

Jonah

- Unique among the prophets because this is not a book about the words of a prophet but a book about the prophet himself. Both types reveal the Lord's character, will and his word.
- The Gospels refer to it as a real story (Lk 11:29-32)
- Jeroboam II (reigned northern Israel from 793-753 BC) was the king and the Bible identifies two prophets of God that ministered during his reign:
 - Jonah
 - 2 Kings 14:23-25 where Jeroboam II was told God is with you by the prophet Jonah and the land prospered. This would have most likely been early in Jeroboam's reign. :
 - "In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. He restored the border of Israel from **Lebo-hamath** as far as the **Sea of the Arabah**, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher." – Kings 14:23-25
 - The Bible in 2 Kings 14 and in the book of Jonah presents Jonah in a suspicious, awkward position where he is seen as:
 - Extremely nationalistic
 - Speaking blessing to an evil king and then refusing to speak blessing to another nation.
 - It is likely that Jonah found a place among the royal prophets of Jeroboam II and could have been on the government's payroll
 - The words of the prophet Amos would then have been aimed at the prophets, religion, culture and government then Jonah operated with and found himself at home.
 - Amos
 - Amos 6:13-14 where Jeroboam II was told God is NOT with you by the prophet Amos and the land was headed into judgment, overthrow and captivity:
 - "you who rejoice in **Lo-debar**,
who say, "Have we not by our own strength captured **Karnaim** for ourselves?"
For behold, I will raise up against you a nation,
O house of Israel," declares the Lord, the God of hosts;
"and they shall oppress you from **Lebo-hamath**
to the **Brook of the Arabah.**"
 - Date for the events of the book of Jonah range from 790-759 BC.
 - Overview of the book:
 - Chapters 1 and 3 is Jonah among Gentiles
 - Chapter one – pagan sailors
 - Chapter two – Gentile Ninevites, or Assyrians
 - In both cases:
 - Jonah is presented as selfish and hardened toward the Lord

- The pagan Gentiles are humble and responsive toward to Lord
- Chapters 2 and 4 contain prayers of the prophet Jonah to the Lord
 - Chapter 2 – a prayer of repentance, if that is what you call a prayer inside the belly of a fish in the Mediterranean Sea...more like a prayer of desperation, maybe.
 - Chapter 4 – a prayer rebuking God for being merciful to pagans.
- The characters in the book of Jonah have clear and strong stereotypes, but then in the account of Jonah these characters act completely opposite of their stereotype. Everything is upside down.
 - Jonah, the prophet of Yahweh, rebels against Yahweh. The Lord says go east to Nineveh, but Jonah attempts to go as far west as he can.
 - Sailors, who are wicked, immoral pagans are quick to seek God and immediately act on the word from God's prophet while confessing their obedient actions as possibly sinful and taking vows which it is recorded they fulfilled.
 - Being eaten by a fish does not mean death, but instead life. Being taken as prey actually means being delivered...in this story.
 - The arrogant Assyrian King who is virtually unapproachable, but he receives Jonah and humbles himself before Jonah's God with acts of repentance similar to a common person.
 - The evil population of Nineveh quickly repent and are so extreme that they even include their cattle in the acts of repentance before the Lord.
 - Then, after having read the book of Amos we know that at the very same time:
 - the Assyrians are responding to God's prophet Jonah and repenting of their wickedness,
 - the Israelites are rebuking God's prophet Amos and increasing their wicked practices that Amos has identified as unacceptable social crimes.
- The book of Jonah then is written with satire which includes irony, humor and extreme circumstances which serve to critic the stupidity of the Israelite culture and religion during the reign of Jeroboam II or about 760 BC. The book is like a comedy skit (Think: "The Carol Burnett Show" or a "Saturday Night Live" skit)
 - A prophet fleeing from the presence of the almighty God...how can this work?
 - Panicked sailors apparently not too far from shore stopping a storm by throwing a man into the sea almost as a human sacrifice
 - A fish swallowing the prophet
 - Jonah's prayer from inside a fish
 - The fish vomiting Jonah back into the land he fled from
 - Jonah's simple, unenthusiastic five word sermon that unleashes a full scale revival
 - Cows with sackcloth and fasting
- Why does Jonah run in chapter one? We are given the answer finally in chapter four.

