

# Jonah

# A brief overview-

God tells his prophet Jonah to take a message of his judgment *against* Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire.



Jonah refuses God's call and boards a ship in the opposite direction.

God sends a storm that threatens the ship. Jonah asks the sailors to throw him into the sea so the storm, and God's wrath would quit attacking the ship.

A giant fish swallows Jonah and takes him to dry land. While in the fish Jonah seems to have a change of heart and offers prayers of thanksgiving to God for his salvation.<sup>2</sup> (2:1-9)

# The Story Continues

Once again God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh and announce the impending doom that is to destroy the city.

The Ninevites believe Jonah, they fast, pray and repent.

God withholds his judgement on Nineveh. The city and all its inhabitants are saved.

Jonah becomes angry with God. He hopes that God will change his mind and punish the city. He goes outside the city to wait and watch what God will do, hoping God will change his mind.



# God makes this a teaching moment

First God makes a bush to grow up over the prophet's head to protect him from the hot sun.

Then God sends a worm to kill the bush.

When Jonah complains about the loss of the bush, God taunts him in 4:10-11.

Then the LORD said, “You are concerned over the gourd plant which cost you no effort and which you did not grow; it came up in one night and in one night it perished. <sup>11</sup> And should I not be concerned over the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot know their right hand from their left, not to mention all the animals?” (4:10-11)



# Jonah is a very hopeful story..

## What do we learn from this story?

1. God uses **imperfect** and **unlikely** people to fulfill his purpose and to bring about salvation.
2. God is the God of *all creation and all people*.
3. *God believes in giving second chances.*
4. *Salvation is available to all who pray and repent.*

**Jonah stresses the *Mercy of God* even for those who are not the “chosen people”**

In Jonah, Ninevites who did even not know YHWH acknowledge the authority and power he has and honor him as God.

This story challenges the thinking of Ezra and Nehemiah who demanded that the men in the post-exilic period divorce their pagan wives for fear they might lead them to worship other gods. The thought that these same wives might come to know God through these marriages is not considered. (Ezra 9:1-10:44)

**Is Jonah historical or merely a parable?  
We do not know for certain.**

Evangelical and conservative Biblical Scholars believe it is an *historical* account. *(The Expositors Biblical Commentary)*

Catholic Biblical Scholars (and many others) believe Jonah is a parable or didactic story that helps to explain how God works in our lives and in history.

*(The Jerome Biblical Commentary, Collegeville Bible Commentary)*

## A Jewish perspective- *(Anchor Bible Commentary )*

Jonah was indeed a prophet from the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. who is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25.

Jonah was *not* a writing prophet.

There were many non-scriptural stories and legends that circulated about the prophet Jonah that survived in oral tradition for generations.

This story was written about Jonah by an anonymous writer probably during the exilic or post-exilic periods. It is written in the third person.





Who is this Jonah?

His book is part of the scroll of 12 minor prophets.



In 2 Kings 14:25, there is a prophet named Jonah:

He, (Jeroboam II), was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Dead Sea, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, *spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher.*

*Little else is known of Jonah other than this...*<sup>9</sup>

# Who is Jonah?

A prophet to King Jeroboam.

A reluctant prophet.

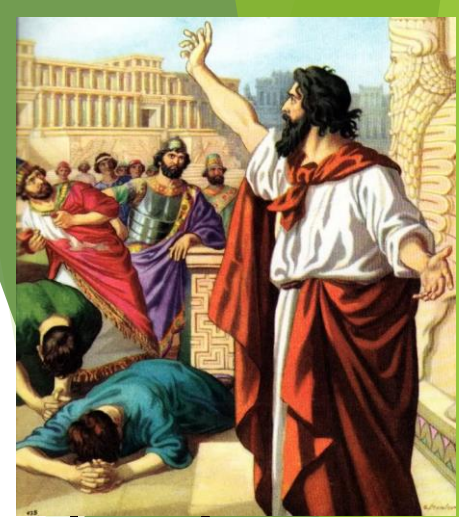
Not a perfect man, he attempts to run away from his commission.

He is blinded by his hatred and fear.

Jonah is an instrument of God's mercy and salvation.



**Jonah is clearly different from other prophets.**



Most of the prophetic books include a series of prophetic utterances; the word of God is revealed through the voice of the prophet.

