

# **JONAH:**



## **ADVENTURES IN MISSING THE POINT**

**A 3 C'S CONTEMPLATIVE STUDY™  
BY DR. JACK M. JACOB**

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*All Scriptures quoted, partially quoted, or adapted from the New American Standard Version of the Holy Bible with 1995 Update.*

## Introduction to the Book of Jonah

**Author:** Many people who do not even read or study the Bible have heard of the book of Jonah. With such widespread knowledge of the book's contents, one would expect to find much information on the identity of the author of the book. Surprisingly, this is not the case.

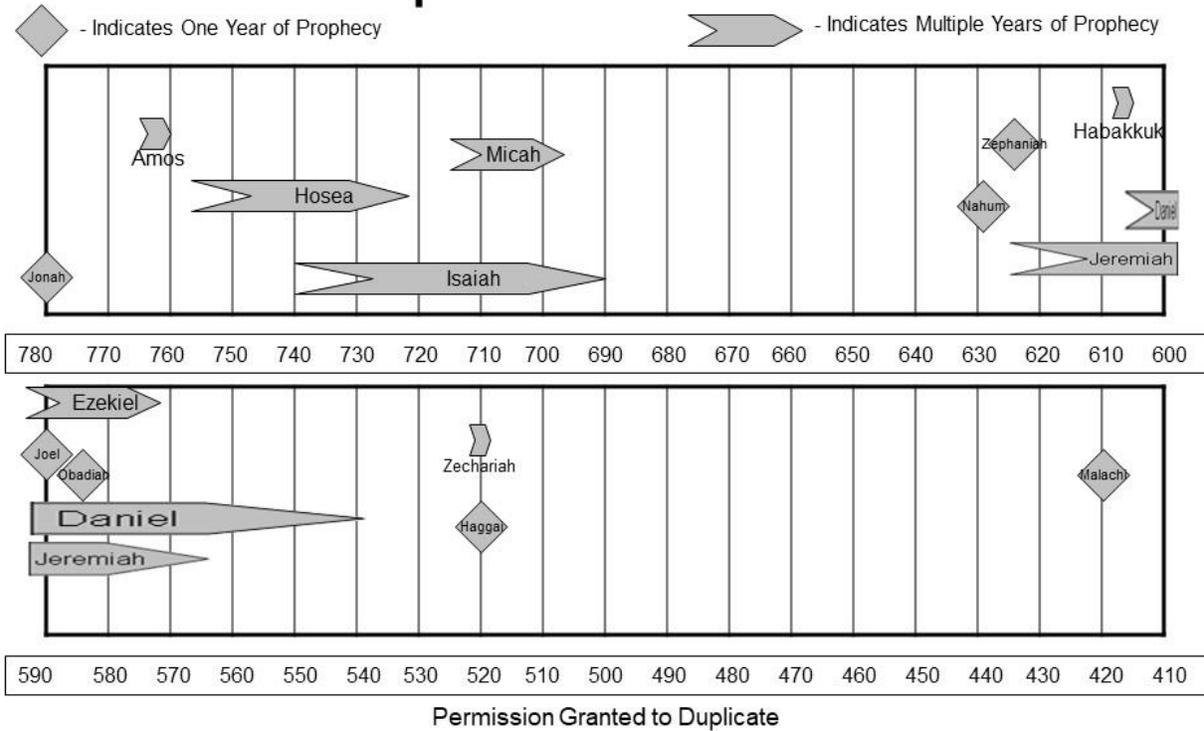
The book identifies the prophet as "Jonah, son of Amittai" (1:1). The name itself means "pigeon" or "dove". This same Jonah, son of Amittai is also mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 as a key advisor to Jeroboam II on how, where, and when to fight to extend Israel's borders. This passage also tells us Jonah was from Gath-Hepher, which was a small town north of Nazareth, in the tribal territory of Zebulun. This exhausts the Biblical references to anything having to do with Jonah's identity.

The question remains, who wrote this book? Unfortunately, we cannot say with any definitiveness. There are two major options for the writing of the book. First, that Jonah, later in life, regretted the way he had acted during this period of his life and wrote the book as a means of atoning for those actions. Second, it could have been written down from the oral stories of Jonah that would have been taught to the children as part of Israel's history. Neither option takes anything away from the factuality of the writing as we still believe it was inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16) and that no one skewed it to serve their purposes (2 Peter 1:20-21). Even the traditions of the Jews themselves do not help us any further than the data presented.