- Jonah admits the Lord is the God who created the land and the sea, so Jonah knows he is not going to get away from God. Jonah does not tell the sailors to throw him into the sea because Jonah wants to help save his new pagan friends, but because Jonah thinks he has forced the Lord's hand in two ways:
 - One, the sailors commit a sin by killing Jonah and killing the Lord's prophet. This should secure judgment on the sailors.
 - Two, now Jonah will die without completing his ministry. (Similar to Elijah.)
- In the belly of the fish Jonah never really repents, but does:
 - Thanks the Lord for not abandoning him. (Jonah probably realizes how really bad things are. Coming out of the luxury of Samaria around 760 BC Jonah may have thought things were "really bad", but in the belly of the fish Jonah is experiencing a whole new level of badness reality can have.
 - Promises to obey the Lord...because, even though the Lord's plan is "bad" it is not "as bad" as the belly of the fish and sure death by digestive juices..
- Jonah's message is 5 words in the Hebrew: "Forty more days and Nineveh shall be overturned!"
 - This might be a summary of Jonah's full message, but it is fitting with the storyline and Jonah's attitude that this was his entire message.
 - What is missing from Jonah's message is:
 - A list of Nineveh's offensive sins
 - What God requires them to do
 - Who or what is going to overturn them
 - What will their judgment be
 - God is not mentioned. God's name is not mentioned. The Lord is not even brought up. As far the Nineveh could tell it may have been the god Ashur or Enlil or Marduk or Tiamat, etc.
 - On the ship Jonah attempted suicide by the hands of the sailors. Is Jonah now "obeying" the Lord, yet trying to confuse his message with the least effort and the least amount of information? Is he intentionally trying to fail? Look at the length of Amos's words and Jeremiah's words and the other prophets who had zero impact on saving their nation. Then, consider Jonah's brief message and the huge impact it had. Jonah must have been disappointed in the success of his ministry. In fact, Jonah was very upset his message produced results.
 - Key word and the last word of Jonah's message is "overturned". The word can mean:
 - "overthrown" and "destroyed" as is used in Genesis 19:21, "He said to him, "Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken." This is when the angel promised Lot he would not overthrow the little city of Zoar because Lot asked to escape to that city instead of the hills. (But, eventually, Lot left Zoar for the hills because he was afraid to live in Zoar according to Gen. 19:30)
 - "transformed" and "changed" as in 1 Samuel 10:6, "Then the Spirit of the Lord will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and

be turned into another man.” Here Saul is promised to be changed or transformed when the Spirit comes on him.

