

Jonah

The Authorship and Dating

Internal evidence claims Jonah the Son of Amittai as the book's author (1:1). The detail and information found in the letter further support this claim. Also, Jesus noted Jonah as a prophet no less than two times (Matt 12:40; 16:4). Concerning the book's dating 2 Kings 14:25 indicates that Jonah ministered during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.). Keeping in mind that although Assyria (Jonah's audience) invaded Israel in 721 B.C., the book makes no allusion toward Israel's subjugation to Assyria at this time. With this in mind we are compelled to date Jonah before 721 B.C. While some antisupernaturalist scholars date the book much later,¹ I conclude, in keeping with the internal evidence, the testimony of 2 Kings as well as Jesus that Jonah was written in the 8th century B.C. by Jonah the Son of Amittai.

The Recipients

Although the prophet addressed Nineveh, the storyline is for the Hebrew Nation. By example, Jonah demonstrated a nation who had little concern for fellow human beings. Jonah demonstrated their unconcern for the weak and needy as well as a powerful nation outside God's will. The Hebrew nation had forgotten that God had set them apart as a special people to be a blessing to the whole world (Gen. 12:3).

The Purpose

The book of Jonah works to call God's Covenant people Israel back to covenant faithfulness as God's representatives.

The Message

The book opens with a rebellious preacher by the name of Jonah (1). Although the Lord gave Jonah the command to preach in Nineveh, the prophet chose to go to a different city by the name of Tarshish. Jonah's apathy toward the sailors (1:4-6) turned to hypocrisy (1:7-10). While the gentile sailors passionately repented before the Lord, it is Jonah who received just judgment by being cast into the sea (1:11-17). From Jonah's place of humility he called upon the Lord who ultimately delivered him toward the His intended purpose (2:1-10). Still bitter about his mission Jonah delivered his one verse sermon desiring that the Lord would judge the entire Assyrian city (3:1-10). It is in the last chapter that the climax of the lesson peaks. By his great mercy God provided Jonah with shade from the searing heat. However, the tree shriveled prompting anger from Jonah. God then asked Jonah whether it was right for Jonah to express such emotion over the destruction of a bush and have no concern for the possible destruction of the people living in Nineveh (4:1-11). Jonah's message paralleled the people of Judah and

¹ "Some scholars have dated the book many centuries later because of alleged inaccuracies and Aramaisms. None of their arguments is conclusive, however, and a preexilic date seems most likely. Other scholars have suggested that the book is a parable or allegory, and should not be taken literally. But the book itself gives no hint that its author so intended it. Furthermore, Jesus affirmed that Jonah preached to Nineveh (Mt 12:41)." Bill T. & Bryan T. Beyer Arnold, *Encountering the Old Testament*(Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008). 453. For extended research concerning the dating as well as the allegory question concerning Jonah, Archer is recommended. Gleason L. Jr. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*(Chicago: Moody Press, 1994). 342ff.

Israel. While they were living in relative prosperity and only concerned for the most part for their possessions, God worked to remind them they were the representatives of a compassionate God.

Theme

God's grace despite His representative's complacency.

Outline of Jonah²

I. Jonah's Rebellious Flight from God's Command 1-2

A. Jonah Commissioned To Nineveh 1:1-3

B. Jonah and Pagan Sailors 1:4-17

1. Jonah's Apathy 1:4-6
2. Jonah's Hypocrisy 1:7-10
3. The Sailor's Repentance 1:11-17

C. Jonah's Repentant Pray 2:1-10

1. Jonah's Prayer 2:1-2:9
2. Jonah's Deliverance 2:10

II. Jonah's Bitter Obedience to God's Command 3-4

A. Jonah Recommissioned to Nineveh 3:1-3

B. Jonah and Pagan Nineveh 3:4

1. Jonah's Message 3:4
2. Nineveh's Repentance 3:5-9
3. God's Mercy to Nineveh 3:10

C. Jonah's Spiteful Prayer 4:1-4

D. God's Lesson for Jonah (Climax) 4:5-11.

² Outline taken in part from Dorsey who advocates a seven scene division following a chiastic abc-a'b'c'd structure emphasizing the last scene.

Questions Concerning Jonah

1. Who is the intended reader of Jonah and what impact would this story have on them?
2. How do you date the book of Jonah and as a result what is the book's purpose?
3. How does the background of Nineveh add to the story?
4. For what was Tarshish known?
5. Jonah's movement is continually down throughout the first two chapters. Do you think that this has any significance to the story and if so what?
6. Is the swallowing of Jonah by a fish to be understood figuratively or literally? How do you come to your conclusion?
7. How does Jonah in the belly of the fish fit into the discussion concerning the amount of time that Jesus spent in the grave?
8. Jonah's message is one verse in length. How does the shortness of his message add to the story?
9. Contrast the various characters within the story (i.e. Jonah/Sailors...Jonah/Nineveh...Jonah/God).
10. How do the "cattle/beasts" in chapters 3 and 4 add to the story?

Bibliography

Archer, Gleason L. Jr. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.

Arnold, Bill T. & Bryan T. Beyer. *Encountering the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.