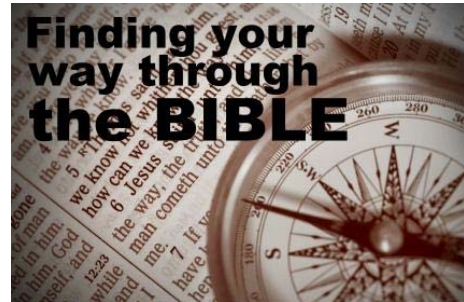


Jonah

Title

The book is named after its principal character, whose name means “dove”; see the simile used of Ephraim in [Hos 7:11](#) to portray the northern kingdom as “easily deceived and senseless.” See also [Ps 68:13](#); [74:19](#) and notes.



Author



Though the book does not identify its author, tradition has ascribed it to the prophet himself, Jonah, son of Amittai ([1:1](#)), from Gath Hopher ([2Ki 14:25](#);) in Zebulun ([Jos 19:10,13](#)).

Background

In the half-century during which the prophet Jonah ministered (800–750 b.c.), a significant event affected the northern kingdom of Israel: King Jeroboam II (793–753) restored her traditional borders, ending almost a century of sporadic seesaw conflict between Israel and Damascus.

Jeroboam, in God’s good providence ([2Ki 14:26–27](#)), capitalized on Assyria’s defeat of Damascus (in the latter half of the ninth century), which temporarily crushed that center of Aramean power. Prior to that time, not only had Israel been considerably reduced in size, but the king of Damascus had even been able to control internal affairs in the northern kingdom ([2Ki 13:7](#)). However, after the Assyrian campaign against Damascus in 797, Jehoash, king of Israel, had been able to recover the territory lost to the king of Damascus ([2Ki 13:25](#)). Internal troubles in Assyria subsequently allowed Jeroboam to complete the restoration of Israel’s northern borders. Nevertheless, Assyria remained the real threat from the north at this time.

The prophets of the Lord were speaking to Israel regarding these events. About 797 b.c. Elisha spoke to the king of Israel concerning future victories over Damascus ([2Ki 13:14–19](#)). A few years later Jonah prophesied the restoration that Jeroboam accomplished ([2Ki 14:25](#)). But soon after Israel had triumphed, she began to gloat over her newfound power. Because she was relieved of foreign pressures—relief that had come in accordance with encouraging words from Elisha and Jonah—she felt jealously complacent about her favored status with God ([Am 6:1](#)). She focused her religion on expectations of the “day of the Lord” ([Am 5:18–20](#)), when God’s darkness would engulf the other nations, leaving Israel to bask in His light.

It was in such a time that the Lord sent Amos and Hosea to announce to His people Israel that he would “spare them no longer” ([Am 7:8](#); [8:2](#)) but would send them into exile “beyond Damascus” ([Am 5:27](#)), i.e., to Assyria ([Hos 9:3](#); [10:6](#); [11:5](#)). During this time the Lord also sent Jonah to Nineveh to warn it of the imminent danger of divine judgment.

Date of Writing

Perhaps the third quarter of the eighth century is the most likely date for the book, after the public ministries of Amos and Hosea and before the fall of Samaria to Assyria in 722–721.

Interpretation

Many have questioned whether the book of Jonah is historical. The supposed legendary character of some of the events (e.g., the episode involving the great fish) has caused them to suggest alternatives to the traditional view that the book is historical, biographical narrative.

The book of Jonah recounts real events in the life and ministry of the prophet himself. Jesus also asserted the truthfulness of Jonah's story, *"But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*(Matthew 12:39-40.)

Literary Characteristics



Unlike most other prophetic parts of the OT, this book is a narrative account of a single prophetic mission. Its treatment of that mission is thus similar to the accounts of the ministries of Elijah and Elisha found in 1, 2 Kings, and to certain narrative sections of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Outline

- Jonah Flees His Mission ([chs. 1–2](#))
 - Jonah's Commission and Flight ([1:1–3](#))
 - The Endangered Sailors' Cry to Their gods ([1:4–6](#))
 - Jonah's Disobedience Exposed ([1:7–10](#))
 - Jonah's Punishment and Deliverance ([1:11–2:1](#); [2:10](#))
 - His Prayer of Thanksgiving ([2:2–9](#))
- Jonah Reluctantly Fulfills His Mission ([chs. 3–4](#))
 - Jonah's Renewed Commission and Obedience ([3:1–4](#))
 - The Endangered Ninevites' Repentant Appeal to the Lord ([3:5–9](#))
 - The Ninevites' Repentance Acknowledged ([3:10–4:4](#))
 - Jonah's Deliverance and Rebuke ([4:5–11](#))