

Jonah Series

February 2007

Prepared by Mike Southwick

Introduction and Overview of the Writings of Jonah

From Rebellion to Repentance to Redemption

Introduction:

1. What do we plan to learn from the Prophet Jonah?
 - Rebellion or disobedience to God has its consequences
 - 1) All human beings are susceptible to disobedience and even spiritual leaders, godly people or modern followers of Christ can disobey and or rebel against God.
 - 2) Jonah is as a prime example of one who willingly chose to rebel against God and thus suffers the consequences.
 - Repentance is essential in God's plan of redemption
 - 1) It is never too late to repent
 - 2) Our sins are never too great to repent of
 - 3) Usually the thing that inhibits our repentance is our own shame, pride or arrogance
 - Redemption is provided through faith
 - 1) In the case of Jonah it took a near death experience to get his attention to believe (have faith) that God had a plan for those in Nineveh and his decision to turn to God (repentance) brought about his redemption.
 - 2) The entire Bible is a story of redemption!

2. I chose the title “***From Rebellion to Repentance to Redemption***” because it encompasses the complete story of the redemption of man that is accomplished through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

- Even Jesus will use an illustration about Jonah; “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, Teacher, we want to see a sign from you. *But He answered and said to them, an evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 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 12:38-41)
- Whether you accept the story of Jonah as a literal and historic fact, or relegate it to an allegory, symbolic of something, or figurative in its interpretation, the fact remains that it tells the complete story of God’s sovereign control over the redemption of man which is completed at Calvary!

3. The Book of Jonah creates a series of questions and offers some significant challenges, and those questions and challenges come from the unbelieving skeptic all the way to the scholarly believer.

- There are historical questions that some claim doesn’t measure up to what Jonah writes.
- There are natural, scientific, and philosophical questions about this book. Here are just a couple of questions that come up:
 - 1) Was there really such a sea monster that could swallow a man whole?
 - 2) Was it possible for a man to live for three days in the belly of a sea monster?

Let's see if we can answer some of those questions by establishing a few key points:

1. Who is the most probable author?
2. When was the Book written? (The date)
3. What was the basic historical setting? (yawn, yawn, yawn)
4. What was the basic message of the Book and for whom and to whom was it written?
5. Can the skeptical arguments (its authenticity and historicity) be answered?
6. What is the significance of the Book or what are we to learn from it?

The Author

1. The most probable conclusion to who wrote the Book (the author) is that _____ must have written it.
 - After all that is the name of the Book and most of the story is about the adventures of Jonah so of course he wrote it.
 - The only credible argument against Jonah as the author is the fact that the Book is written in the third person and thus the claim is the Book was written about him and not by him. (See Jonah 1:3, 5, 9, 12; 2:1; 3:4; 4:1, 5, 8-9)
 - 1) It is not a real strong argument for Moses often used the third person when he wrote of something he did.
 - 2) Isaiah and Daniel also wrote in the third person in some instances.
 - 3) So writing in the third person doesn't necessarily negate the person as the author and I conclude it is a mere attempt to distract a person from seeing the big picture which is the story itself.
 - 4) Let's face it the reason for the attempt to deny Jonah as the author simply fuels the skeptics claim that someone else could have written it at a different time and thus that persons facts may be skewed.

2. Just who was this Jonah?

- He was a _____
 - 1) We know this because in Jonah 1:1 we are told that the “word of the Lord came to him”
 - 2) He will predict or prophecy that Israel’s borders will be extended under Jeroboam II and those predictions came true. (II Kings 14:23-25)
 - 3) He was one of four Old Testament prophets whose ministries were referred to by Christ (Matthew 12:41, Luke 11:32). Can you name the other three?
- 4) Ironically; he was the only Old Testament prophet to run from God.
- 5) Finally, there are some basic similarities in the ministry of Jonah to that of Elijah and Elisha (**all three ministered in the Gentile regions of Phoenicia and Aram**).