**Date:** The Biblical data does help us quite a bit in dating the events described in the book. Jeroboam II reigned from 783 to 753 BC. Early on in his reign, God used him to extend the borders of Israel nearly back to where they had been during Solomon's reign. It was after this that Jeroboam turned evil and ended up being a terrible influence on the religious morality of his people. Assuming Jeroboam II would have sought direction shortly after taking the throne, this would put Jonah's advice to him somewhere from 783 to 778 BC. In addition to the situation in Israel, the situation in Nineveh also helps us to date the book's happenings. From his ascendance to the throne of Assyria, Assur-Dan III was constantly involved in, and defeated in, battles with various kingdoms and would not have allowed a foreign visitor into the city of his royal residence. He ruled from 773 to 756 BC. His predecessor, Shalmanesser IV was a weak king and established a royal residence at Nineveh just prior to his death, so this would have put Jonah's visit at 780 at the earliest. This is the best date for the events of the book.

**Contemporary Prophets:** In order to see the contemporaries of Jonah, refer to the following chart:

# Prophetic Timeline



It should be noted, from the chart above, that Jonah was the first of the prophets God sent to warn His world of His actions. From this point on, “Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets.” (Amos 3:7)

**Historical Situation:** While much of this situation has been mentioned in the section on the dating of the events of the book, some additional points may help us understand both Jonah’s actions and God’s message.

First, Nineveh was a town known for its violence. While not technically a capitol, in the sense the modern reader would understand a capitol, it was the royal residence of the king of Assyria. Most likely, this king was Shalmanesser IV. While he was a weak king, Shalmanesser IV was also a cruel king, as were his predecessors. To give an example of the cruelty of the king and the city, when enemies were conquered, they would be wholly exterminated. They would cut the heads off their enemies and pile them up outside the city. They would take the bodies, cut them into four pieces, burn them, and skewer the remains on sticks. They would parade through the streets with children carrying the sticks and proclaiming this would be the outcome for any who dared oppose them.

In addition to being a city known for violence, the Assyrian empire was a long-standing enemy of Israel and was constantly invading their land to carry off

flocks, herds, women and children and often leaving little more than a smoldering rubble in their wake. Israel alternated between serving Assyria and rebelling against her and each time they rebelled, they paid a price. Lastly, Egypt was weak during this time and could not help Israel defend itself against Assyria until Jeroboam II came to the throne. Finally, Israel was able to hold its own! It was into this situation that God called Jonah to go to Nineveh and tell them to repent or He would destroy them.

**Main Focus:** The main focus of the book of Jonah is not actually one focus, but two. On the one hand, the book is about Jonah, his relationship to God, and God's working with Jonah to help Jonah understand His ways better. Jonah needed to learn to see people from God's perspective and not to allow their actions and factions to define their worth. This is a focus, but there is a broader, more over-arching purpose here as well. The bigger purpose is to show Jonah, Nineveh, and the world that God is sovereign over the entire world and is not just a regional "god" to which only the Israelites were accountable.

#### Outline of the Book of Jonah

- I. Jonah's Rebellion Against God's Calling (1:1-17)
  - a. Jonah's Calling (1:1-2)
  - b. Jonah Runs Away (1:3)
  - c. God Pursues Jonah (1:4-17)
    - i. With a storm (1:4)
    - ii. With sailors (1:5-6)
    - iii. With circumstances (1:7-9)
    - iv. With sacrifice (1:10-16)
    - v. With superintending nature (1:17)
- II. Jonah Rescued by God's Grace (2:1-10)
- III. Nineveh Rescued by God's Grace (3:1-10)
  - a. By sending the prophet (3:1-3)
  - b. By sending the message (3:4)
  - c. By changing their hearts (3:5-9)
  - d. By changing their destination (3:10)
- IV. Jonah Forgets God's Grace (4:1-11)
  - a. Jonah wanted evil punished (4:1-3)
  - b. God showed Jonah grace again (4:4-6)
  - c. God showed Jonah life without grace (4:7-8)
  - d. Jonah missed the point (4:9-11)

**Personal Word:** As you study the book of Jonah, it may be quite easy to think you already know all there is to know about this little book. It may also be tempting to think this is a lesson only for children. Resist that urge! Try to look at this book, not with the eyes of the person that can see all of God's redemptive history, but as a person living in Jonah's day. Try to feel what

