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Jonah's Authenticity and Historicity



Although the majority of modern secular scholars prefer to view **Jonah** as fictional, this is a relatively recent development. Only in the past one hundred years has there been a marked departure from what was once the almost unanimous opinion that the events described actually occurred. The fact that generations and generations of scholars and writers were convinced that the author of **Yonah** did not intend to write fiction argues against the modern view that the form or style of the narrative conveys this very impression. Were these earlier generations completely blind to features that we are asked to believe are so obviously apparent? Did these earlier writers not live and study in an environment much closer to that of the author of **Jonah** than we do? And if so, would they not have been more attuned to the generic signals of an ancient narrative? With these factors in mind, we must surely expect good reasons for ignoring or rejecting the traditional interpretation of **Yonah**.[5]

Critical secular scholars with their anti-supernatural bias, have denied the authenticity of the Book of Jonah for five reasons. The rebuttal to these objections to the authenticity and historicity of **Jonah** will be in the text of the commentary and not here. **First**, critics scoff at the miracle of **the great whale** swallowing **the reluctant prophet**. Scholars, however, have demonstrated the validity of such an event (for example, A. J. Wilson, "Sign of the Prophet Jonah and

Its Modern Confirmations," *Princeton Theological Review* 25 October 1927, pages 630-642; George F. Howe, "Jonah and the Great Fish," *Biblical Research Monthly*. January 1973, pages 6-8). **Second**, some "scholars" have questioned the size **of Nineveh (3:3)** and its population **(4:11)**. **Third**, the reference to the king of Assyria as **the king of Nineveh (3:6)**. **Fourth**, some reject the book of **Yonah** because of the sudden repentance of the Ninevites **(3:5)**. And **fifth**, some scholars reject the authenticity of the book because of the rapid growth of **the leafy plant (4:6).**

Three main arguments support the historicity of the book. First, known cities are mentioned in the book, **including Nineveh (1:2, 3:2-4** and **6-7, 4:11), Tarshish (1:3, 4:2)** and **Joppa (1:3)**. **Second, Jonah** is viewed as a historical person, not a fictional character. **He** was said to be a prophet from **Gath Hepher (Second Kings 14:25)** who lived in the reign of a historical person, Jeroboam II. **Third, Yeshua** recognized the historicity of **Jonah (Matthew 12:41; Luke 11:29-30, 32),** calling **him a prophet (Matthew 12:39)** and acknowledging **his** death and resurrection from inside the sperm whale **(Matthew 12:40)**. In fact, **Jesus** based **His** call to repentance in **His** day on the validity of **Yonah's** message of repentance **(Matthew 12:41; Luke 11:29-32)**. If the story of **Jonah** is merely a parable such a literary form is extremely unusual and would be different from all the other prophetic books.[6]

However, the true root of the difficulty is the denial of the miraculous and the work of the Holy Spirit. Was the sign of **Jonah** not the death and resurrection of **the Lord Yeshua Messiah**? If we exclude the miraculous from our Bibles, how much do we have left? And more importantly, what kind of **God** do we have left? It is nothing less than shortsighted unbelief to think that the difficulty is solved by the removal of this miracle from the book of **Jonah**. The trusting child of **God** is not afraid of the miraculous. And more, this perennial scorn of the miracle of the swallowing of **Jonah** by the large sperm whale has served all too long to swallow up the central message of the book, which is that **God** is the **God** of second chances.[7]

The book is full of miracles. Note these clear miracles in the book: the storm, the selection of **Jonah** by lot as guilty, the sudden subsiding of the sea, the great whale appearing at just the right time, the resurrection of **Yonah**, **his** ejection from **the whale onto dry ground**, **the worm**, **the east wind**, and finally, the repentance of the entire **city of Nineveh**, which is more difficult to believe than **Jonah** being swallowed by **a whale**.