- He was the son of Amittai (his name means “my true one”)
 - 1) He came from the area known as Gath Hepher (II Kings 14:25)
 - 2) He was of the tribe of Zebulun (Joshua 19:10, 13)
- He lived during the reign of Jeroboam II (II Kings 14:23-25)
- Jonah’s name means _____

When was the Book of Jonah Written?

1. We find a connection to the ministry of Jonah to the reign of Jeroboam II in II Kings 14:25) so we draw the conclusions that the events of Jonah took place during that time period.
 - The reign of Jeroboam took place from 793-753 B.C.
 - Most scholars conclude that Jonah's prophecies in II Kings 14 about the expansion of Israel's borders took place early in Jeroboam's reign.
2. Jonah's ministry would have most likely coincided with the ministries of Hosea (See Hosea 1:1) and Amos (See Amos 1:1).
 - Hosea's prophecies exposed Israel's sin of idolatry, their breach of the covenant and their turning from God with an overall appeal to repent and obey.
 - Amos spoke of judgment upon Israel, but also offered hope that there would one day be an "Overcomer" who would come as a Warrior to judge the nations and bring restoration to Israel and ultimately draw all nations to Himself.

The Basic Historical Setting

1. The ministry and prophecies of Jonah took place during the reign of Jeroboam II:
 - Jeroboam was the _____ king over the Northern Kingdom that is most commonly referred to as Israel. (**See chart on page 6**)
 - Jeroboam was probably the most powerful king of the Northern Kingdom for it was during his reign that their borders were extended to what was previously conquered/occupied by David and Solomon (territory of Aram – northeast to Damascus) at the height of the United Kingdom. (**See map on page 7**)

Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets

JUDAH

ISRAEL

Kings*		Dates		Years	Dynasty†	Kings		Dates		Years
Rehoboam		931-913		17	1st Dynasty	Jeroboam I		931-910		22
Abijah		913-911		3		Nadab‡		910-909		2
Asa Coregency† with Jehoshaphat		911-870 873-870		41 (3)	2nd Dynasty	Baasha		909-886		24
Jehoshaphat Coregency with Jehoram		873-848 853-848		25 (5)	3rd Dynasty	Elah‡		886-885		2
Jehoram OBADIAH**		848-841		8		Zimri		885	7 days	
Ahaziah‡		841		1	4th Dynasty	Tibni Overlapping reign† with Omri		885-880 885-880	6 (6)	
Queen Athaliah‡		841-835		6		Omri		885-874		12
Joash‡ JOEL**		835-796		40		E L I J A H	Ahab	874-853		22
Amaziah‡ Azariah's vice- regency under Amaziah		796-767 790-767		29 (23)		Aheziah		853-852		2
Amaziah (Uzziah) Coregency with Jotham		790-739 750-739		52 (11)	5th Dynasty	E L I S H A	Jehoram (Joram)‡	852-841		12
Jotham Ahez's vice- regency under Jotham Coregency of Jotham with Ahaz		750-735 744-735		16 (9)		Jehu		841-814		28
Ahaz Hezekiah's vice- regency under Ahaz		735-732 729-715		4 (14)		Jehoshaz		814-798		17
Hezekiah Manasseh's vice- regency under Hezekiah		715-686 697-686		29 (11)	6th Dynasty	E H O S E A	Jehoash (Joash) Coregency with Jeroboam II	798-782 793-782	16 (11)	
Manasseh NAHUM		697-642		55	7th Dynasty	Jeroboam II JONAH AMOS		793-753		41
Amon‡		642-640		2		Zechariah‡		753-752		1/2
Josiah ZEPHANIAH		640-609		31		Shallum‡		752		1/12
Jehosheaz		609		1/4		Mensham Overlapping reign with Pekah		752-742 752-742	10 (10)	
Jehoiakim HABAKKUK		609-598		11		Pekahiah‡ Overlapping reign with Pekah		742-742 742-740	(2) (2)	
Jehoiachin		598-597		1/4	8th Dynasty	Pekah‡		752-732		20
Zedekiah		597-586		11	9th Dynasty	Hoshea		732-722		9

* Includes one queen (Athalish).