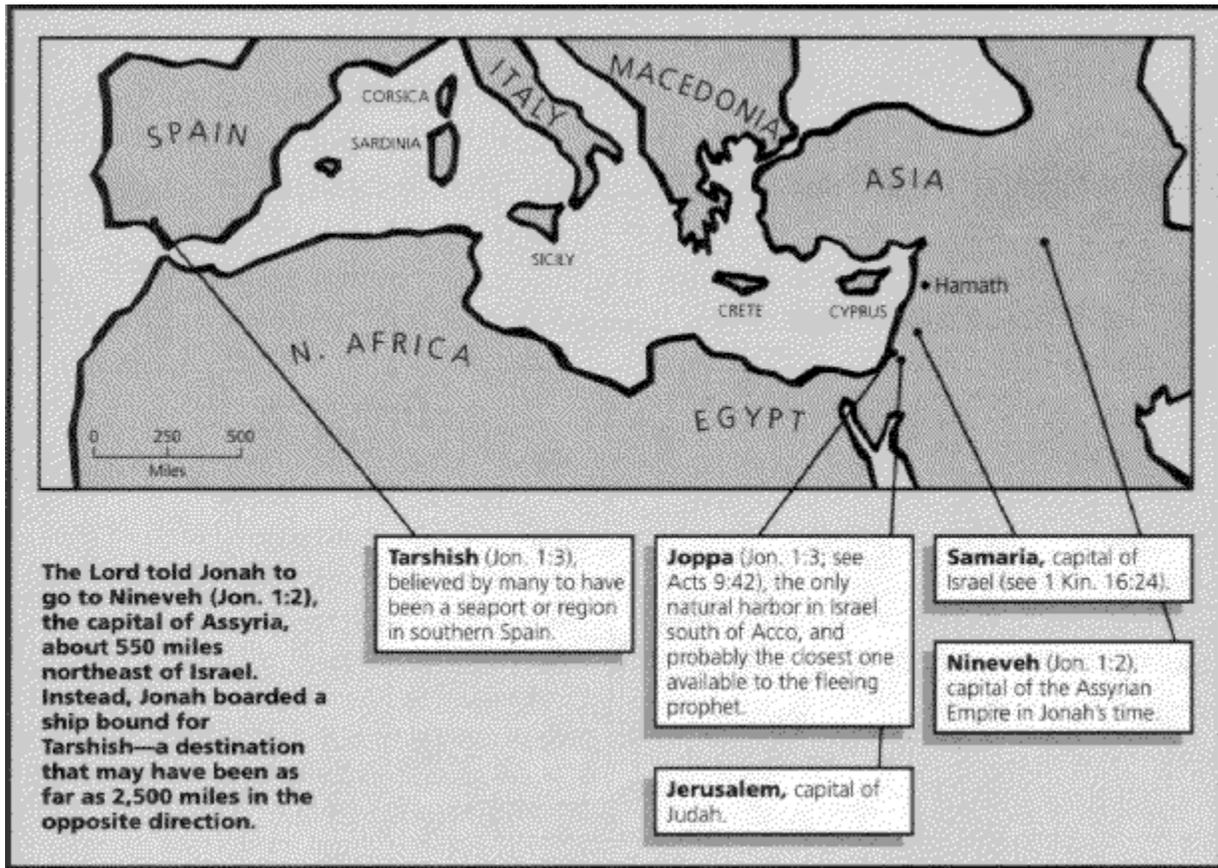
Jonah would have felt when he sought to run from God. Try to feel what Jonah would have felt when he was thrown overboard and BEFORE the great fish swallowed him (which he did not see coming). Try to understand his displeasure with God over his own misery.

As you open your eyes wider to consider someone else's point of view, you will no doubt capture a new and profound sense of God in as much of His splendor as you can understand. You will begin to see His mercy and lovingkindness in a way that just might challenge you to be more like Him.

May God bless you as you and may He become more known to you as you study this well-known story.

Dr. Jack M. Jacob

## Geography of Jonah's Day



<sup>1</sup> Thomas Nelson, *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts, Old and New Testaments, Updated and Revised Edition*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1996.

Reading Record for the Book of Jonah

- Chapter 1
- Chapter 2
- Chapter 3
- Chapter 4

Record Your Observations Below:



## **HIDE AND SEEK WITH GOD JONAH 1:1-2:10**

What child has not had fun playing hide and seek? It is a fun game where one person hides their eyes while all the other participants run and try to find good hiding places. The goal of the game is to be the last one found by the person looking. My son was exceptional at this game. One Saturday night, the youth of our church decided to play hide and seek. My son ran and hid. The entire group looked for him for hours and finally got so frustrated, they

called for help thinking he had left and gone to a friend's house. After scouring the entire church building, he was found, asleep, hiding in a little cupboard we had next to our baptistery! While they were frantically searching, he had been there the whole time and had gotten so bored waiting for them to find him that he fell asleep.

