

# The Book of the Twelve: Jonah (“Dove”)

1. **Historical Context:** Out of all the minor prophets, Jonah is perhaps the most well-known and familiar. This is, in large part, due to the fact that this prophetic book is focused not so much on God’s Word through his prophet to any given nation, but rather on the prophet Jonah himself. Jonah prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC) and is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25, *“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.”*
2. **Date:** c. 790 -780s BC
3. **Author:** Jonah the prophet, mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25
4. **Summary:** God’s concern and care for his entire creation.
5. **Christ in the Book of Jonah:** In the prophet Jonah, He is your salvation, bringing you back into his will by his abundant grace and mercy.
6. **Literary Genre/Features:**
  - a. Narrative history
  - b. Satire and irony combined in this factual account of history
  - c. The prophet Jonah is full of ironies, one of the main narrative devices used in this prophetic book. Consider just a few brief examples:
    - i. Jonah, the called prophet of God runs away from YHWH’s call (1:3)
    - ii. Jonah flees from YHWH (1:3), yet also confesses that he believes and worships YHWH (1:9)
    - iii. Jonah receives salvation from YHWH (2:10) and then begrudges the same salvation YHWH gives to the people of Nineveh (3:10-4:11)
  - d. Jonah’s name is mentioned 16 times in this book, while God’s name or references to him at a total of 39 times.
7. **Main Theological Themes**
  - a. The purpose of God’s judgment, which is to lead people to repentance
  - b. God’s compassion as creator for all people and all creation
  - c. Prophetic mission of Israel to the nations: God’s judgment of wickedness and deliverance of the penitent.
  - d. God changes his mind (3:10; 4:2)
  - e. The Word of YHWH vs. the word of man.
  - f. God’s pleasure in extending his grace and mercy to all (4:10-11)
8. **Purpose(s)**
  - a. See Jonah 4:10-11
  - b. To show the universal scope of God’s compassion which extends even to his enemies and to encourage his people to exercise the same compassion
  - c. To introduce the prophecies of Micah and Nahum against Assyria
  - d. To show the audience/original hearers where they have deviated from God’s ways
  - e. To restore repentance and true faith in Israel

- f. To strengthen the missionary outreach of God's people.
- g. To see ourselves in the person of Jonah.

## 9. Outline:

One way to outline the book of Jonah is like that of a play/drama:

Scene 1 – Account of Jonah's call and his reaction – 1:1-3

Scene 2 – Onboard the ship amidst the storm at sea – 1:4-17

Scene 3 – Inside the great fish – 2

Scene 4 – YHWH repeats his prophetic assignment to Jonah – 3:1-3

Scene 5 – Jonah delivers the message; Nineveh responds – 3:4-10

Scene 6 – Jonah's prayer in Nineveh – 4:1-3

Scene 7 – Jonah sits outside Nineveh; YHWH teaches his lesson on His mercy – 4:4-11

Another way to outline the overall structure of the book is to compare and contrast the parallels in chapters 1-2 and 3-4.

### *Jonah 1-2*

Word of YHWH comes to Jonah (1:1)

Content of the Word (1:2)

Response of Jonah (1:3)

Gentile Response (1:5)

Action of the Captain (1:6)

Sailors and Jonah (1:7-15)

Disaster averted (1:15)

Response of sailors (1:16)

YHWH and Jonah (1:17-2:11)

YHWH's Response (2:11)

### *Jonah 3-4*

Word of YHWH comes to Jonah (3:1)

Content of the Word (3:2)

Response of Jonah (3:3-4)

Gentile Response (3:5)

Action of the king (3:6-9)

Ninevites and God (3:10)

Disaster averted (3:10)

Response of Jonah (4:1)

YHWH and Jonah (4:2-3)

YHWH's response (4:6-11)

## 10. New Testament References

- a. The "sign" of Jonah is mentioned three times in the NT, it is a paradoxical sign revealing both God's judgment and salvation, paralleling God's judgment and salvation of Jonah with the judgment and salvation of Jesus on the cross.
- b. Matthew 12:39
- c. Matthew 16:4
- d. Luke 11:29

## 11. Liturgical Use

- a. Epiphany 4 (1 yr): Jonah 1:1-17
- b. Epiphany 3B: Jonah 3:1-5, 10
- c. Easter Vigil: Jonah 3:1-10



Jonah 2:6, “I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever, yet you brought up my life from the pit...”

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In Matthew 12:40, Jesus teaches us to read His own death and resurrection in light of Jonah’s descent into the abyss of the fish’s belly and his ascent again to the land of the living. Jonah did not die and rise again,

but his ordeal is—Jesus tells us—an image of what Jesus will accomplish in Himself when he descends to the lower regions of the earth (Sheol) upon His death and rises again in victory (Ephesians 4:9).

What I want to focus on this morning, though, is that word “forever.” ....Jonah, speaking poetically, says that the bars of Sheol closed upon him \*forever\* .....and yet, the very next verse tells us he was raised up from the pit. Of course, in Jonah’s case, his descent is like a death, and so it is as if he went into the land of Sheol whose bars close forever and from whom none can escape ....but Jesus experienced the reality to which these words point.

Christ was beyond salvation in the grave....He descended to the place where the gates are forever shut....to the place where all who enter abandon hope.....He had been crushed under the waves and breakers of divine wrath (Jonah 2:3, Psalm 42:7) and was swallowed by the mouth of the grave; the bars shut over Him forever.....

And yet, He escapes; He is raised up....beyond all hope, beyond all expectation, beyond all possible desire—He is raised up again from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus from the void of death teaches a profound truth about the essential nature of God: He is the God who does what cannot be done; who calls nothing something, who calls “No Mercy,” “Mercy”, who makes the weak strong, who brings water from the stone, who gives life in the barren womb, and who—the controlling image—who brings the dead to life. He does the impossible in accordance with His character, which is to say, He does the impossibly good....which is to say, He is fundamentally eucatastrophic.

The God of the risen Jesus is the God of the Eucatastrophe. He is the God who ordains and achieves good beyond all expectation, joy beyond all hope, beauty beyond all imagining....the God who, in love and as mercy, enters and embraces the depths of horror, invading the depths of horror with Himself, weaving the depths of horror into the experience of His own life of indomitable love and peace and gladness, and so transfigures darkness into a servant of light, sorrow into the handmaid of joy, death into the seed of life, suffering into the crown of glory.