



## Background

The book of Jonah is probably the best known of the "Minor Prophets" or "The Twelve."

Jonah was a prophet in Israel (the northern kingdom) during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC). This was a time of great national prosperity when the boundaries of the kingdom were extended to approximately where they were during Solomon's reign. Jonah probably preached to Nineveh around 759 BC during the reign of the Assyrian king Asher-Dan III (772-754 BC). Israel was defeated by the Assyrians about 40 years later in 722 BC.

## Prodigal prophet?

It has been said that Jonah is perhaps the most misinterpreted book of the Bible. The key is to remember that Jonah is part of a 3-fold prophetic attack on Israel along with Amos and Hosea. The message is to Israel to repent or be destroyed. But the book is unique because God uses Jonah's rebellious heart, and the positive response of everyone else, to send a convicting message and a warning to Israel.

1. **Review:** Remember that Jonah was a contemporary of Hosea and Amos, yet he does not preach any sermon to Israel in his book. But the purpose of his book is the same as the sermons of Hosea and Amos.

- Read Amos 1:1, 2:6-8; Hosea 1:1, 4:6-12
- When did they preach?
- What was their central message?
- Jonah is a MIRROR of Israel's behavior.

2. **Jonah's response to God (1:1-3):** God directs Jonah to Nineveh but we are not told what the message is. Rather, the focus is on Jonah's response.

- Why won't Jonah go? (See 4:1-2)
- Why is Jonah running from God? Does God pursue?
- What about a theology of open / closed doors for determining God's will in our lives?

3. **God chases but Jonah sleeps (1:4-5):** God sends a storm but Jonah sleeps below deck.

- Contrast Jonah's response to the storm to the sailor's response to the storm.

4. **Spiritual advice from a pagan (1:6-8):** The captain has to wake Jonah to pray.

- Why does the pagan captain need to ask Jonah to pray to Jonah's God? (What does this say about the captain and about Jonah)

- The sailors cast lots. Is that good or bad?

- What can we learn from the interrogation (v. 8)?

5. **Jonah's "great profession" (1:9-10):** Again we need to contrast Jonah's actions to the sailors' actions.

- What do we make of Jonah's profession? How does this reflect Israel's heart?

6. **Die or repent (1:11-13):** The sailors seek spiritual guidance from Jonah, but he would rather die than repent. What does this say about Israel? Can Christians, churches, and the U.S. be like this? What is the irony about verse 13?

7. **The pagans pray (1:14-15):** Who are the sailors praying to and what was Jonah's role in their conversion?

8. **The pagans worship (1:16-17):** The sailors make a sacrifice and offer vows. What does it mean that they offered vows? And what is the significance of God's response to all of this in verse 17?