† In coregency the kings ruled together; in overlapping reigns they reigned separately; in a vice-royalty a son ruled with his father in a subordinate position.

‡ These kings and one queen were assassinated.

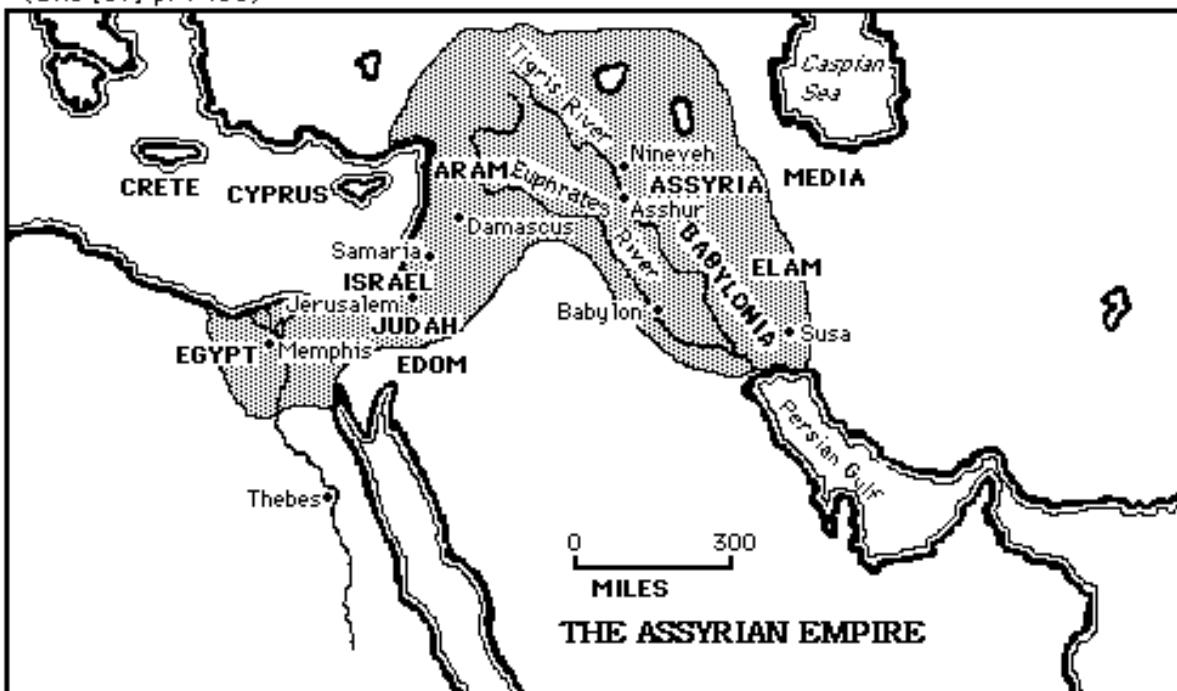
¶ A **dynasty** is a succession of rulers who are members of the same family or a single ruler of a family different from those before and after him. (The kings of Judah were all of one dynasty because they were all descendants of David.)

** Evangelical scholars differ on these dates of Obadiah and Joel. Some place them at later dates (see the *Introductions* to Joel and Obad.).

Note: In some kings' reigns the dates (e.g., Rehoboam, 931-913), when subtracted, may vary from the number in the "Years" column for that king. This is because the beginning and ending dates for a given king may include only portions of those years in the Gregorian calendar.

The dates of the kings are adapted from Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983.

(BKC [OT] p. 1465)



2. The spiritual condition of the people of Israel during this time period would best be described as disobedient, stubborn and stiff-necked.
 - God would send them prophets who warned of impending judgment and they refused to listen.
 - It was because of this stubbornness that the means by which God chose to bring judgment was through a Gentile nation who would conquer them and bring them into captivity.
 - The prophet Amos warned Israel (the Northern Kingdom); because of their disobedience, that they would be sent into exile beyond Damascus. (Amos 5:27)
 - The prophet Hosea will similarly warn them of the impending Assyrian captivity. (Hosea 11:5)