- So, Jonah’s 5 words were proven to be true. Nineveh was “overturned”, “transformed” or “changed”.
- Chapter 4 – Jonah is mad and prays for the second time in the book:
 - One, Jonah explains why he ran in the beginning. Jonah did not run in fear, but because he knew God’s character was mercy and that God’s word produced results. Jonah quotes from Exodus 34:6 God’s own description of himself. And, Jonah doesn’t like it! It is almost as if Jonah is upset that God tolerates these pagans. It is as if Jonah has a higher standard of righteousness than God does, but it is not a legalistic righteousness as much as it is commitment to a false understanding of God’s covenant with Israel. Jonah clearly has some bad doctrine (the stuff Amos addressed in his book)
 - Two, Jonah prays that God would kill him right there. Jonah does not want to live with a God like the Lord who accepts the pagan gentiles. Jonah is what we might describe as:
 - Xenophobic – a dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries
 - An extreme nationalist
 - God ignores Jonah’s request to die and asks Jonah if his anger is justified?
 - Jonah goes outside the city to camp out and wait to see if the pagan Ninevites relapse into their sinfulness and get smoked by God. Jonah is hoping his stereotypical assumptions of pagans will justify his xenophobic prejudice and the Lord will be forced to destroy these unworthy pagans.
 - While Jonah is camping outside waiting the 40 days out God causes a tree to grow for Jonah’s shade, but then sends a small worm to destroy the tree which causes Jonah to ask God to just kill him. God asks again if Jonah’s anger is justified and Jonah says, “Yes, just kill me.” Those are Jonah’s last words.
 - The key to the book may be in God’s question to Jonah that is asked twice at the end of the book: **“What right do you have to be angry.”** (4:4; 4:9)
 - God ends the book by making a comparison between Jonah and his tree/vine and God and the people of Nineveh.
 - Jonah cared about the vine and didn’t want to lose it.
 - The Lord cared about the city and didn’t want to lose it
 - Which is more justified? A plant or a city?
 - The corrupt prophet was more interested in his own comfort and a plant than God’s plan and people.
 - God ends by asking his prophet for permission to be gracious and merciful to people who are lost.
- The points of the book are many, but one important point is God is merciful and is saving people. We are God’s people, but God is not finished reaching out to save more. Some of the people God will reach out to and deliver are people with habits, practices, cultures, opinions, lifestyles, etc. that we despise and find

disgusting. We are fine with God judging, destroying and damning his enemies which are also our enemies. But, what if God instead reaches out and “overturns” these same enemies of ours with his mercy. They will become his people, but are we willing to worship a God who would go so close to this kind of corruption that he could actually change them? Jonah, the prophet of the Lord, had his limits on how far God’s mercy could go. Jonah accepted the fact that God would give him shade in the heat, but Jonah did not accept the fact that God would save a pagan city from destruction by converting them.

Assyrian Kings

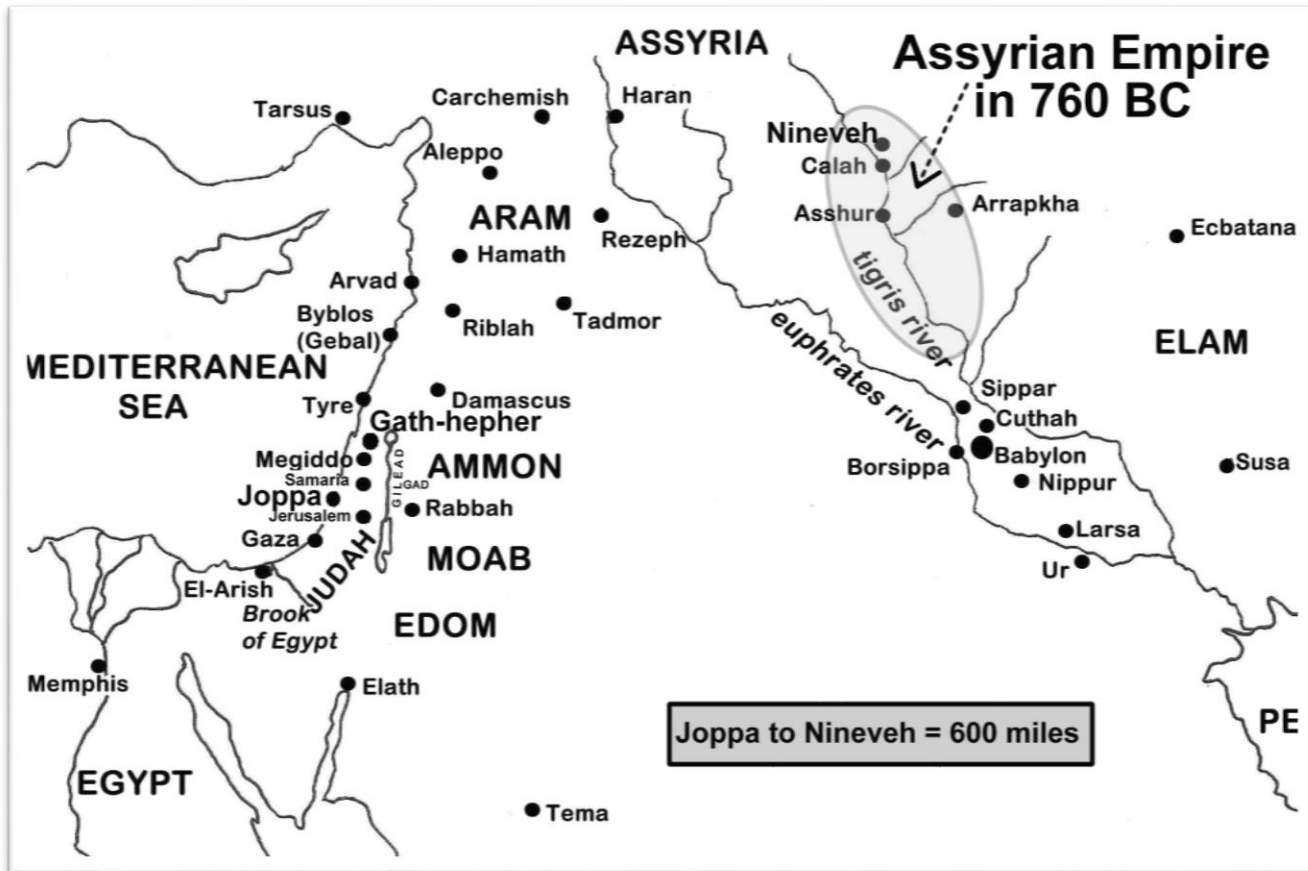
Kings of Assyrian during the Neo-Assyrian Period:

