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish,

2: and he said,

“I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me.”

“I called for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice.”

3: “For You threw me into the deep,

Into the heart of the seas,

And the current flowed around me.

All Your breakers and waves passed over me.”

4: “So I said, ‘I have been cast out of Your sight.

Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.’

5: “Water encompassed me to the point of death.

The deep flowed around me, Seaweed was wrapped around my head.

6: “I descended to the base of the mountains.

The earth *with* its bars *was* around me forever,

But You have brought up my life from the pit, LORD my God.

7: “While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD,

And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple.

8: “Those who are followers of worthless idols

Abandon their faithfulness,

9: But I will sacrifice to You

With a voice of thanksgiving.

That which I have vowed I will pay.

Salvation is from the LORD.”

10: Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.”

Comment: Chapter two is in Hebrew poetry with a prose prologue and an epilogue.<sup>21</sup> It is actually a highly structured poem. Hebrew poetry always indicates to the reader that there is an important message within the poem, and that the content or context of the poem itself is not as important as the message it contains. Much like a parable. The parable is a vehicle containing the message or point within. This is a popular and common way the Biblical writers used to convey the divine message they are communicating. Jonah himself did not write this as far as we can tell and so it is up to us to ascertain what message God is conveying to the readers through this story. The verse division in the English translation is slightly different than the Hebrew order, and the translation approximate, but the format and message remain intact.

The actual poem itself is reflective of and sometimes a direct quote of many Psalms.<sup>22</sup>

This poem and the “great fish” account begin to indicate that there is something else besides the face of the story we are to get. But what is the message that is intended and we are to get?

1-2: First, let’s notice that we have a prologue in prose in verse one and an epilogue in prose in verse 10. Then we see the in poem a series of parallelisms. Let’s look at this.

Both phrases of strophes in verse two are in parallel construction saying the same thing in different ways. It displays the cry of a person in deep despair. Though circumstances are incredibly difficult, and hope seems to be lost, out of anguish the soul reaches out to God.

“Sheol” is the Hebrew word for the place of the dead, a place apart from God from which there is no return. To cry out from there and be heard by God shows God’s compassion and willingness to answer the prayer of the penitent soul.

One of the major points here is God’s determination to have His prophets bring truth and light to the Gentiles. From early on, the Israelites spurned this mission God had for His people and made Judaism exclusive, considering Gentiles little more than dogs. Yet, there is nothing in the Bible justifying this attitude. Quite the opposite. Many passages speak about God’s people being a “light to the Gentiles.”<sup>23</sup> But Israel failed in this commission.

Jonah’s attitude personifies both the attitude and fear Israelites came to have for Gentiles. They wouldn’t even cross into the land of the Gentiles but would go miles and miles around the Gentile controlled land to avoid “contamination.” Jesus went directly into this territory, ministered there much to the chagrin of His disciples and the amazement of the Samaritans

---

<sup>21</sup> This is the same format we find in the Book of Job.

<sup>22</sup> For verse 2, see for example Psalm 4:1, 18:4-6 (also for verse 5); For verse 2, Psalm 31:22, Psalm 40:2; 69:1-2; 30:3; 30:9; 55:2; for verses 5 and 6; Psalm 18:6 for verse 7; Psalm 31:6; 50:23; Psalm 116:17-18; 37:Psalm 39-40; and 68:20 for verses 8 and 9.

<sup>23</sup> Beginning with God’s repeated Word to Abraham “No longer shall you be named Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.” (Genesis 17:5; “And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” (22:18); there are many more. II Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49; Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; etc.

themselves.<sup>24</sup> Had the Israelites complied with the Lord's will for his people to be a light to the Gentiles, perhaps the impending disasters and destruction might not have happened. Jonah's mission success may illustrate that this could have been accomplished if God's people had the mind to obey him and heart for the lost over the centuries.

3: In verse three, we have a double parallelism. The first two strophes are in parallel order with the second two strophes. Then we have a parallelism between strophe one and strophe three of verse three and strophe two of verse three and verse four of verse three.

We see the message of God's great displeasure with Jonah's failure, and his attempt to disregard and avoid the Lord's word.

4: Verse four repeats the cry of verse two.

5-6: Phrase one of verse 5 and phrase one of verse 6 are in parallel construction saying the same thing in different ways and the second phrase of each verse does this also. Both verses (except for the final strophe in six) repeat verse three and are in parallel construction with it.

The final phrase in verse six expresses the realization that the Lord is his only hope and begins a new theme and introduces it for verses seven and eight. Remember, chapters and verses as such were not included in the texts until over a thousand years after the first century A.D.

The "pit" is parallel to "Sheol" in verse two. It is the grave or place of destruction and decay.

7: Reprises verse two. Again, a parallelism.

8-9: Jonah's capitulation is complete knowing that the pagan idolaters are without hope whereas Jonah acknowledges that only Yahweh can bring salvation to the lost. These two verses are a reverse parallelism where one presents one theme and the other a contrasting theme.