3. During the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.) the Assyrian Empire was in temporary decline but the prophecies of Amos and Hosea actually do come true.
 - In 722 B.C. Sargon II will carry the Northern Kingdom into Assyrian Captivity. (Read II Kings 17)
 - Many conclude that Jonah's reluctance to preach repentance in Nineveh was due to the fact that he would actually be helping the enemy in the overthrow of his own country!
4. A few details about Nineveh:
 - It was located on the east bank of the Tigris River
 - It was about 550 miles from the capital of the Northern Kingdom which was _____.
 - It was a very large city and well protected and fortified (with an inner wall some 50 feet wide by 100 feet high and an outer wall) much like Babylon.
 - Before Jonah's arrival there had been two plagues in the city (one in 765 and the other in 759), plus a total eclipse of the sun (June 15, 763) which were considered divine type judgments. This may explain why those in Nineveh were prepared to hear the words of Jonah which probably occurred sometime around 759 B.C.

The Message Itself:

1. The whole purpose behind recording Jonah's mission to Nineveh was to convey a very important message to those in the Northern Kingdom.
 - Consider the possibility that although Jonah went to Nineveh to preach repentance; the people of Israel were the intended recipients of the documentary.
 - 1) What do you suppose was the message that God was trying to convey to the Israelites?
 - 2) We all have a story to tell about how God has worked in our lives.....have you ever used your own story to help another?
 - Another thing I would like you to consider; who is the principal person in this story - Jonah or God?
 - 1) Take note as to who had the first word and the last word in the Book? (Jonah 1:1-2, Jonah 4:11)
 - 2) It is God who commands Jonah to act (Jonah 1:2, 3:2)
 - 3) It is God who causes the storm (Jonah 1:4)
 - 4) It is God who provides the rescue for Jonah by way of a great fish (Jonah 1:17), and it is God whose sovereign control even dictates to the great fish that it couldn't digest old Jonah but had to release him (sounds better than vomit doesn't it?). (Jonah 2:10)
 - 5) Finally it is God who in His sovereignty decides to have mercy on Nineveh (Jonah 3:10) by giving them the opportunity to repent, and reminds Jonah as to who is in charge. (Jonah 4:6-8)

2. If the recipients of this Book are the Israelites and not the Ninevites; and the main character is God and not Jonah – what then is the message that God is trying to convey?

- First; God is just as concerned for _____ as He is for the _____.
 - 1) Just because God chose Abraham to be the father of a “chosen people” doesn’t mean He forsook all others.
 - 2) Christians were not the first missionaries.....the Israelites were to be testimonies (emissaries/missionaries) of God’s greatness, God’s deliverance, God’s judgment, God’s redemption, God’s love and compassion and so on.
- Second; even in the disobedience of Israel by not being a light to a dark world – God in His sovereignty still caused his love and compassion for man to be declared to others. (Jonah 2:9)
- Third; this story reveals just how stubborn and hard hearted the Israelites had become. The fact that Gentile people with little or no “true” spiritual background would willingly turn and look to God for deliverance (Jonah 1:14-16), is a serious rebuke to not only Jonah’s spiritual hardness; but the entire nation as well; for they would not heed the words of the other prophets Hosea and Amos.
- Fourth; in many ways Jonah himself can be seen as a symbolic representation of the entire nation of Israel for as a whole they too were disobedient, rebellious, and cared little for the spiritual welfare of the nations around them!
- Finally; The way in which God deals with Jonah; first by judgment for his disobedience, and then through grace (tenderly and compassionately) is similar to how He dealt with the nation as a whole. The purpose to the book then is to reveal to the people of Israel that God desires that they too would repent like Jonah and the people of Nineveh.

Is the Book of Jonah actually Authentic and Historically Accurate?