- Adad-nirari II 912–891 BC
- Tukulti-Ninurta II 891–884 BC
- Ashur-nasir-pal II 884–859 BC
- Shalmaneser III 859–824 BC
- Shamshi-Adad V 824–811 BC
- Shammu-ramat (widow, mother) 811–808 BC
- **Adad-nirari III** 811–783 BC (Defeated Arameans and subjugated Damascus in Syria)
- **Shalmaneser IV** 783–773 BC (1st weak king leading to Assyria’s decline)
- **Ashur-Dan III** 773–755 BC (solar eclipse 763 BC) (2nd weak king in Assyria’s decline)
- **Ashur-nirari V** 755–745 BC (3rd weak king in Assyria’s decline)
- Tiglath-Pileser III 745–727 BC
- Shalmaneser V 727–722 BC (Northern Israel falls in 722 BC)
- Sargon II 722–705 BC (Northern Israel falls in 722 BC)
- Sennacherib 705–681 BC (Destroys Lachish in Judah; Threatens Jerusalem; Communicates with Judah’s King Hezekiah; Loses 185,000 soldiers and retreats to Nineveh)
- Esarhaddon 681–669 BC
- Ashurbanipal 669–between 631 and 627 BC
- Ashur-etil-ilani ca. 631–627 BC
- Sin-shumu-lishir 626 BC
- Sin-shar-ishkun ca. 627–612 BC (fall of Nineveh)

