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What You Need to Know About the Book of Jonah

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE BOOK OF JONAH

BOTTOM LINE INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK CONTAINS THE BIGGEST FISH STORY OF ALL TIME. BUT IT ISN'T WHAT YOU THINK IT IS.

Almost everyone has heard the story of the huge sea creature that swallowed Jonah, and about Jonah's pitiful prayer for deliverance while inside its stomach (ch. 1-2). But the real fish story takes place in chapter 3. To understand this, consider an event that would transpire some seven centuries later in northern Israel: *"And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him"* (Mt. 4:18-20). In this passage Jesus taught that the "fish" God is looking to catch are sinful men, and the real "fishermen" are soul winners. In Jonah 3, after the prophet's preaching, history's greatest revival took place. In other words, Jonah caught more "fish" in his net than ever before – thus we have the greatest fish story of all time.

FACTS REGARDING THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK

1. Who? **Jonah**. He was the most famous "foreign missionary" in the Old Testament, who once attempted to run from God (Jonah 1:1-3), was then swallowed by a great sea creature (Jonah 1:17), and later conducted one of history's most successful revival campaigns (Jonah 3:1-10)!
2. What? The **Book of Jonah**
3. When and where? 785 B.C., from the land of Zebulun in northern Israel
4. Why? To call for the repentance of Nineveh
5. To whom? The wicked city of Nineveh

KEY EVENTS

1. Jonah's prayer within the sea creature and subsequent deliverance
2. The great revival in Nineveh

KEY INDIVIDUALS

1. **Jonah**: reluctant Hebrew prophet, initially swallowed by a whale, who would later preach a message of repentance in Nineveh, resulting in the entire city turning to God
2. **King of Nineveh**: unnamed ruler who set the example to his people by confessing his own sin and calling upon God for forgiveness

KEY PLACES

1. **Nineveh**: cruel and wicked capital city of the Assyrian Empire, located on the Tigris River where the reluctant prophet Jonah would eventually turn its citizens to God through his message of repentance or judgment
2. **Joppa**: a seaport of Palestine on the Mediterranean Sea where Jonah entered a ship sailing for Tarshish
3. **Tarshish**: Jonah's intended destination, a possible reference to Spain

UNIQUE FEATURES

1. The book of Jonah is one of three Old Testament books especially hated by Satan:
 - Genesis, which predicts the Incarnation of Christ from the lineage of the woman (Gen. 3:15).
 - Daniel, which predicts the Glorious Second Coming of Christ (Dan. 7:9-12) to destroy his enemies.
 - Jonah, which predicts (in type form) the Death and Resurrection of Christ (compare Jonah 2 with Matt. 12:38-41).
2. There are three basic interpretations of the book of Jonah:
 - *The mythological approach.* This is the liberal view, which would look upon Jonah as it would Robinson Crusoe, Gulliver (of *Gulliver's Travels*), or Hercules.
 - *The allegorical (or parabolic) approach.* In this view the book is merely an extended parable.
 - Jonah is really Israel.
 - The sea is Gentile nations in general.
 - The fish is the Babylonian Captivity.
 - The regurgitation is the return during Ezra's time.
 - *The literal-historical approach.* This alone is the correct view.
 - The account presents itself as actual history.
 - The Jews and early church believed it to be literal.
 - The author of 2 Kings (14:25) refers to Jonah as a historical person. His hometown is given, along with the name of his father, and the king he served under.
 - Jesus testified to the literal account of Jonah (Matt. 12:38-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32).
3. Jonah is the only biblical prophet who made only one prophecy, and that prophecy was not fulfilled! (Compare 3:4 with 3:10.)
4. He was also the only Old Testament prophet specifically commissioned to be a witness to the Gentiles, as was Paul in the New Testament (Gal. 1:16; 2:2).
5. Jonah was the only biblical prophet to run from his call by God.
6. He was one of four Old Testament prophets whose ministries were referred to by Jesus in the New Testament.
 - Jonah (Matt. 12:41)
 - Elijah (Matt. 17:11, 12)
 - Elisha (Luke 4:27)
 - Isaiah (Matt. 15:7)
7. Jonah was from Gath-heper of Zebulun (Josh. 19:13), north of Nazareth in Galilee. Thus, the Pharisees were in error concerning their statement recorded in Jn. 7:52: "*Search, and look; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.*"
8. Jonah may be compared to Simon Peter on one occasion: In Joppa, God called Jonah, a Hebrew prophet, to minister to the Gentiles. He disobeyed (Jonah 1). In Joppa, God called Peter, a Hebrew apostle, to minister to the Gentiles. He obeyed (Acts 10).

9. Jonah may be compared to John Mark on one occasion: John Mark failed God the first time but was allowed a second chance and succeeded. (See Acts 13:13; 15:36-40; 2 Tim. 4:11.) Jonah failed God the first time, but was allowed a second chance and succeeded (compare 1:2, 3 with 3:1-3).
10. The fourth chapter of Jonah along with 2 Samuel 11 are probably Scripture's two greatest examples proving the Bible is not a book edited by humans, but rather an unabridged account by God Himself.
11. According to Jewish tradition, Jonah was the son of the widow of Zarephath whom Elijah raised from the dead (1 Kings 17:8-24). In keeping with this thought, there are those who believe Jonah died in the fish's belly and was raised again (see 2:2, 6).
12. Jonah's testimony inside the fish is really a summary of the entire Bible. In despair he cried out: "*Salvation is of the Lord.*" (2:9).
13. This book, for its size, records more miracles than any other biblical book, no less than eight in 48 verses, averaging one miracle per each six verses! Note:
 - The wind (1:4)
 - The calm (1:15)
 - The sea creature (1:17)
 - The survival in the sea creatures (2:1)
 - The release from the sea creature (2:10)
 - The gourd (4:6)
 - The worm (4:7)
 - The east wind (4:8)
14. This book also shows God's foreign mission program was in existence centuries prior to the Great Commission of Matt. 28:19-20.
15. Jonah is read every year by the Jews on the Day of Atonement—Yom Kippur.
16. Finally, the book of Jonah vividly demonstrates that out of all God's vast and marvelously created universe, the only speck of matter that can say no to his Creator is man.
 - The wind obeyed him (1:4; 4:8)
 - The ocean obeyed him (1:11)
 - The fish obeyed him (1:17; 2:10)
 - The gourd obeyed him (4:6)
 - The worm obeyed him (4:7)

COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

Nahum:

- Both Jonah and Nahum's ministries involved the same city – Nineveh.
- Jonah preached repentance (God knew the city would turn to Him).
- Nahum preached judgment (God knew the city later would not turn to Him).

Habakkuk:

- Jonah, like Habakkuk, consists largely of a dialogue between God and the prophet.

TITLES FOR AND TYPES OF JESUS

1. The God of Heaven, Sea and Earth (1:9)
2. The God of Salvation (2:9)
3. The God of the Second Chance (3:1)
4. The Forgiving God (3:10)
5. The Gracious and Merciful God (4:2)
6. The Compassionate God (4:10, 11)

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