

JONAH

What is it about?

God reserves the sovereign right to be compassionate, even when those acts work against an already issued prophetic warning. God delights in gracious acts of compassion in response to small steps in the right direction. Certainly if God responded that way to Nineveh, the epitome of pagan wickedness, he would respond compassionately to Israel.

Audience, Author, Date

- Author: Anonymous
- Audience: Israelites
- Date: 8th century BC; 782-753

Themes

- God's compassion for all.
- Anger
- Theodicy

Key Ideas

- God's right to perform gracious acts of compassion.
- God's delight in small steps in the right direction.
- God's propensity for offering second chances.
- God's sovereignty.

Introduction

Context

Jonah is the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher (Galilee), and prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel (2 Ki 14:25), the grandson of Jehoahaz (814-798BC). Because of his sins, Israel was oppressed by the Arameans (2 Ki 13:3).

Because of God's compassion (2 Ki 13:4, 23), Israel was spared destruction & delivered from this oppression (2 Ki 13:5). Israel then regained much territory, matching the days of Solomon & David. Assyria, Israel's enemy, was weak so Israel regained its strength. Jonah prophesied during a time of Israel's growth to prosperity, overcoming their enemies, and now God calls Jonah to preach repentance to those enemies.

Literary Features

- **Irony:** a contrast between expectations and reality.
 - The pagan sailors fear God, pray, repent, & act more righteously than Jonah. The wicked Ninevites repent immediately. Jonah is the one resisting God's mercy.
- **Satire:** Jonah is portrayed in an exaggerated way: running from God, sleeping through a storm, angry that people repented, more upset over a plant than a city full of people.
- **Repetition:** God speaks, Jonah responds, pagans respond better than Jonah, God provides something, Jonah reacts badly.
- **Parallel scenes:** the structure is tight and crafted, not random storytelling tossed into the Bible.
- **Contrasts:** Israelite prophet vs. Gentile sailors; Jonah vs. Nineveh; Jonah's anger vs. God's compassion; concern for a plant vs. concern for a city.
- **Exaggeration/Hyperbole:** "Great city," "Great storm," "Great fish," "Great fear." The magnitude of Jonah's task. This points out God's sovereignty & Jonah's small-heartedness.
- **Double entendre:** a phrase that has two meanings at the same time.

Worth Memorizing

- 2:2: I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.

Christo-Centricity

- Jonah is a type of Christ. Christ told his opponents that he would only give them the “sign of Jonah:” *Just as Jonah was 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth.* (Matt. 12:38-42)

Satire

The exposure of human vice or folly.

4 elements of satire in Jonah:

1. The object of attack is Jonah & what he represents—bigotry & ethnocentricity that regarded God as the exclusive property of Israel.
2. The satiric vehicle is narrative or story.
3. The satiric norm or standard by which Jonah’s bad attitudes are judged is the character of God, who is portrayed as a God of universal mercy, whose mercy is not limited by national boundaries.
4. The satiric tone is laughing, with Jonah emerging as a laughable figure—the prophet of God who runs from God & is caught by a fish, a childish and pouting prophet who prefers death over life without his shade tree.

- **Unanswered Questions:** The book doesn’t end by telling us that Jonah repented. The reader is forced to answer the final question.

Genre of Literature:

- **Prophetic Narrative:** Primarily narrative; it is unique because it is ABOUT a prophet, not oracles or prophecies from a prophet.
- **Satire:** uses humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize human vices, follies, or societal flaws.
- **Poetry:** Jonah’s prayer in Ch. 2 is poetry.

Outline

- A. Jonah’s commissioning and flight (1:1-3)
 - B. Jonah and the pagan sailors (1:4-16)
 - C. Jonah’s grateful prayer (1:17-2:10)
- A. Jonah’s recommissioning and compliance (3:1-3a)
 - B. Jonah and the pagan Ninevites (3:3b-10)
 - C. Jonah’s angry prayer (4:1-4)
- D. Jonah’s lesson about compassion (4:5-11)

The Ethics of Jonah:

The ethics of the book of Jonah is presumably linked to the author’s implied criticism of the unattractive character and behavior of the reluctant prophet. We should not assume that mean-spirited Jonah is a typical Jew, nor are the (easily converted) sailors and Ninevites to be thought of as typical Gentiles. **The implied ethic is that people should show mercy toward others in line with the character of God on display in this book.**

7 Episodes in Jonah

- (7) Jonah’s lesson about compassion (4:5-11)
- (3) Jonah’s grateful prayer (1:17-2:10)
- (6) Jonah’s angry prayer (4:1-4)
- (2) Jonah & pagan sailors (1:4-16)
- (5) Jonah & the pagan Ninevites (3:3-10)
- (1) Jonah’s commissioning & flight (1:1-3)
- (2) (4) Jonah’s recommissioning & compliance (3:1-3)