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# Introduction to the Book of Jonah
# from a Messianic Jewish Perspective

*To my son Brian. He has learned that **ADONAI** is the **God** of second chances.*




## The Use of the New International Version

Because I am writing this commentary on **Jonah** from a Jewish perspective, I will be using *the New International Version* unless otherwise indicated. There will be times when I substitute Hebrew for English names using the Complete Jewish Bible by David Stern. But generally I will be using the NIV translation for the Jewish perspective.

## The use of ADONAI

Long before **Yeshua's** day, the word **ADONAI** had, out of respect, been substituted in speaking and in reading aloud for **God's** personal name, the four Hebrew letters *yud-heh-vav-heh*, variously written in English as **YHVH**. **The Talmud (Pesachim 50a) made it a requirement not to pronounce Tetragrammaton**, meaning the four-letter name of **God**, and this remains the rule in most modern Jewish settings. In deference to this tradition, which is unnecessary but harmless, I will be using **ADONAI** where **YHVH** is meant.[1] In ancient times when the scribes were translating the Hebrew Scriptures, they revered the name of **YHVH** so much that they would use a quill to make one stroke of the name and then throw it away. Then they would make another stroke and throw that quill away until the name was completed. **His**

name became so sacred to them that they started to substitute the phrase ***the Name***, instead of writing or pronouncing **His Name**. Over centuries of doing this, the actual letters and pronunciation of **His Name** was lost. The closest we can come is **YHVH**, with no syllables. The pronunciation has been totally lost. Therefore, the name Yahweh is only a guess of what the original name sounded like. Both **ADONAI** and **Ha'Shem** are substitute names for **YHVH**. **ADONAI** is more of an affectionate name like *daddy*, while **Ha'Shem** is a more formal name like *sir*.

## The use of TaNaKh

The Hebrew word **TaNaKh** is an acronym, based on the letters **T** (for "**T**orah"), **N** (for "**N**evi'im," or the Prophets), and **K** (for "**K**etuvim," or the Sacred Writings). It is the collection of the teachings of **God** to human beings in document form. The term "Old Covenant" implies that it is no longer valid, or at the very least outdated. Something old, to be either ignored or discarded. But **Jesus** Himself said: **Don't think I have come to abolish the Torah and the Prophets, I have not come to abolish but to complete (Matthew 5:17 CJB).** I will be using the Hebrew acronym **TaNaKh** (sometimes I might use the phrase the Old Covenant when comparing something to the New Covenant) instead of the phrase, the Old Testament throughout this devotional commentary.

## The Author

The book of **Jonah** was almost certainly written originally by the prophet himself. The name **Jonah**, or **Yonah** in the Hebrew, means *dove*, although, throughout the book **he** tends to act more like a hawk than a *dove.* **He** was **a servant of the LORD** from **Gath Hepher**, which by ancient tradition, is identified with Hirbet ez-Zerra, five kilometers northeast of Nazareth **(Second Kings 14:25)**, and a town in **the tribe of Zebulun (Joshua 19:10** and **13). Yonah** lived when **Jeroboam II** was king of the northern kingdom of Isra'el **(Second Kings 14:23-25). Jonah's** prophecy that Israel's boundaries would expand under Jeroboam came true. This **prophet**, a **Hebrew (1:9)** and **the son of Amittai**, was the only prophet in the TaNaKh to run from **God**. **Yonah** was one of four prophets in the TaNaKh whose ministries were referred to by Christ **(Matthew 12:41; Luke 11:32).** The others were Elijah **(Matthew 17:11-12)**, Elisha **(Luke 4:27)** and **Isaiah (Matthew 15:7). Jonah** had some parallels to **his** immediate predecessors Elijah **(First Kings 17-19, 21; Second Kings 1-2)** and **Elisha (Second Kings 2-9** and **13),** who ministered to Isra'el and also were called to Gentile missions in Phoenicia and Aram.

Some have suggested that **Yonah** was not the author of the book because **he** is referred to in the third person **(1:3, 5, 9, 12, 2:1, 3:4, 4:1, 5, 8-9)**. But this is not a strong argument. Moshe, author of the Torah, often used the third person when describing **his** own actions. Also **Isaiah (Isaiah 37:21, 38:1, 39:3-5)** and **Daniel (Daniel 1:1** to **7:1)** sometimes wrote of themselves in the third person. So no one would have been able to write about his unique experiences except **Jonah** himself.

## Date

Since **Second Kings 14:25** relates **Yonah** to the reign of Jeroboam II, the events in the book of **Jonah** took place sometime in Jeroboam's reign (793-753 BC). Jonah's prophecy about Israel's boundaries being extended may indicate that he made that prophecy early in Jeroboam's reign. This makes **Jonah** a contemporary of both **Hosea** and **Amos**, and probably lived during the reign of the Assyrian king Ashur-dan III (772-754 BC). **Jonah's** reference to **Nineveh** in the past tense **(3:2)** has led some to suggest that **the son of Amittai** lived later, after the city's destruction in 612 BC. However, the tense of the Hebrew verb can just as well point to **the city's** existence in **Yonah's** day.

## Historical Setting

Jeroboam II, in whose reign **Jonah** prophesied, was the most powerful king in the northern kingdom of Isra'el **(Second Kings 14:23-29)**. Earlier **the Assyrians** had established supremacy in the Near East and secured tribute from Jehu (841-814 BC). However, after crushing the Arameans, **the Assyrians** suffered a temporary decline because of internal dissension. In the temporary setback of **Assyrian** imperialistic hopes, Israel's Jeroboam was able to expand his nation's territories to their greatest extent since the time of David and Solomon by occupying land that formerly belonged to Aram (northeast toward Damascus and north to Hamath).