Jonah's prophetic message to Nineveh is quite brief!  
"Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed!" (3:4)

**Irony and satire** make this a humorous story. Not only does Jonah *not react* as one would expect, but *neither do the sailors or the Ninevites*.

# Why does Jonah hate the Ninevites?

Assyria began its conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel around the year 740 B.C.

1 Chronicles 5:26 - “So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, the spirit of Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and he took them into exile, namely, the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and brought them to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the river Gozan, to this day.”

These northern tribes, located east of the Jordan River, were the first ones conquered by Assyria. **Jonah both hated and feared Israel’s enemy.**

# Assyria carried away the “lost tribes” of Israel.

In 722 BC, the capital city, Samaria, was overtaken by the Assyrians.

2 Kings 17:5-6 notes that, “in the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and *he carried the Israelites away to Assyria..*”

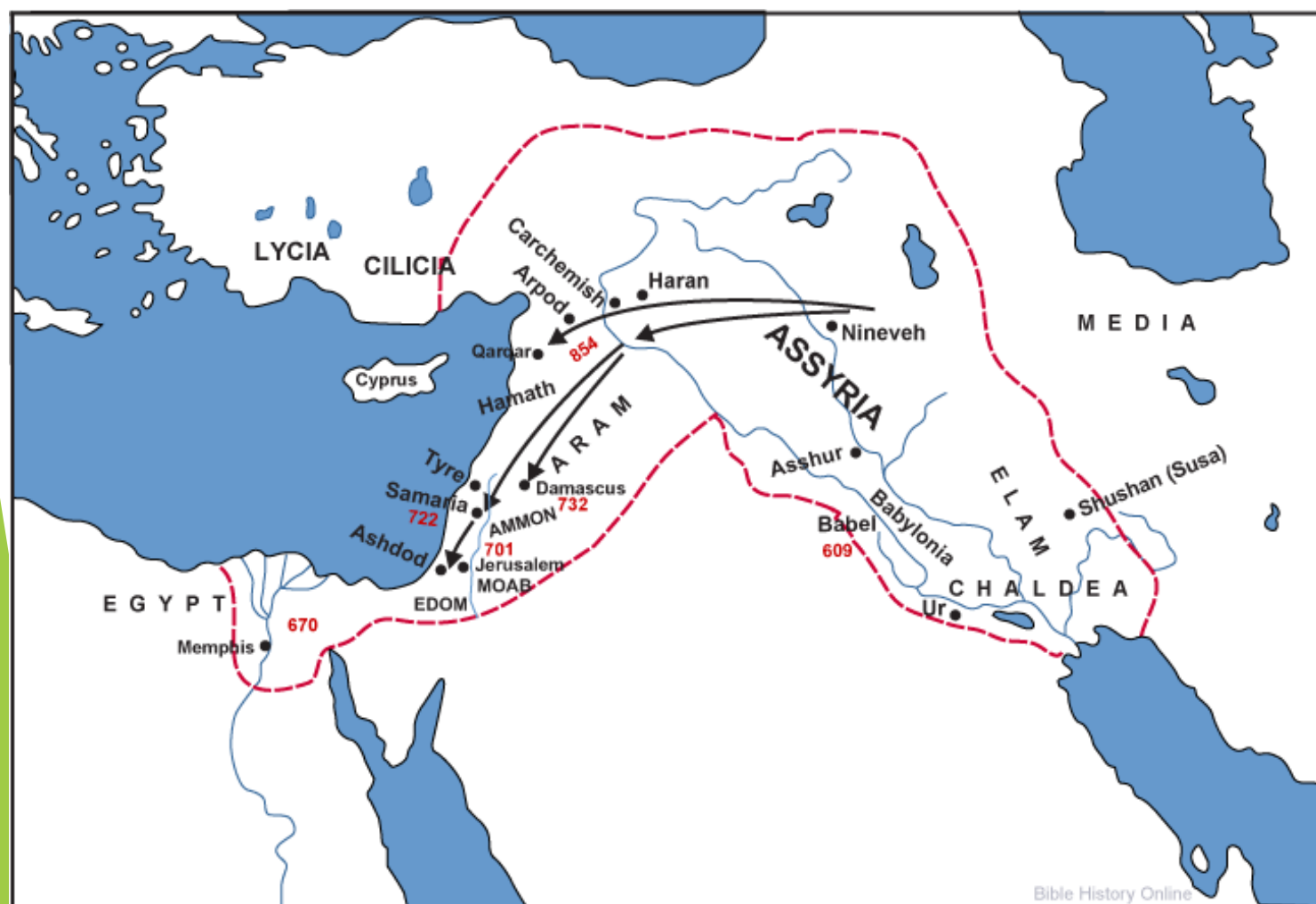
In 701 BC the Assyrians marched south into Judah; however, they were unable to capture Jerusalem due to the Lord’s intervention (2 Chronicles 32:22).

