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**INTRODUCTION TO JONAH**

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**Who wrote the book?**

The book of Jonah, written primarily in the third person, does not explicitly name the prophet as the author of his own account, but we have no reason to doubt either the inspiration or the historical veracity of the book. Identified in verse 1 as the son of Amittai, Jonah came from a town called Gath-hepher, near Nazareth in the area that later came to be known as Galilee ([2 Kings 14:25](https://biblia.com/bible/nlt/2%20Kings%2014.25)). This makes Jonah one of the few prophets who hailed from the northern kingdom of Israel.

**Where are we?**

During Jonah’s years as a prophet, Israel stood tall among the nations, though in a political rather than a spiritual sense. The reign of Jeroboam II (793–753 BC), who was an evil king before the Lord, saw Israel’s borders expand to their greatest extent since the time of Solomon. Increased prosperity resulted in a materialistic culture that thrived on injustice to the poor and oppressed, one of the key messages of Jonah’s prophetic contemporary, Amos.

However, rather than direct Jonah to prophesy to his own people, God commissioned him to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. At first unwilling to make the journey northeast to deliver God’s message, Jonah turned and aimed for the farthest westward point known to him—Tarshish, located in modern-day Spain. After God eventually turned Jonah in the right direction, the prophet obediently prophesied to the people of Nineveh while Ashurdan III (772–754 BC) sat on the throne of Assyria. Though Assyria had been in a politically weakened state for some time, by the time of Jonah their cruelty to captives and other undesirables was well-known in Israel, creating an obvious need for Jonah’s message of repentance.

**Why is Jonah so important?**

Jonah was one of only four writing prophets that Jesus mentioned by name during His earthly ministry (Isaiah, Daniel, and Zechariah were the others). But Jonah received more than a mere mention. Jesus actually identified Himself with the prophet’s three-day sojourn in the belly of the great fish, noting it as a foreshadowing of His own death, when Jesus would spend three days “in the heart of the earth,” before His resurrection ([Matthew 12:39–41](https://biblia.com/bible/nlt/Matt%2012.39%E2%80%9341)). Jesus’s identification with the prophet at the lowest point of Jonah’s life finds echoes in the book of Hebrews, where it teaches that Jesus “had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest” ([Hebrews 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/nlt/Heb%202.17)). The book of Jonah stands as an important link in the prophetic chain, giving readers a glimpse of Christ’s death and resurrection hundreds of years before they actually occurred.

**What's the big idea?**

When the call of God came to him, Jonah could not see beyond his own selfish desire for God to punish the Assyrians. How could God want him to take a message of mercy to such people? Before Jonah could relay God’s message, he had to be broken. He had to learn something about the mercy of the Lord. Through his flight to Tarshish, his shipwreck, and his time in the great fish, Jonah was convinced in a powerful way that all salvation comes from the Lord ([Jonah 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/nlt/Jonah%202.9)). And because of God’s supreme power, only God decides where to pour out His salvation and His mercy (4:11).

**How do I apply this?**

Do you ever find yourself fighting God—your desires pulling you one way, God’s desires pulling you another? Jonah found himself in that very position, but his own desire won out over God’s for a time. Or so he thought. As we often see in our own lives, God accomplished His purposes through Jonah even though it meant God doling out a heavy dose of humility on a prideful and unwilling heart.

While Jonah eventually departed and proclaimed God’s message, the lesson of his story does not end there. Jonah prophesied to Nineveh but he wasn’t happy about it ([Jonah 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/nlt/Jonah%204.1)). Herein we find another touchstone for our lives: aligning our desires with God’s is always a process. Just because we go through the motions of following God’s will does not mean our hearts are aligned with His. God wanted Jonah’s actions *and* his heart. He wants ours as well.