Historical Setting in Assyria

1. **859-824 BC** - Assyria had declined since the days of Shalmaneser III (859-824). During Shalmaneser’s time the old Assyria had established control over Aram, Israel, Judah and other kingdoms.
2. **826-820 BC** - During Shalmaneser’s final years (826-824) and into 820 BC Assyria faced revolts on several fronts including in Nineveh.
3. Shamahi-adad V (Shalmaneser’s son) subdued the rebellion, but was weakened in the west.
4. **824-811 BC** - Shamahi-adad V died in 811 leaving his young son Adad-nirari III as heir to the throne, but too young to rule so his mother, Sammuramat, ruled until her death for her son.
5. **811-783 BC** - Adad-nirari III died in 783 BC leaving the kingdom to a period of anarchy which was oversaw by his three sons:
 - a. Shalmaneser IV, 783–773 BC (1st weak king leading to Assyria’s decline)
 - b. Ashur-Dan III, 773–755 BC (solar eclipse 763 BC) (2nd weak king in Assyria’s decline)
 - c. Ashur-nirari V, 755–745 BC (3rd weak king in Assyria’s decline)

6. **763-758 BC** - This time period resulted in a series of rebellions between 763-758 BC which were led by Assyrian officials who were dissatisfied with the current leadership. At this time Nineveh was *not* the capital of a vast empire, but the center of a province in a struggling kingdom.
7. **745 BC** – The rise of Tiglath-pileser III began a new dynasty that would manifest Assyrian supremacy for the next 100 years when the Chaldeans would begin to rise.
8. **705 BC** – Sennacherib moves Assyrian capital to Nineveh and begins to enlarge the city to its greatest heights.
9. **612 BC** – Nineveh is destroyed by



Date for the actual writing the Book of Jonah ranges from 750-250 BC.

Assyrian Eclipse of 763 –

- (from Wikipedia) – “The Assyrian eclipse, also known as the Bur-Sagale eclipse, is a solar eclipse recorded in Assyrian eponym lists, most likely dating the ninth year of the reign of king Ashur-dan III. The eclipse is identified with the one that occurred on 15 June 763 BC (proleptic Julian calendar). The entry is short and reads: “[year of] *Bur-Sagale of Guzana*. Revolt in the city of Assur. In the month *Simanu* an eclipse of the sun took place.” The phrase used — *shamash* (“the sun”) *akallu* (“bent”, “twisted”, “crooked”, “distorted”, “obscured”) — has been interpreted as a reference to a solar eclipse since the first decipherment of cuneiform in the mid 19th century.”
- From <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/tomhobson/2017/08/jonah-eclipse-ancient-nineveh/> – “A total solar eclipse over Nineveh in northern Iraq on June 15, 763 BCE fits this time frame for the life and career of Jonah. Assyriologist Donald Wiseman, a former curator at the British

Museum, and editor of *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings* and *The Alalakh Tablets*, published a lecture in the *Tyndale Bulletin* in 1979 where he argued persuasively that this eclipse would help explain the dramatic reaction to Jonah's

preaching. (http://www.tyndalehouse.com/TynBul/Library/TynBull_1979_30_02_Wiseman_JonahsNineveh.pdf)

According to the Assyrian writings cited by Wiseman, here's what a solar eclipse would have meant to them: "the king will be deposed and killed, and a worthless fellow will seize the throne...rain from heaven will flood the land...the city walls will be destroyed." The Assyrians tell us that at such a time, there would be solemn fasting, and the king would hand over his throne to a substitute until the danger passed. At least once when there was a total solar eclipse, the Assyrians cry, "Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (in Assyrian, *adi arbat ūmē* ^ā*ninua*^{ki} *innabak*, which can also mean, "Nineveh shall be made to repent!".)

Jonah 1:1 – “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

Jonah 1:2 – “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.”

Jonah 1:3 – “But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

Jonah 1:4 – “But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.

Jonah 1:5 – “Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.

Jonah 1:6 – “So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.”

Jonah 1:7 – “And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.

Jonah 1:8 – “Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?”

Jonah 1:9 – “And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

Jonah 1:10 – “Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.

Jonah 1:11 – “Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous.

Jonah 1:12 – “He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.”

Jonah 1:13 – “Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.

Jonah 1:14 – “Therefore they called out to the Lord, “O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.”

Jonah 1:15 – “So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

Jonah 1:16 – “Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

Jonah 1:17 – “And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.