

## Background

- Jonah is mentioned in **2 Kings 14:25**, as the “son of Amittai...” and lived in the Northern Kingdom in the territory of Gath-hepher in Zebulun (**Josh. 19:13**) near the sea of Galilee.
- Jonah lived and prophesied in the time of Jereboam II (786-746), shortly before the fall of Samaria to the armies of the Assyria (722).

### 2 Kings 14:23-25

<sup>23</sup>In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, **Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel became king in Samaria, and reigned forty-one years.**<sup>24</sup>**He did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin.** <sup>25</sup>He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which **He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.**

- His contemporaries would have included Isaiah and Hosea, some of whom gave oracles against Assyria (**Isaiah 10:12-19; Zeph. 2:13-15**).
- Some scholars believe the book of Jonah is offered as a fictional narrative designed to teach spiritual lessons instead of providing an historical account.

## Message & Application

The book, more than any other prophet, is narrative. The prophetic speech does not even make one full verse “*Forty days more and Nineveh shall be overthrown!*” (**Jonah 3:4**). The book is really more about the prophet and his relationship with God, then it is about the message or the recipient, although as we will see – there are important takeaways there as well.

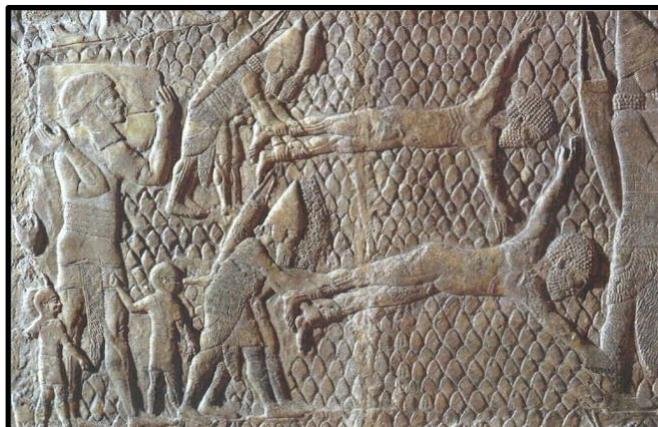
- **Disagreeing with God**

- **God’s Sense of Mercy & Judgment**

**1:2-3** Jonah does not want to preach to Nineveh (the Assyrians)

The depth of God’s mercy to the Ninevites is more fully appreciated against the backdrop of the severe cruelty that the Assyrians practiced toward other peoples in their military conquests. Their actions are reflected in the relief of Assyrian soldiers torturing Elamite prisoners of war that is from the palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh and is attested in the annals of Ashurbanipal:

*“I captured many troops alive: I cut off of some their arms [and] hands; I cut off of others their noses, ears, [and] extremities. I gouged out the eyes of many troops. I made one pile of the living [and] one of heads. I hung their heads on trees around the city.” With their blood I dyed the mountain red like wool, [and] the rest of them the ravines and torrents of the mountain swallowed. I carried off captives [and] possessions from them. I cut off the heads of their fighters [and] built [therewith] a tower before their city. I burnt their adolescent boys and girls.”* See Erika Bleibtreu, “Grisly Assyrian Record of Torture and Death,” BAR 17 (1991): 1–11.



*A relief of Assyrian torturers flaying their prisoners.*

**4:1-3** Jonah was very angry that God's mercy was given to his enemies (Also see Jesus' *Parable of the Laborers* **Matthew 20:1-16**)

- The Incredible Difference between Man's Perspective & God's Perspective

#### Jonah 4:9-11

Then God said to Jonah, "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death." <sup>10</sup>Then the Lord said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and *which* you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. <sup>11</sup>Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know *the difference* between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"

### • The Irony of Who Responds to God

- Israel Compared to Nineveh
  - Nineveh repents after one divine warning from a foreign prophet

*While it may seem improbable that the Ninevites would respond so positively to the message of Jonah, Assyria's internal troubles and economic hardships during Jonah's lifetime may have made the people of Nineveh especially receptive to the announcement of divine judgment, even from an unknown god. A solar eclipse that occurred on June 15, 763 BC, in addition to an earthquake, several famines, and political rebellions that occurred between the years 765–756, may have served as portents of divine wrath. John Walton also argues that the fact Jonah was a foreigner added greater weight to his message: "He is doing the Assyrians a favor and has gone to a great deal of trouble to do so. He has nothing to gain, so the idea that he is compelled by deity is the most plausible explanation." There is also some evidence that the city of Nineveh venerated the fish deity, Nanshe, which would have enhanced the people's esteem for Jonah's message if they were aware of the circumstances that brought the prophet to their city.*

- Israel rejects hundreds of opportunities from the divine warnings of many prophets...
- Jesus makes this same application showing that the Jews in the New Testament were repeating history by rejecting not only the warning of the prophets, but the son of God himself...(Also see **Matthew 21:33-42** the *Parable of the Landowner & Vineyard*).

#### Matthew 12:38-41; 16:4

<sup>38</sup>Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." <sup>39</sup>But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and *yet* no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; <sup>40</sup>for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup>The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here...

<sup>4</sup>An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." And He left them and went away.

- Certainly an application worthy to take seriously today for the Church

#### Matthew 21:31-32

Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. <sup>32</sup>For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing *this*, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

- **Sometimes Salvation & Suffering Are Happening At the Same Time**

- **Jonah 2:1-10**

- **From Death to Life**

- Pointing to Resurrection (**Matthew 12:40**)

- **But, it is Often a Process that Spans the Extremes of Our Emotions, Thoughts, & Actions**

- Running from; Running to
- Avoiding His Presence; Seeking His Presence
- Wish for death; Wish for Life
- Thankfulness; Complaint
- Judgment; Mercy

**Other Takeaways?**