Verse nine closes with, "But I will sacrifice to You With a voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD." This is nearly a direct quote from Psalm 50:14 personalized,

"Offer God a sacrifice of thanksgiving And pay your vows to the Most High."

10: The Lord is satisfied He has received a sincere repentance from Jonah and that the mission will proceed. So, He commands the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land.

We are now presented with a growing list of images that may indicate a theme and message in this book for the people of Israel beyond the face portrait of the story. We will examine this possibility as we get further into the book.

As Jonah attempted to sail away from the Lord, he boarded a ship at Joppa heading west on the

---

<sup>24</sup> John, chapter 4, Acts 8 and 9 and especially Acts 15:9. The Jesus' story about the "good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25-37) must have caused some teeth grinding from those who heard it. But it fits right in with the point of this story.

Mediterranean Sea. It is likely then that the “great fish” deposited him on the north eastern shore of the sea as close to Nineveh as the sea would allow. It is doubtful it traveled over 20,000 miles to go west out of the Mediterranean around Africa and back up to the Persian Gulf. The distance to Nineveh from there by land would be over 500 miles and from the closest point on the Mediterranean over 400 miles.

# THE BOOK OF JONAH

## CHAPTER THREE

3:1-3,

1: “Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2: ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.’ 3: “So Jonah got up and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk.”

1-2: The word of the Lord came to Jonah, and he obeyed the Lord this time. He rose up from the sea shore and began his journey to Nineveh. What he was to do and say would be given to him after his arrival.

3: We are not told how he traveled the several hundred miles to get there. The “three days walk” is not how long it took him to get there. This would be impossible for a 400-mile journey on foot. Even if the narrative is deliberately distorted (as some narratives are) to indicate to the reader look within the narrative to glean the point and message of the text, the “three days walk” probably relates to the “exceedingly large city” and the time it would take to explore it and walk around it. The city walls were about twelve miles in circumference around the city. Jonah’s three-day walk was no doubt thought of as within and around the walled area.

Nineveh was the largest and most powerful city in the world at that time. However, the full extent of the city beyond the walls was around fifteen to twenty miles long on the northeast side of the Tigris river, and about fifty to sixty miles in circumference. Agriculture would be the main reason the city limits extended lengthways along the river.

Also, we have the past tense “was”, “Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city...” suggesting that the narrator of the story is looking back on the past glory of a city that is now less so in his day.

4:

4: “Then Jonah began to go through the city one day’s walk; and he cried out and said, ‘Forty more days, and Nineveh will be overthrown.’”

4: The “one day’s walk” would likely be through the center length of the city. The walled city of Nineveh was close to four miles in length and about a mile and a half wide - within the walls.

Unlike the other Old Testament prophets whose books are the words and messages from God to

his people for nearly the entire length of their book, Jonah’s entire message consists of just eight words in the English translation (five in the Hebrew) “forty more days, and Nineveh will be overthrown.” “Forty more days” is an indeterminate time. The number forty, as discussed many time before, has a symbolic meaning understood as, “as long as it takes to complete.” Then we have the challenge of how did Jonah know the language of the Ninevites? The Assyrians spoke Akkadian, and that language became extinct around 800 B.C. and began to be replaced by an Assyrian Aramaic. But did Jonah speak either of these tongues? Hebrew and Akkadian are not compatible nor is Assyrian Aramaic and Hebrew. But, in Northern Israel there may have been knowledge of this language. There was communication between the nations. And translators did exist. So, we have another mystery. Below we have a photo of the ruins taken in 2019.<sup>25</sup> Much of the city had been built over before archaeological excavations began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued sporadically into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The main palace and political center were preserved. But due to extensive damage from Muslims, wars and looting, the city has not been fully excavated.



View of Nineveh 2019

---

<sup>25</sup> Wikipedia online.

