

Old Testament Survey

Jonah

The Meaning of Jonah

The name Jonah means “dove.” He is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 as having predicted the conquests of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.). In the book of Jonah we find that God’s mercy is extended to even pagan nations if they will repent.

General Outline of Jonah

- I. God’s Commission to Jonah Rejected - Jonah 1:1-3
- II. Jonah’s Flight and God’s Pursuit - Jonah 1:4-17
- III. Jonah’s Prayer for Deliverance - Jonah 2:1-10
- IV. God’s Commission Renewed: Jonah Preaches to Nineveh - Jonah 3:1-9
- V. Jonah’s Grief Over Nineveh’s Repentance and God’s Reply - Jonah 3:10-4:11

Time of Composition

1. The author is not named, but it is fair to assume that the author is Jonah himself some time after the events. That would place its writing right around 760 B.C.
2. Liberal scholars date the book around 460 B.C. by seeing it as an attempt to counter the narrow, nationalistic teaching of Ezra and Nehemiah. Samaritans were being excluded from Jewish life at that time, and the author of Jonah wanted to speak against that.

The basis for this statement is pure speculation and founded in an evolutionary approach to the development of the Jewish religion.

3. Some attempt to allegorize Jonah. For example, the whale’s belly represents the Babylonian captivity, Jonah represents Israel, and the sea the Gentiles.

Again, there is no proof for this interpretation. The book of Jonah itself is hardly written as an allegory. There is no evidence in Jonah itself that the events described were anything other than real events. Even Christ substantiated the accuracy of Jonah in Matthew 12:40-41.

4. In all cases, the liberal critic’s interpretation of Jonah, as well as Ruth, is founded in the evolutionary idea of the development of Israel’s religion and is based in their own speculative and anti-supernaturalistic approach to the Bible.

Historical Objections to Jonah’s Authenticity

1. It is inconceivable that the King of Assyria would be mentioned as merely the King of Nineveh by a Jewish author in Jonah’s supposed time.

Every other secular author in the ancient world knew that Nineveh was the capitol of Assyria. It is folly to assume that the writer of Jonah did not know this as well. Furthermore, in 1 Kings 21:1 Ahab is referred to as the “king of Samaria” although he is also the king of Israel. Benhadad, in 2 Chronicles 24:23, is referred to as the “king of Damascus.” Apparently, the identification of the king with the capitol city of his kingdom was commonly used.

2. Nineveh is spoken of in the past tense, and therefore must have been destroyed by the time of the writing of Jonah.

However, the writer of Jonah most likely was referring to the fact that Nineveh had already become a large city by his time, and this is most accurately conveyed in the past tense.

3. Nineveh is much too large according to the author of Jonah. In Jonah 3:3-4 we find that it took three days to walk through the city because of its size. That is inconceivable for a city of that time.

However, Jonah states that it was his preaching mission that took three days, not that it took him three days to walk non-stop through the city. Also, it may have been that the usage of Nineveh referred to the suburbs as well and not just to the enclosed city itself.

4. No heathen city like Nineveh would have so easily repented as found in Jonah.

This is true, however, the power of God was behind this mission and it was God that brought a sense of doom and gloom to the city and made it receptive to hear Jonah's message.

5. On a positive note, if the king of Assyria at this time was Adad-Nirari III (810-783 B.C.), then the city would have been somewhat prepared for Jonah's message. This king promoted the worship of a single god, Nebo, and was therefore more monotheistic than any others.

Integrity of the Text of Jonah

1. Liberal scholars regard Jonah as being a composite of several sources. Jonah's psalm of thanksgiving in Jonah 2:2-9 is regarded as being added later because Jonah apparently gave this before being vomited out on dry land and because it says Jonah prayed (*hitpallel*) while the rest of the psalm is that of thanksgiving.

Grasping at straws here. Praise is a part of prayer and Jonah's thanks here is thanks for not drowning.

2. Eissfeldt saw Jonah as the collection of two legends. The first was Jonah's disobedience to God's command and the second was his controversy with God as seen in Jonah 4.

Again. Where is the proof for this. Eissfeldt also saw the swallowing of Jonah by the whale as mere legend also since he did not think this was possible. However, further research bears out the possibility of a man being swallowed by a whale and surviving.