

An Overview of Jonah

Historical Background / Setting

Jonah was a prophet of the northern kingdom of Israel from the tribe of Zebulun who lived at Gath-hepher near Nazareth (2 Kings 14:25). He prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC), a period of political prosperity throughout the land of Israel not seen since Solomon (2 Kings 14:23-29).

Jeroboam II had greatly expanded Israel's borders so that its size was about what it had been during the Davidic and Solomonite empire (2 Kings 14:25). At the same time, Assyria was plagued by international and external problems that allowed Israel to flourish.

It was during this time that the Lord called Jonah to go to the great Assyrian city of Nineveh to pronounce judgment upon it (Jonah 1:2).

Purposes for Writing

1. To encourage readers to reflect on God's compassionate character and to examine if their compassion reflects the heart of God.
2. To show God's sovereign control over the material world.
3. To show the futility of idol worship and self-effort.
4. To display God's love for the nations outside Israel.
5. To teach about the need for repentance from sin in general and from self-centeredness in particular.
6. To show that God relents when people repent.
7. To later serve as a sign for Jesus' preaching ministry and resurrection (Matt 12:38-41; Luke 11:29-32).

Structure

Four settings:

1. Jonah and the sea Jonah runs from God's will (1:1-16)
2. Jonah and the fish Jonah submits to God's will (1:17-2:10)
3. Jonah and the city Jonah fulfills God's will (3:1-10)
4. Jonah and the Lord Jonah questions God's will (4:1-11)

Seven episodes:

1. Jonah's commission and flight (1:1-3)
2. Jonah and the pagan sailors (1:4-16)
3. Jonah's grateful prayer (1:17-2:10)
4. Jonah's recommissioning and obedience (3:1-4)
5. Jonah and the pagan Ninevites (3:5-10)
6. Jonah's angry prayer (4:1-4)
7. The Lord's lesson for Jonah (4:5-11)