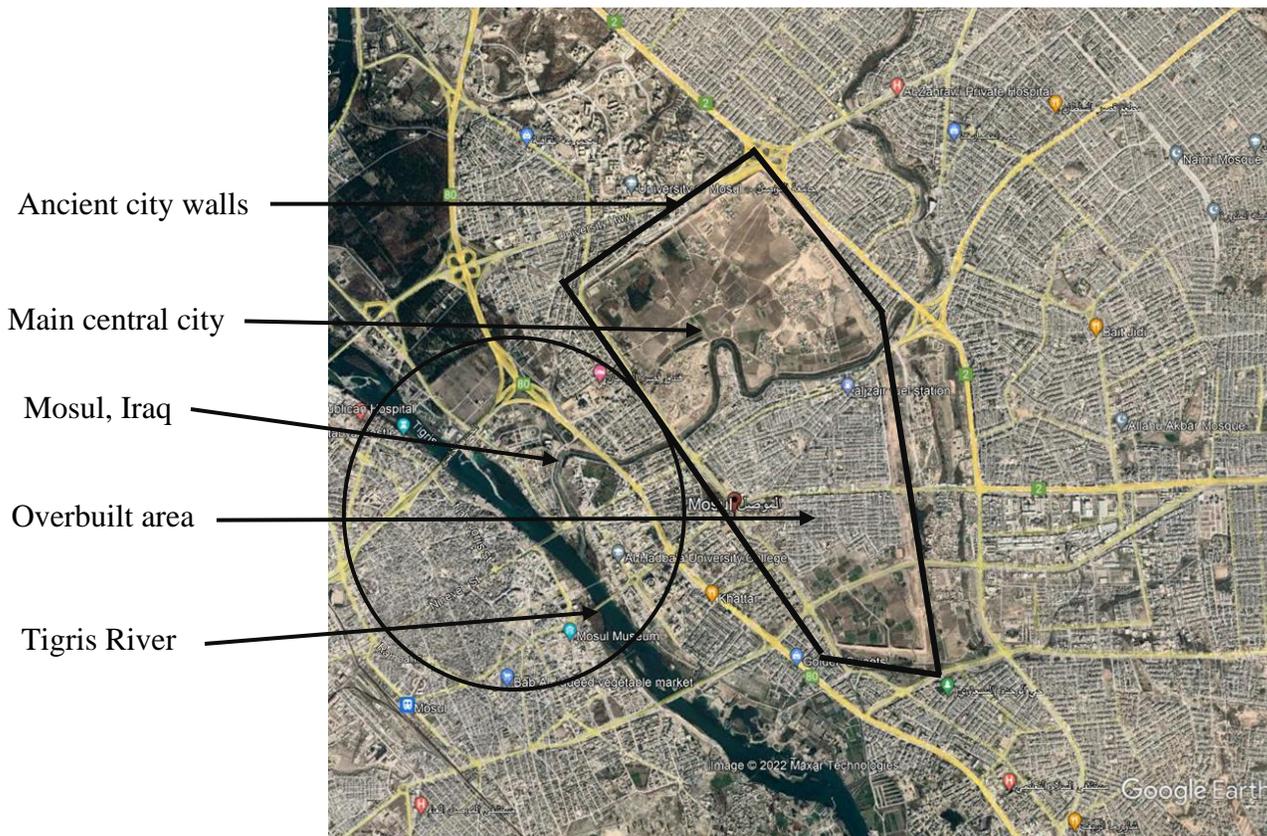


Photo copied from Google Earth Pro

5: “Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.”

5: “People” is “men” and “God” is “Elohim.” This shows the typical patriarchal society of the mid-east and so their families also went with the faith of the patriarch as was typical in those days. Thus, the translation “people.” Though they were moved to faith, it was to “Elohim” not “Yahweh.” What this means is that they came to believe in the Biblical Creator as the true God. But there was no established relationship of consequence between the people of Nineveh and the Lord. But, how did they know that Jonah was a true prophet of God or that his proclamation was really from God? Most would consider him a strange person and ignored him, especially people like the Ninevites. Still, their response is repentance.

3:6-10,

6: “When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he got up from his throne, removed his robe from himself, covered *himself* with sackcloth, and sat on the dust. 7: And he issued a proclamation, and it said, ‘In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: No person, animal, herd, or flock is to taste anything. They are not to eat, or drink water. 8: But *every* person and animal must be covered with sackcloth; and *people* are to call on God vehemently, and they are to turn, each one from his evil way, and from the

violence which is in their hands. 9: Who knows, God may turn and relent, and turn from His burning anger so that we will not perish.’ 10: “When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their evil way, then God relented of the disaster which He had declared He would bring on them. So He did not do *it*.”

6-8: “The king of Nineveh” is not named. The difficulty with these two verses is that during one period there were minor rulers in Nineveh but not a “king.” There was no “throne” in Nineveh. In fact, other than this verse, there is no mention of a “king of Nineveh” anywhere else in history. Sennacherib made Nineveh the capital city of Assyria in around 700 B.C.E. a hundred years after the period of Jonah’s visit. In around 800 B.C. when this story is set, several Assyrian vassals, and city governors are involved, but no king of Nineveh.<sup>26</sup> As noted in the introduction, there is no Assyrian or Ninevite record or annal describing the events told in the book of Jonah even though many proclamations were made and recorded during that period.

Verses 7-8 has the king of Nineveh declaring a fast by both people and all animals (Hebrew “behemah” or “cattle” and may include larger livestock such as horses, mules and camels. But normally only those animals used for food would be included in this mandate and goats and sheep might also be among the animals that are to wear the mourning clothes of sackcloth. The families are directed to call upon Elohim mightily (or vigorously) and turn from their evil conduct.

9: This is a significant point, “Who knows” what God will do? For me, this is a key statement because we are seeing the picture of the word of God being proclaimed to Gentile pagans. I think this is the point of the book and I will discuss this more later on.

The six brief verses telling of this event are minimal compared to the verses describing the attitude and prejudice Jonah displays and which God condemns.

10: Due to the response of the citizens of Nineveh, the Lord did not bring destruction upon Nineveh. It is important to note that God’s mercy or forgiveness is not the same as salvation.

---

<sup>26</sup> See the introduction pages 8-10.