While Hide and Seek may make a fun children's game, it is not the wisest policy when dealing with God. Three times in the first chapter of Jonah we are told Jonah was trying to flee from the presence of God. Jonah, who had been used by God to speak to King Jeroboam II of Israel and had led him to expand the borders of Israel almost to the points they had been when Solomon was king, thought he could run from the presence of God only to learn you can't outrun God. As we study this lesson, we start to see some of Jonah's attitude in others and maybe even ourselves. This first lesson features Jonah wanting to follow God when it is easy, but not when it is tough. He wanted to follow God when it benefitted him, but not when it was inconvenient.

Have you ever tried to "run from God"? If so, describe it below:

How did the situation turn out?

What did you learn from the experience?

## **Consider It**

1. Where did God send Jonah? (1:1-3)
2. Why did God say He was sending Jonah? (1:1-3)
3. Where did Jonah go? (1:1-3)
4. How did God get the sailors' attention? (1:4-6)
5. Where was Jonah when they found him? (1:4-6)
6. Why were the sailors upset with Jonah when they found him? (1:4-6)
7. How did the sailors determine whose fault the storm was? (1:7-9)
8. How did the sailors react to Jonah's declaration of being a follower of God? (1:10-14)
9. What did Jonah tell the sailors to do to get the storm to subside? (1:10-14)
10. What did the sailors do at first? (1:10-14)
11. What did they do second? (1:10-14)

12. What did they do last? (1:15-17)

13. How did the sailors respond when the storm was gone? (1:15-17)

14. How did God rescue Jonah from the ocean? (1:15-17)

15. What did Jonah do while he was being rescued for the ocean? (2:1-10)

16. What did Jonah promise while doing this? (2:1-10)

17. How did Jonah finally end up in Nineveh? (2:1-10)

### **Comprehend It**

1. Why was God going to judge Nineveh?

2. What does this tell you about times when it seems God is not acting as soon as you would like?

3. Three times the Bible says Jonah was attempting to flee from the presence of the Lord. How would you say this theme figures into the bigger picture of the lesson of Jonah?

4. From the map on page 6, describe how Jonah reacted to God's instructions.

5. What ways did God superintend nature in this story?
  
6. What does this tell us about God's power?
  
7. Why did the sailors want Jonah to call on his God?
  
8. What does this tell you about some people that are not yet believers?
  
9. What does it mean to "cast lots"?
  
10. Why did Jonah ignore the questions of the captain and simply answer that he was a Hebrew and feared God?
  
11. What does this tell you about how Jonah saw the situation?
  
12. Why did the sailors not throw Jonah overboard when he first suggested it?
  
13. Assuming Jonah's duty as a prophet to be evangelistic, how was he doing so far?

14. Fill in the following table from Jonah's prayer in chapter 2:

Part of Prayer	Verse(s)	Summary
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Adoration		
Confession		
Thanksgiving		
Supplication		

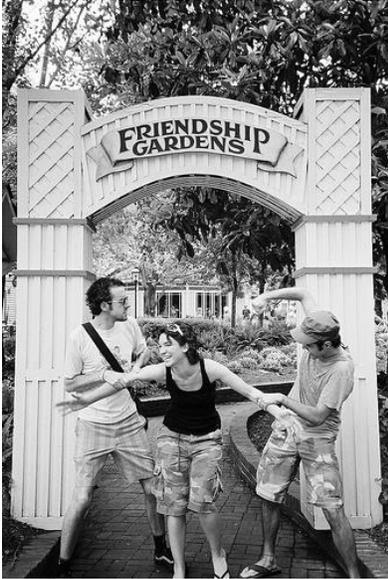
(Hint: not all parts are to be found)

15. How have we seen God's salvation up to this point?

**Connect It**

1. Have you ever had a time when you wished God would act on your behalf, but it seemed He was not doing so? If so, describe it.
2. From this lesson, what may have been the purpose for God's hesitation or silence?
3. Have you ever tried to run from the presence of the Lord?
4. If so, what did you learn from the incident?
5. How many other prophetic books have been reminders that God is sovereign over all creation and not just in Israel?
6. What does this tell you about God's focus during this time?

7. Is there any part of your life that you need to surrender to God's sovereignty?
  
8. The sailors seemed more concerned with offending God than Jonah did. Why might this be?
  
9. What was the basis for Jonah's relationship with God?
  
10. What does this tell you about your focus in your relationship with God?
  
11. Jonah had to reach bottom (no pun intended) before he looked up and surrendered to God.  
What are you going through right now that might be God trying to get your attention?
  
