

The Book of Jonah
Class Notes
Session 1

Intro: While the Book of Jonah may be a small book, it looms large in the cannon of God's Word.

The book of Jonah reflects a deep, theological focus on God's sovereignty as well as His mercy.

Unlike the other prophetic texts, the focus in Jonah is on the prophet himself; the prophetic message is secondary.

The name Jonah means, "Dove"...He was Prophet of Yahweh from *Gath Hepher*.

2 Kings 14.25... Matthew 12.39-41

Date: The dating of Jonah (as with most Old Testament books) is debated.

Some scholars date Jonah around 790 B.C. Others maintain a broad time span between 760–250 B.C.

The earlier dates reflect a common belief among scholars that Jonah lived during the reign of Jeroboam II of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (*2 Kings 14.23–25*), which would place the date of Jonah between 793-753 B.C.

Author: Tradition cites Jonah himself as the author. However, the book cites no author. As Biblical commentators B.K Smith and F.S. Page note:

"The Book of Jonah contains no explicit reference to an author or to a chronological setting. In fact, if it were not for 2 Kgs 14:25, we would know almost nothing about the historical situation or the prophet. Therefore it is impossible to know whether the book is *by* Jonah or only *about* him. While most scholars doubt authorship by Jonah, some affirm his contribution, at least in supplying information...Whoever the author was, the book's inclusion in canonical Scripture indicates that the community of Israel acknowledged its divine inspiration and prophetic character...In the final analysis we do not know *how*, only *that* God enabled the recording of his Word for the benefit of his people."¹

Genre: Prophetic Narrative. Jonah is considered one of the, "Book of the Twelve Prophets." There is also an element of "Narrative Satire."

Purpose: Through a reluctant Prophet, God reveals Himself as a merciful God who is both the *covenant* God of Israel, as well as the *creator* God of all people.

God is free and God desires that all people turn to Him for salvation and hope!

Jonah 1.1-3 God commanded Jonah to travel to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it.

The literary description in v.1..."The word of the Lord came to Jonah..." indicates that Jonah had divine authority for his message.

The city of Nineveh was located on the east side of the Tigris River about 550 miles northeast of Samaria (It was located in modern-day Iraq opposite the town of Mosul).

¹B.K. Smith and F.S. Page. *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995).



(v.2): Nineveh was an old city, dating back to approximately 4500 B.C. A principal city (Capital.) of ancient Assyria.

God describes Nineveh as evil... While the exact nature of the evil is not given in the text, God's judgment was coming upon Nineveh due to its sin.

“Archaeology confirms the biblical witness to the wickedness of the Assyrians. They were well known in the ancient world for brutality and cruelty. Ashurbanipal, the grandson of Sennacherib, was accustomed to tearing off the lips and hands of his victims. Tiglath-Pileser flayed victims alive and made great piles of their skulls.”²²

(v.3): Jonah's reluctance to travel to Nineveh may have been due to its horrendous violence or Jonah's incredulity that God would spare these veil people!

Jonah heads to Tarshish...literally the opposite direction from Nineveh!

Joppa was a seaport on the Great Sea. Outgoing Ships would routinely carry passengers as well as cargo if one could pay the fare, which, Jonah did.

No matter the reasoning, Jonah wanted to be far away from God and from Nineveh.

“Most of us have our own Nineveh and Tarshish. One is the city of faithfulness and obedience; the other is a place of escape and equivocation. Our Ninevehs are those clear revelations of the will of God. Also, whatever or whomever our judgments have focused on as our enemy can be our Nineveh. Nineveh can be simply the Lord's urging that we change our behavior or do some obedient action that demands more than we are ready to give. Whatever else, Nineveh is the call of God sounding in our hearts to put Him first, be His person, and accept our vocation to be servants in mission....Tarshish can be inside our own souls!”³

Going Forward: “As you read Jonah, reflect on God's purposes for your life. Day by day we make decisions and plan our future, but the prophet Jonah describes just how far the Almighty will go to fulfill His plans for us and through us. Turn to Him in prayer, seeking His blessing. As you pray, remember that He is a “gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love”⁴

² Smith and Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*

³ L.J. Ogilvie. *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1990).

⁴ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia, 2000).