# THE BOOK OF JONAH

## CHAPTER FOUR

4:1-3,

1: “But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry. 2: Then he prayed to the LORD and said, “Please LORD, was this not what I said when I was still in my *own* country? Therefore in anticipation *of this* I fled to Tarshish, since I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in mercy, and One who relents of disaster. 3: “So now, LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.”

1: In 3:4, Noah proclaimed to the wicked and troubled city that it would be “overthrown” in “forty days.” He was not told, nor did he proclaim that if they repented would they be spared. “Greatly displeased” is an understatement of Jonah’s feelings over this. The Hebrew uses the strongest word possible to describe this. “Infuriated” is better, and “angry” is actually “to burn with fury.” He wanted to see Nineveh destroyed. But after forty days, nothing changed. After all he had been put through, he was not amused. God should be showing goodness only to Israel not giving mercy to Israel’s enemies. Yet Israel was not humble and repentant before the Lord. They were in the throes of idolatry and immorality. Jehoash and Jeroboam II were the kings in Israel during this period and we read of their rule,

“In the thirty-seventh year of Joash king of Judah, Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz became king over Israel in Samaria, *and he reigned* for sixteen years. He did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not turn away from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, into which he misled Israel; *rather*, he walked in them.” II Kings 13:10-11

“In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel became king in Samaria *and reigned* for forty-one years. He did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not abandon all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, into which he misled Israel.” II Kings 14:23-24

Most of the Kings of Israel were reprobates. Less than a hundred years after the period where the ministry of Jonah is set, Israel is conquered and destroyed by Assyria. Still, there is this note in II Kings 14:26-27 in spite of Jeroboam’s ungodliness,

26: “For the LORD saw the misery of Israel, *which was* very bitter; for there was neither bond nor free *spared*, nor was there any helper for Israel. 27: Yet the LORD did not say that He would wipe out the name of Israel from under heaven, but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.”

In verse 25, just prior to this statement we have this,

“He (Jeroboam II) restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher.”

This is a fascinating note in that Jonah either spoke this to the king prior to or after his mission to Assyria. This is the only mention of Jonah outside of the book in the Old Testament. At the end of the book, he is sitting outside the city on the ground in anger. Nothing is said about a return home to Israel. So, any correspondence with Jeroboam II probably took place before his journey.

2-3: Jonah’s prayer was a criticism of God as he sensed that God would use him to proclaim a destruction to the city but then relent and show mercy. Jonah did not wish God to do that, but to follow through and destroy the city. His prayer boiled down to, “Not thy will but mine be done,” typical of so many of our own prayers. He never anticipated that the city would repent. Jonah thought that his life would end when he was thrown into the sea. Now, he wishes it had. And after this debacle (in his mind), he begs the Lord to take his life, because for him, death is better than life if this is what his life is about.

This shows the entrenched prejudice the Jews had against those outside of their faith. Early on, they had made their religion an exclusive “club” that only they could be a part of. They had the true Creator God in their midst. Their temple and all the traditions and God’s own direction to them became distorted as they shunned any outsiders from their clique. This of course was not what God desired at all. But their attitude, engrained in them by their religious teachers, dismissed the true intention of God for their existence in the first place.

In 3:9 we saw the ruler of Nineveh having more insight and knowledge than did Jonah when he said, “Who knows, God may turn and relent, and turn from His burning anger so that we will not perish.”<sup>27</sup> The Jewish readers of this story would have the same attitude as Jonah as they (and often we) think that God should be more merciful to us than to our enemies – and His.

But they never learned the lesson that God cares about all mankind and that His people were to be a “light to the Gentiles.” Nearly a thousand-years later Jesus was scorned when He taught,

“But love your enemies and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *people*. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” Luke 6:35-36

For us as readers, here is the lesson. Regardless of our view of the book’s authenticity, the

---

<sup>27</sup> Note the first seven words of Joel 2:14 (In the English). The Hebrew is identical to Jonah 3:9 (The first four words in the Hebrew).

Joel 2:14: מי יודע ישוב ונחם

Jonah 3:9: מי־יודע ישוב ונחם

message is quite clear. Thus, God’s question in verse 4 is quite appropriate.

4:4,

4: “But the LORD said, ‘Do you have a good reason to be angry?’”

4: So, God ignores Jonah’s request to die and, instead, asks a very probing question. There may be times when we wish or hope that God will pour out His wrath upon those we despise. In light of this book so far, and God’s question applied to us, we may recognize that there is a lack of God’s perspective in our own heart and mind. We have a ways to go. Jonah is angry without cause. His anger has no foundation or merit. So, he is unable to answer God’s question.

Applied to ourselves, do we have reason to be angry when our hopes for the destruction of the wicked go unanswered? And to make matters worse, God offers mercy to them while we suffer under their wickedness. Is this fair? This is quite the challenging question.

4:5-6,

5: “Then Jonah left the city and sat down east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade, until he could see what would happen in the city. 6: So the LORD God designated a plant, and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head, to relieve him of his discomfort. And Jonah was overjoyed about the plant.”