12. What are you going to do differently because of studying this lesson?



**GOD IS MY FRIEND! NOT  
YOURS!  
JONAH 3:1-4:11**

Does this scene look familiar? If you have ever been a teenager, or been around teenagers, you have probably seen something like this. I don't know what it is about us, but we seem to be very possessive when it comes to our friends. It is almost like we think being our friend precludes a person from being anyone else's friend. With the exception of imaginary friends, I have never really found this to be true. Most of us can have multiple friends, but don't tell that to these two guys!

Our lesson today is much like this picture. Jonah had been rescued from the depths of the ocean by a great fish. He had spent three days and nights in the belly of the fish. In that time, he had prayed and asked God to forgive him and to allow him to continue on the journey God had called him. In chapter three,

Jonah will finally make it to Nineveh and will preach and will have one of the greatest evangelistic campaigns of his day, but he was not happy because he thought God should only be his friend and that everyone else deserved God's wrath and vengeance. Jonah missed the entire point of his ministry.

If we are not careful, we will forget where God saved us from and will begin to look at others and judge whether or not they are worthy of God's friendship. Oddly enough, at this point, we are acting more like His enemies than those that have found His grace to be sufficient. Just as God had to teach Jonah about His grace and love and mercy, maybe we need a refresher as well.

Have you ever been watching the news and been glad that someone got what was coming to them? If so, describe it below:

Has God given you what was coming to you for your past sins? How did this make you feel?

### **Consider it**

1. What did God tell Jonah to do? (3:1-4)
2. How did Jonah respond this time? (3:1-4)
3. How large was Nineveh? (3:1-4)
4. What message did Jonah deliver? (3:1-4)
5. How did the people respond to Jonah's message? (3:5-10)
6. How did the king respond to Jonah's message? (3:5-10)
7. What instructions did the king give the people? (3:5-10)
8. For what did the king hope? (3:5-10)
9. How did God respond to the Ninevites? (3:5-10)
10. How did Jonah respond to God's response? (4:1-4)
11. Why did Jonah say he had not wanted to go to Nineveh? (4:1-4)

12. How did Jonah describe God's character? (4:1-4)

13. What question did God ask Jonah? (4:1-4)

14. How did Jonah respond to God's question? (4:5-8)

15. How did God provide comfort for Jonah? (4:5-8)

16. How did God withdraw the comfort? (4:5-8)

17. How did God add to Jonah's misery? (4:5-8)

18. How did Jonah respond to God? (4:5-8)

19. What was Jonah upset about? (4:9-11)

20. What was God concerned about? (4:9-11)

## **Comprehend It**

1. Why did God reiterate His command to Jonah?
2. Did Jonah obey God or not? Explain your answer.
3. Why did God mention the size and population of the city?
4. Why was it significant that the news of Jonah's message traveled from the common man to the king instead of the other way around?
5. How did God's response to Nineveh compare to Jonah's?
6. Twice Jonah asked God to let him die. Why did he go to such extremes?
7. Three times God uses the word "appointed" to describe his activity in the comfort and removal of comfort from Jonah. What was He communicating through the use of this word?
8. What was the motivation for Jonah's concern for the vine?
9. What was the motivation for God's concern for Nineveh?
10. Summarize Jonah's objection to saving Nineveh.

11. Summarize God's response.

12. A wise man once said, "I should not be amazed that God would save some and not others, but I am amazed that God would save ANY because we all deserve destruction." How does this statement apply to this book of the Bible?

### **Connect It**

1. Has God ever done something for you that others would consider a blessing, but you did not feel that way? If so, describe it.
  
2. Why did you see things differently than others?
  
3. Have you ever shared the gospel with someone that actually prayed to surrender their life to Christ? If so, how did it make you feel?
  
4. Can you imagine not feeling this way?
  
5. Considering that Nineveh would be destroyed just a few short years from this instance, how would you rate their repentance?
  
6. Why did God still refrain from destroying them if He already knew this?
  
7. What does this tell us about the character of God?

8. How do many Christians act similarly to Jonah and his attitude towards Nineveh?
  
9. Based on these passages, how does God desire us to act?
  
10. In what ways do many Christians act similarly to Jonah and his attitude towards the vine?
  
11. Based on these passages, how does God desire us to act?
  
12. What needs to change as a result of studying this lesson?
  
13. What needs to change as a result of studying this book?

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