1. I suppose the skeptical mind will always be skeptical and no matter how hard we try to convince them otherwise it seems they will never believe what they determine to be impossible or improbable. Here are a few of their objections to various claims recorded in the Book of Jonah:
 - A great fish of any kind would never have swallowed Jonah whole and if so he wouldn't have survived, and certainly not released him (ok use vomit if you would like) as described in this Book.
 - 1) There have been several stories that have surfaced over the years that validate such a thing is possible, but it is much easier for some people to believe that complex human life developed by random mutation of an amoeba than it is to accept a fish swallowed a man.
 - 2) Further; some will accept the existence of aliens and ufo's (unidentified flying objects) from outer space, life on mars and yet reject that a mammal that may well be 10 times larger than a man, could not possibly swallow a human being and then release him alive after three days.
 - Another objection is to how Jonah records the size of Nineveh (Jonah 3:3) and its population.
 - 1) If the circumference of Nineveh's inner wall was less than eight miles then that would make the diameter of the city less than 2 miles.
 - 2) The objection then is that it certainly wouldn't have taken 3 days for Jonah to travel through it.
 - 3) The answer to the objection is as simple (assuming you choose to believe it) as the journey to Nineveh probably included the surrounding towns and or suburbs as well as just the city itself.

- Another objection is the way in which the Ninevites repented so quickly:
 - 1) To us the answer is simple – the supernatural work of God is the cause of the sudden repentance. That is precisely what happens today when a sinner repents; as the third person in the Trinity – (The Holy Spirit) is the drawing agent.
 - 2) We also should not discount the nature found in man that recognizes there are spiritual or divine beings who rule over us. The Ninevites were no exception to that and with some of the recent happenings (i.e. the solar eclipse and two famines) it is highly probable that they feared some sort of wrath from a divine being.
- Another objection is the rapid growth of the vine found in Jonah 4:6
 - 1) This one can be explained even by normal means (look up the castor bean) but I would rather believe that God sped up the process whether it was natural or supernatural is irrelevant to me.
 - 2) Far more supernatural events have occurred (i.e. parting of the Red Sea, the walls of Jericho tumbling down from people shouting) that I personally accept as true and so do many others including those who are skeptical of Jonah's writings; that this one is easy to accept.
- Questions/Comments:

2. When all is said and done in many ways it comes down to whether we believe the Bible is true or not. Although we believe the Bible to be true here are a few good supportive arguments in favor of this Book being historically accurate:

- Since Jesus acknowledges the events of Jonah in the New Testament then the connection between what Jonah records is intricately tied to what is recorded in the Gospel account.
 - 1) Jesus acknowledges the great fish that swallowed Jonah and his three day stay in the “Whales Inn”.
 - 2) Jesus also acknowledges the repentance of Nineveh which if it did not happen would make the claims that Jesus was a blasphemer to be true.
- There are a number of cities mentioned in the Book of Jonah that help to support its historical accuracy:
 - 1) Nineveh (Jonah 1:2, 3:2-4, 4:11)
 - 2) Tarshish (Jonah 1:3, 4:2)
 - 3) Joppa (Jonah 1:3)
- Jonah is a real historic person and not a fictional character
 - 1) We know this because he prophesied in II Kings 14
 - 2) We also know this from Jesus acknowledging him in Matthew 12:39-41, Luke 11:29-32)

What Should We Learn From Jonah:

1. “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man sows, this he will also reap”. (Galatians 6:7)
2. It is a dangerous thing for any person to tempt God by intentionally living disobediently.
3. God is forgiving and no matter what our issue of disobedience; His mercy and grace covers all our sin – just ask the Apostle Paul.
4. In many ways our lives are full of disobedience (even after we embrace Christ); and for some the need for continual confession (I John 1:9) and repentance is more of a regular occurrence than it is for others.
 - When it comes to sin we are all on an even playing field (Romans 3:10), even though some have more bruises than others.
 - We should never let shame or embarrassment keep us from repenting and seeking God’s forgiveness.
 - We should also strive for humility so that pride and arrogance also not hinder us from repenting and seeking God’s forgiveness.
5. Thank the Lord that the story of Jonah doesn’t end with rebellion or even repentance – but Jesus finishes the story by declaring; “for just as Jonah was three days in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” and later showing that He conquered death by raising from the dead; “But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus”.....the angels who were there said; “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again”. (Luke 24:1-7 – The resurrection of Jesus is our final redemption)