5: Unable to give a reason for his anger, Jonah leaves the city. It seems he traveled west to east through the city proclaiming the message. He appears to be still attempting to escape the Lord. He builds some sort of inadequate shade in the hot desert sun to try and protect himself and then he waits to see what happens to the city, perhaps in hope that there would be a divine act of retribution and the destruction of the city after all.

Did he wait the entire “forty days” (an indeterminate period) to see if the city went up in some sort of explosion? Perhaps, as Jonah was a stubborn, self-centered person who had to have proof that God’s mercy was in force. But his waiting was in vain.<sup>28</sup>

6: Here, and only once in the book we have the designation “LORD God” (Yahweh Elohim). This is God’s full name and title and underscores that there is no mistake as to who this divine being is. He is the creator of the universe and the God of the Hebrew people. What He says and does in this book demands that His authority in this matter be given full respect and obedience.

The “plant” the LORD God “designated” to grow into a shade is a “qîyqâyôn” in the Hebrew, and here in chapter four is the only place this word is found in the Bible. Its identification is unknown and various terms like “gourd,” “vine plant,” “leafy plant” or “bush” are found in the translations of this word. The word “designated” is the same word used to describe God

---

<sup>28</sup> On my web site: [www.bibleclassroom.org](http://www.bibleclassroom.org) under “Controversial Topics there is a dissertation entitled, “Self-Centeredness - The Problem With Everything.” It sums up the condition of the human race, the problem of evil and why.

“designating” the great fish in 1:17. It is used four times in the book. Again, this means to “appoint” or “prepare.” Here, God didn’t plant a seed in the soil to grow but created another item that miraculously grew rapidly as a plant of some undetermined specie to give shade to Jonah. The plant becomes an object lesson for Jonah. God shows mercy to Jonah in the midst of his suffering.

Jonah “was overjoyed about the plant.” Mercy was shown to him in his discomfort, distress and rebellion and so he was extremely joyous over this. What is good for Jonah is good. What is good for those he hates, is not good. His joy was not in the Lord, but in that which benefits himself. He rejoiced about the plant, not the Lord’s mercy. So....

4:7-9,

7: “But God designated a worm when dawn came the next day, and it attacked the plant and it withered. 8: And when the sun came up God designated a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah’s head so that he became faint, and he begged with *all* his soul to die, saying, ‘Death is better to me than life!’ 9: “But God said to Jonah, ‘Do you have a good reason to be angry about the plant?’” “And he said, ‘I have good reason to be angry, *even* to the point of death!’”

7-8: In providing the plant, God had shown mercy to Jonah. But Jonah did not acknowledge or thank the Lord for the mercy received. To instill another lesson about this, God “designated” (same word again) a worm to wither the plant and remove the shade from him. Then God “designated” a “scorching east wind” to blow Jonah’s way. The heat became unbearable.

Unprotected, Jonah began to suffer under the heat of the wind and the sun and began to wither himself. But he sought not to humble himself before God but to become angry again and then begged to die. He would not or could not grasp the lesson about God’s mercy for any and all who would turn to Him. Nor would he turn to God himself with any faith in what God was trying to teach him (and the readers.) He did not get it. Herein lies the condition of the human heart.

9: God asks the same question He asked in verse 4, but this time about the plant. “Do you have a good reason to be angry about the plant?” Here the plant is a picture of God’s mercy for Nineveh, and Jonah loves that but hates when it is taken away. God is picturing to Jonah what it would be like if He did to Nineveh what Jonah wished. “How do you like it?” so to speak.

Douglas Stuart notes, “By reducing the question to the particular issue of the gourd, God focused the question in a way that would cause Jonah to condemn himself by his own words. Jonah did just that.”<sup>29</sup> Jonah’s response is, “I have good reason to be angry, *even* to the point of death!”

---

<sup>29</sup>Word Biblical Commentary, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987, Hosea-Jonah, Volume 31, pg. 506

The plant was extremely important to Jonah because it saved his life. He treasured it. But now that it withered away and died, he is furious. What he doesn't realize is that the worm is an image of Jonah himself and what he hoped for. And he hated it. He just wishes to die. Thus, he condemns himself without acknowledging that God will have mercy on whomever He pleases.

There is ample evidence in both testaments of this. For example, Psalm 103:8-19 reads,

8: "The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in mercy. 9: He will not always contend *with us*, Nor will He keep *His anger* forever. 10: He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our guilty deeds. 11: For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him. 12: As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our wrongdoings from us. 13: Just as a father has compassion on *his* children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. 14: For He Himself knows our form; He is mindful that we are *nothing but* dust. 15: As for man, his days are like grass; Like a flower of the field, so he flourishes. 16: When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, And its place no longer knows about it. 17: But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting for those who fear Him, And His justice to the children's children, 18: To those who keep His covenant And remember His precepts, *so as* to do them. 19: The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all."

Joel 2:12-14 reads,

12: "Yet even now," declares the LORD, "Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping, and mourning; 13: And tear your heart and not *merely* your garments." Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in mercy And relenting of catastrophe. 14: Who knows, He might turn and relent, And leave a blessing behind Him, *Resulting in* a grain offering and a drink offering For the LORD your God."

