



Summary of Jonah

Introduction

Jonah prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II, who ruled in the Northern Kingdom of Israel from 782 BC to 753 BC. Jeroboam was the grandson of Jehoahaz, who ruled in Israel from 814 BC to 798 BC. Because of the sins of Jehoahaz, Israel was oppressed by the Aramæans. However, because of the Lord's great compassion, Israel was spared destruction and delivered from this oppression. This deliverance came through a 'saviour', who may have been Adad-nirari III (810-783 BC), king of Assyria.

Despite God being angry with the sins of his people Israel, he was still God of the other nations and it was also the sin of the Assyrians which displeased him. He raised up the prophet Jonah to go to Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, to prophesy against them if they did not repent of their ways. Jonah was reluctant to answer the call of God and tried to run away but God would not allow this and Jonah ended up in Nineveh. He prophesied against this wicked nation and was aggrieved when they repented and God relented. The story concludes with the dialogue between God and Jonah, where the latter is shown the true grace of a loving God towards his creation.

Chapter One

God called Jonah and commanded that he go to prophesy in Nineveh but Jonah tried to run away and boarded a ship bound for Tarshish. The Lord brought a violent storm on the sea and the sailors feared for their lives. They found out that Jonah was the cause of their plight and he instructed them to throw him overboard to save themselves. However, they initially tried to row back to shore because they did not wish to be the cause of Jonah's death. Eventually, they relented and threw Jonah into the sea. God then sent a large fish to swallow Jonah, who remained inside the fish for three days and nights.

Chapter Two

Jonah finds himself in a perilous situation, being in the belly of the large fish. However, Jonah's poetic prayer is not a request to be saved from the fish but is thanksgiving for being saved by the fish. Verse 2 summarises the prayer: Jonah called for help and God answered. Verses 3-6a then expand on Jonah's call for help; while vv.6b-10 expand on God's answer, which results in Jonah being returned to dry land.

Chapter Three

Having repented of his own sin, Jonah is now in a place to obey God, who again instructs his prophecy to go to Nineveh, which he does. After he proclaims God's displeasure and the coming destruction on the city, the people believed and the king of Nineveh issued a decree that all the people and their livestock should fast and put on sackcloth. Because of their demonstration of repentance, God relented of the judgement that would have otherwise come upon the city.

Chapter Four

Despite the grace and mercy that God had shown to him in not punishing him for being disobedient at the outset and then saving him from the sea and the fish, Jonah now shows his anger that God has shown that same grace and mercy to the Ninevites when they repented. He even tries to blame his own disobedience on the knowledge that God would relent from punishing these pagans. So in his temper tantrum he leaves the city and sits down to observe what would happen next.

God graciously provides a plant to shelter Jonah from the sun but the next day he provides a worm to make the plant wither and sends a sultry east wind to burn Jonah. At this point Jonah wants to die just as the bush dies because he has lost his shade and it has made him uncomfortable. God then reproves Jonah for his lack of compassion for the people and animals of Nineveh, yet he wants to die because his shady bush has died.