# Exile of the conquered ..

The Assyrian king Tiglathpileser III strengthened Assyria and established it as a great empire to be reckoned with. He also introduced a very interesting way of dealing with conquered peoples. *It's called exile.*

The Assyrians took the indigenous people, moved them someplace else, and brought others in to take their place. By the time the exiles figure out where they were, decades passed, they assimilated into their new culture and they didn't have the ability or the means to revolt.

# Map of Assyrian Conquests



In 702 B.C. Nineveh became capital of the Assyrian Empire. Nineveh soon became one of the largest cities of the ancient Near East. The Assyrian Empire ultimately embraced the lands of Armenia, Media, Babylonia, Elam, Mesopotamia, Syria, Israel, Judah, and the northern portion of Egypt

# What is the “sign of Jonah”?

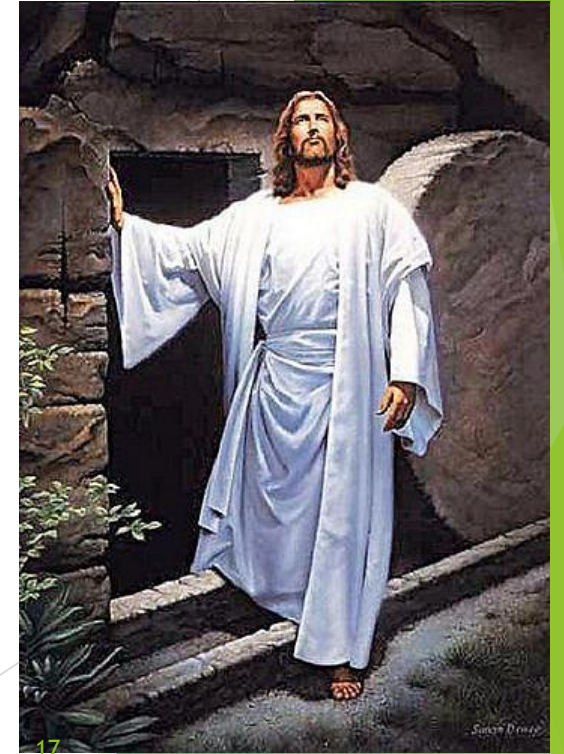
## Matthew 12:38-41

- ▶ Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” He said to them in reply, “An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. At the judgment, the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and there is something greater than Jonah here.



# Jesus uses the story of Jonah to foretell his own resurrection.

- ▶ Jonah was in the belly of the “big fish” for three days then emerged in Nineveh to participate in their salvation.
- ▶ Jesus was in the tomb for three days. He rose on the third day to reveal his resurrection and ours from death to new life.



# So what should we take away from this study?

1. God uses **imperfect** and **unlikely** people to fulfill his purpose and to bring about salvation.
2. God is the God of *all creation and all people*.
3. *God believes in giving second chances.*
4. *Salvation is available to all who pray and repent.*
5. *Also God is a God of mercy.*

# Let us pray- Jonah's Prayer

## Jonah 2:3-10

- ▶ Out of my distress I called to the LORD,  
and he answered me;  
From the womb of Sheol I cried for help,  
and you heard my voice.  
4 You cast me into the deep, into the heart of  
the sea,  
and the flood enveloped me;  
All your breakers and your billows  
passed over me.  
5 Then I said, "I am banished from your sight!  
How will I again look upon your holy temple?"  
6 The waters surged around me up to my neck;  
the deep enveloped me;  
seaweed wrapped around my head.
- ▶ 7 I went down to the roots of the mountains;  
to the land whose bars closed behind me forever,  
But you brought my life up from the pit,  
O LORD, my God.
- ▶ 8 When I became faint,  
I remembered the LORD;  
My prayer came to you  
in your holy temple.  
9 Those who worship worthless idols  
abandon their hope for mercy.  
10 But I, with thankful voice,  
will sacrifice to you;  
What I have vowed I will pay:  
deliverance is from the LORD.