Paul writes to Timothy,

1: "First of all, then, I urge that requests, prayers, intercession, *and* thanksgiving be made in behalf of all people, 2: for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. 3: This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4: who wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." I Timothy 2:1-4

And II Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance."

4: 10-11:

10: “Then the LORD said, ‘You had compassion on the plant, for which you did not work and *which* you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. 11: Should I not also have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 people, who do not know *the difference* between their right hand and their left, *as well as* many animals?’”

10-11: If striking down the plant is a tragedy in Jonah’s eyes, then how can striking down Nineveh be a good thing? If having mercy on Jonah is good, then why is having mercy on the people of Nineveh a tragedy?

Nineveh has a great population who are lost. Do they not have a greater value than a plant? Do not their animals?

The attitude of Jonah displays the attitude of the Jews in general. None of that is supported by God’s own Word. In fact, it stands in direct contradiction to what He has desired His people to do for the nations, that is display His mercy and glory to them.

Jesus said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the Law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these *are the things* you should have done without neglecting the others.” Matthew 23:23.

The book ends abruptly at this point. There is no ending to Jonah’s journey or any further history of the prophet or the subsequent accomplishments in either Nineveh or in the life of the prophet. He just vanishes from the pages of Scripture.

I think this is deliberate so that the reader will be confronted with the message and challenge of this narrative and God’s final words to Jonah. This is why this story is told.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### My thoughts and opinions

#### I. Is the prophet a real person in history?

There is sufficient evidence to believe that this prophet was a real person living in Israel about around 800 B.C.E. Little is known of him however except that he came from Gath-hepher, a town north of Nazareth in the territory of Zebulun. This is noted in II Kings 14:25. We have a book titled with his name. Then we have Jesus quoting from the story both about Nineveh repenting due to Jonah's preaching<sup>30</sup> as well as the sign of Jonah of Jesus' authority and authenticity being three days in the earth as Jonah was inside the great fish.<sup>31</sup>

Otherwise, there is no other reference to Jonah in the Bible. The only other thing known is that he personifies the attitude of most of the Jews of his day, (and the past and future) toward the Gentile nations. If he was a real person, then he was an insignificant prophet at the least.

Then, some may think Jonah is fictional, but his journey is very important because within the journey of "Jonah" is an important message from God to His people. In fact, the story is far more important than Jonah himself due to its important message to its readers. There are credible arguments for the fictitiousness of Jonah and the story. Let's remember the question, "Do biblical writers ever use fictional images or stories to convey God's message? The answer is "yes" very frequently. Jesus' parables, Jotham's fable in judges eleven, the Book of revelation, and the many metaphors and similes used throughout the Bible such as Jesus' statements such as "I am the vine", "I am the door" and him described by Peter as a "living stone", not to mention images like "The mountains and the hills will break into shouts of joy before you, And all the trees of the field will clap *their* hands." (Isaiah 55:12) There are hundreds of these.<sup>32</sup>

So, to argue that Jonah is fictional can be supported by some of the unique oddities of the narrative. Jonah's name (meaning "dove") only used in this book in the Bible and nowhere else. His father "Amittai" (possibly meaning "truth.") is only used once in the Bible as Jonah's father's name and never again. Jonah has no background or historical life outside of this story and the comment in II Kings 14:25.

Jonah himself is characterized as a bitter, rebellious, fearful, hardhearted, miserable, and angry person. No other prophet is described in these kinds of terms. This is an indication that Jonah personifies the attitude of the Jews in Israel and Judah and that

---

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 12:41, Luke 11:30-32.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew 12:39-40.

<sup>32</sup> See the introduction, pages 1-3.

requires confrontation by God Himself.

Then, we have the “designated” productions of God in the story that are unknown to history and science including “the great fish”, the “plant”, “the worm that attacked the plant”, and a “scorching east wind.”

Further, we have oddities such as the storm rising up and then quelling when Jonah is thrown overboard from the ship he was on in his attempt to escape from God. Then living three days and nights inside the fish, the great fish “vomiting” Jonah onto dry land and then Jonah traveling some 400 miles to Nineveh somehow. That is not described. Then the abrupt end of the story with a question addressed to Jonah by God but obviously intended for the reader to contemplate as the theme of the book is grasped.

## II. Is the story told in the book bearing his name a true historical event?

This is the debated issue. For me it does not matter as long as the point and message of the book is grasped and that our hearts are taught and changed as God would have them be.

But as to the question about the historicity of the account, there are many indications that it is a created narrative based on a minor prophetic personage to teach a vital lesson. These include the fact that the book is a narration about Jonah and not composed by Jonah. In the story, Jonah is seen in a very negative way, and it is unlikely anyone would have written this about himself. His entire message is eight words, five in the Hebrew text.

In all the annals of Assyria, or in any other historical record, there was never a “king” of Nineveh existing at the time of Jonah’s visit. There is also no record of Jonah’s proclamation within Nineveh and repentance of the city outside of the book itself, (though many “proclamations were recorded before, during and after that time), and no record or knowledge of any impact by the work of Jonah in the city – and in fact Assyria was continually conquering and existing in the same manner for centuries without any noted change except in the political arena.