However, the religious life of Isra'el was such that **God** sent both **Hosea** and **Amos** to warn of impending judgment. Jeroboam changed the worship from **God** to golden calves, place of worship from Jerusalem to Dan, the priests from Levites to all sorts of people and the date of the feast of Booths from the seventh to the eighth month **(First Kings 12:26-33)**. Therefore, as a result of the northern Kingdom's stubbornness, the nation would fall under **God's** chosen instrument of wrath, a Gentile nation from the east. **Amos** warned that **God** would send Isra'el **into exile beyond Damascus (Amos 5:27). Hosea** specifically delineated the ravaging captor as **Assyria**: **Will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to**

**repent (Hosea 11:5).** So **Assyria,** then in temporary decline, would awake like a sleeping giant and devour the northern kingdom of Isra'el as its prey. This prophecy was fulfilled in 722 BC when Sargon II carried the northern Kingdom into captivity **(Second Kings 17).** In addition, **Assyria** also brought **Assyrian** people into Isra'el and eventually intermarrying with them and assimilating them into **the Assyrian** culture **(Second Kings 17:24)**. The people in the southern kingdom of Judah deeply resented this and considered their northern brethren to be "half-breeds" (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click Gw – The Parable of the Good Samaritan**). The prophecies of **Hosea** and **Amos** may explain **Jonah's** reluctance to preach in **Nineveh. He** might have feared **he** would be used to help the enemy that would later destroy **his** own nation.

**Nineveh** was located on the east bank of the Tigris River, about 550 miles from Samaria, capital of the northern Kingdom. **Nineveh** was large and, like Babylon, was protected by an outer wall and an inner wall. The inner wall was 50 feet wide and 100 feet high. Before Jonah arrived at this seemingly impregnable fortress-city, two plagues there (in 765 and 759 BC) and a total eclipse of the sun occurred on June 15, 763. These were considered signs of divine anger and may help to explain why **the Ninevites** responded so readily to **Jonah's** message, around 759 BC.[2]

## Acceptance in the TaNaKh

The Jews apparently accepted the book of **Yonah**, with all its supernatural aspects, as true and authoritative right from the start. It was included as canonical among the books of the prophets, even though (alone among all these books, from **Isaiah** through **Malachi**) it contained no prophecies except the one in **Jonah 3:4** proclaiming the imminent doom of **Nineveh**. That prophecy was not fulfilled until much later, of course, because **the people** of **the city** of **Nineveh** did repent at that time.[3]

## Jonah as a Type of Christ

The story of **Yonah** is a fascinating tale of adventure that at first seems so incredible that few people take it seriously enough to realize that it is a true story. **Jonah** was a real man; a true prophet of **God** who died and was resurrected after **his** body spent three days and nights in the belly of **a great whale**. Then **he** returned to **his** prophetic ministry, preaching so powerfully against the wickedness of **the Assyrians** in **Nineveh** that the total population of **the Assyrian** triangle of about 600,000 (made up of **Nineveh** and **her** satellite **cities** of **Rehoboth Ir,**

**Calah** and **Resen**) repented and turned to **God**. These real life adventures of **the reluctant prophet** are presented in such a matter-of-fact way that it clearly has the ring of truth, even without **Christ's** testimony. **Jonah is identified as a type in the B'rit Chadashah** (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Mc – The Resurrection of Jesus: The Second Sign of Jonah**). **All this is confirmed by the Lord Jesus Christ and has thereby become a striking foreshadowing in terms of His willingness to die for others, His shed blood, His descent into sh'ol, and His bodily resurrection. Consequently, there are seven different ways in which Yonah is pictured as a type of our Lord in this short book. These similarities will be woven into the fabric of the narrative as we proceed through our study.**

## Themes

**God** is sovereign. **He** controlled the weather and the great whale to achieve **His** ends. **God's** message is for the whole world, not just people we like or who are similar to us. **God** requires genuine repentance. **He** is concerned with our heart and true feelings, not good deeds meant to impress others. Finally, **God** is forgiving. **He** forgave **Jonah** for his disobedience and he forgave **the Ninevites** when **they** turned away from **their** wickedness.

## Applications

First, this book teaches the universality of **God**; He is the **God** of both the Jews and the Gentiles. Secondly, it shows us **ADONAI's** willingness to save Gentiles as well as Jews. Thirdly, it teaches the principle of delayed judgment. Eventually, **Nineveh** did suffer a judgment, and the prophet **Nahum** gives us the details of **Nineveh's** destruction. Of course, **Nahum's** prophecy is the one **Yonah** would have preferred to give, but that was **God's** will for **Nahum**, not **Jonah**. Sometimes **God** will delay judgment because of repentance. Fourthly, **YHVH** will not throw aside **His servant** because of unfaithfulness. Although **Jonah** was faithless, **God** still responded to him in mercy. Fifth, it teaches the nature of ministry; the result may not be what one expects. One might expect good results and get bad ones, or one might expect bad results and get good ones. But, whether they are good or bad, **HaShem** is responsible for the results. Sixth, a believer should not react to the grace given to another believer without remembering the grace that was given to him or her. It must be remembered that **God** deals differently with different believers.[4]