My opinion is that the narrative is created to underscore an important message the Israelites have ignored for centuries. It seems Jonah could have been a real person, but actually had little or no impact as a prophet. If a real person, he may actually have had a very negative attitude, if not a hatred for foreigners, especially Assyria. This could have led to this story and God used his characteristics to personify Israel and the Jews in this story form to teach them His concern and compassion for the lost Gentile nations.

### III. What kind of literature are we dealing with here in this book?

In thinking this through and with the message the book is commanding to the readers (as discussed in the next section), it is my opinion that we are dealing with a satire in its purist form.

The Encyclopedia Britannica on line defines it this way,

“**satire**, artistic form, chiefly literary and dramatic, in which human or individual vices, follies, abuses, or shortcomings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, parody, caricature, or other methods, sometimes with an intent to inspire social reform.”

<https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/satire> says this,

“*Satire* is a way of making fun of people by using silly or exaggerated language. Politicians are easy targets for satire, especially when they're acting self-righteous or hypocritical. Even though the ridiculous language of *satire* isn't intended to be taken seriously, well-made satire can use mockery to get at more serious truths.”

I believe this fits the Book of Jonah perfectly. Another example of satire in the Bible would be Jotham’s sermon to the elders of Shechem as recorded in Judges 9:6-20, reproduced below,

6: “All the leaders of Shechem and all Beth-millo assembled together, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the memorial stone which was in Shechem. 7: Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim, and raised his voice and called out. And he said to them, ‘Listen to me, you leaders of Shechem, that God may listen to you. 8: ‘Once the trees went to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, ‘Reign over us!’ 9: ‘But the olive tree said to them, ‘Shall I give up my fatness with which God and mankind are honored, and go to wave over the trees?’ 10: ‘Then the trees said to the fig tree, ‘You, come, reign over us!’ 11: ‘But the fig tree said to them, ‘Shall I give up my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to wave over the trees?’ 12: ‘Then the trees said to the vine, ‘You, come, reign over us!’ 13: But the vine said to them, ‘Shall I give up my new wine, which cheers God and mankind, and go to wave over the trees?’ 14: ‘Then all the trees said to the bramble, ‘You, come, reign over us!’ 15: “And the bramble said to the trees, ‘If you really are anointing me as king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, may fire come out of the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon.’ 16: ‘Now then, if you have acted with honesty and integrity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have dealt with him as he deserved— 17: for my father fought for you, and risked his life and saved you from the hand of Midian; 18: but *in fact* you have risen against my father’s house today and have

killed his sons, seventy men, on one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his female slave, king over the leaders of Shechem, because he is your relative— 19: so if you have acted with honesty and integrity toward Jerubbaal and his house this day, be joyful about Abimelech, and may he also be joyful about you. 20: But if not, may fire come out of Abimelech and consume the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo; and may fire come out of the leaders of Shechem and from Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech.”

Dr. Leland Ryken writes,

“The Book of Jonah is satire in narrative form. While most of the satire in the Bible is serious, the Book of Jonah is a masterpiece of humor in the Bible, being the story of a pouting prophet whose career is a veritable handbook on how not to be a prophet. Jonah embodies the nationalistic, ethnocentric zeal that views God as the exclusive property of the Jews.”<sup>33</sup>

In I Kings 18:24-27 Elijah uses satire in mocking Baal. There are numerous used of satire in the Bible to mock prominent personalities for the purpose of teaching the people that a new perspective needs to be taken about what is happening.

#### IV. What is the point and message of the book?

Jonah personifies the attitude and prejudice of Israel toward the Gentile nations. His story reflects the opposite desire of God had for His people who were commissioned to bring God’s word of salvation to the world. They resisted doing so and even excluded the nations from God as much as they could and begrudgingly allowed some to become a part of the community of believers as long as they submitted to the law, were circumcised and followed all the traditions and instructions of the Jewish teachers.

Then, And only then could they sit at the back of the synagogue or in the outer court of the temple. They were “second class citizens” and called “God fearers”<sup>34</sup> not true of the family. Most Jews and Israelites called them “dogs” and saw them as excluded from the things of God. They were unclean, unrighteous and to be shunned. Yet there is not a word to this effect in all the Bible. It became the teaching of men, not that of God. What’s new?

God made it clear from the beginning with Abraham, the patriarch of the people that his descendants were to be.

“And I will make you into a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your

---

<sup>33</sup> Dr. Leland Ryken, “Satire in the Bible” online.

<sup>34</sup> Acts 13:43; 17:4; 17:17

name great; And *you shall* be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” Genesis 12:2-3

“The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.” Genesis 18:17-19

And much later in Isaiah we read,

“He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the protected ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations, so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’”  
Isaiah 49:6-7

“I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison.” Isaiah 42:6-7

But even with these mandates, the fulfillment of them was never accomplished until Jesus renewed them with His disciples who, though having to go through a controversial period about this, finally began to get the job done. But this mandate was recognized even when Jesus was born. We see in Luke 2:25-32,

25: “And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26: And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. 27: And he came by the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, 28: then he took Him in his arms, and blessed God, and said, 29: ‘Now, Lord, You are letting Your bond-servant depart in peace, According to Your word; 30: For my eyes have seen Your salvation, 31: Which You have prepared in the presence of all the peoples: 32: A light for revelation for the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel.’”

At the beginning of Jesus ministry Matthew writes,

12: “Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; 13: and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14: *This happened* so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet would be fulfilled: 15: “THE LAND

OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES— 16: THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED.” 17: From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” 4:12-17

In Antioch of Pisidia, Acts 13 records Paul and Barnabas preaching in the city to the Jews who repudiated them and so,

46: “Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first. Since you repudiate it and consider yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47: ‘For so the Lord has commanded us, ‘I HAVE APPOINTED YOU AS A LIGHT TO THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.’ 48: “When the Gentiles heard this, they *began* rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and all who had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49: And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.”

This was before the Jerusalem conference recorded in Acts, chapter 15 where the issue of including the Gentiles in God’s plan of salvation was hotly debated because the objectors insisted they must be circumcised and keep the law. But James, the head of the church in those days, made the decision that indeed it was God’s plan to include the Gentiles and that demanding circumcision and Law keeping was not required and so he overrode the objections concluding,

“Therefore, it is my judgment that we do not cause trouble for those from the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols, from *acts of* sexual immorality, from what has been strangled, and from blood.”<sup>35</sup> Acts 15:19-20

There are more than a hundred passages in the New Testament testifying that the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus is open to all the world, Jew and Gentile alike. It is upon us to be available to speak this message of good news to all who wish to hear about it.

I Peter 3:15,

“...but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a

---

<sup>35</sup> This request was to keep the new Gentiles from causing offense to their new Jewish brothers and thus causing even more hostility over this issue.

defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, but with gentleness and respect...”

II Timothy 2:24-26,

24: “The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, skillful in teaching, patient when wronged, 25: with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26: and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”

II Timothy 4:1-4,

1: “I solemnly exhort *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2: preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; correct, rebuke, *and* exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3: For *the* time will come when they will not tolerate sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires, 4: and they will turn their ears away from the truth and will turn aside to myths.”

Matthew 28:18-20,

18: “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. 19: Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20: teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.””

The message of the book of Jonah is to those who opposed the very Word of God in this regard and though it was written for this purpose the actual message of the book, like Jonah’s mission had no effect. It took the brutal torture and death of God’s own Son, and a resurrection from the dead to begin to convince Israel of their intended mission.

As the king of Nineveh said, “Who knows, God may turn and relent, and turn from His burning anger so that we will not perish.” We do not know what God will do with the message of salvation we share. We sow the seed, speak the truth in love, be a light to those lost in darkness, and from there it is up to God. (Matthew 13)

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY AND CREDITS**

Scripture passages reproduced in this study are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted. The NASB, Zondervan Corporation, 1999, The Lockman Foundation. (Note: The asterisk normally indicating the historical present tense has been eliminated to avoid confusion in terms of footnotes).

The New American Standard Bible. The NASB, Zondervan Corporation, 1999, The Lockman Foundation, notes on Jonah by Marvin R. Wilson, John H. Stek.

Word Biblical Commentary, volume 31 – Douglas Stuart, Jonah, Word Books 1987

The Interpreter's Bible – Volume 6, Abingdon Press, 1956, Page 871 James D. Smart, the Book of Jonah.

E-sword.net:

“Smith's Bible Dictionary”

“Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary”

"Albert Barnes notes on the Bible"

"Adam Clark's Commentary on the Bible";

"Vincent's Word Studies".

E-sword maps

Dr. Leland Ryken, “Satire in the Bible” online.

The Encyclopedia Britannica on line

<https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/satire>

Google Earth Pro

Google images: “Tarshish and Nineveh”

[www.dreamstime.com>Illustrations](http://www.dreamstime.com/illustrations)

[Rafaela Naji·Phoenicia](#) · February 14, 2020

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Nineveh-ancient-city-Iraq>

All Things Assyrian; Saving Ancient Nineveh by Dan McLerran

<http://www.popular-archaeology.com>

Bible Odyssey.org – Shalmaneser.

Paul J. N. Lawrence;

[https://legacy.tyndalehouse.com/tynbul/Library/TynBull\\_1986\\_37\\_06\\_Lawrence\\_AssyrianNobles\\_Jonah.pdf](https://legacy.tyndalehouse.com/tynbul/Library/TynBull_1986_37_06_Lawrence_AssyrianNobles_Jonah.pdf)

Wikipedia under: Shalmaneser IV.

<https://www.worldhistory.org/assyria/>

Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, of the Israel Bible Center e-mail article

Our Bible study group: Michael Stewart, Matthew DeArcos, Ricky Avalos, Karen Loscavio, Chuck Marvin, Diane Marvin, Donna Stewart, Reggie Harrison and Jane Harrison.