

Jonah: An Introduction

Howard Hendricks

I. Introduction

- A. The prophets were Israel's conscience, even though Israel did not always listen to them.
- B. The two responsibilities of the prophets:
 - 1. Comfort the afflicted.
 - 2. Afflict the comfortable.
- C. Jonah lived approximately 800 years before the body of Christ.
- D. Though the story is old and Jonah is a minor prophet, his story is relevant because it is revealed.
- E. All twelve Minor Prophets only comprise 67 chapters of Scripture, while the other prophets have larger books of prophecy. Size does not determine significance.
- F. All Scripture is breathed from God and is valuable for teaching. (II Timothy 3:16-17)
- G. Some of the greatest challenges in today's church are because of the lack of knowledge about the Minor Prophets and their teachings.
- H. Critics never waste their time on secondary targets.

II. Four basic approaches to the book of Jonah.

- A. Legendary fiction – Jonah is a story but it is not historical.
- B. Parable – Story of God's mercy to the world. It is a legend with a message.
- C. Allegory – Jonah represents Israel cast into the sea of the nations. Not a historical approach.
- D. Historical – The book provides a record of what happened to the prophet Jonah.

III. Reasons for accepting the historical approach:

- A. Jonah the prophet is mentioned in the historical narrative of the Old Testament. (II Kings 14:23-25)
 - a. We are told his name.
 - b. We are told the nature of his ministry as a prophet.
 - c. We are told his genealogy.

- d. We are told the city from which he came.
- e. We are told the specific prophecy he made regarding the king.

B. Jonah bears the stamp of history.

- a. Jonah always included in the Old Testament canon, unlike many other books.
- b. From the earliest time, the Christian church also accepted the book as historical fact.
- c. Criticism of Jonah only began 100 years ago.
- d. When confronted with the supernatural, you must either submit or rationally explain it. Jesus faced the same issue from the Pharisees and chief priests about His authority to cleanse the temple. (Mark 11)

C. Jesus regarded the book of Jonah as history. (Matthew 12:38-42)

- a. Christ hinges His resurrection on the historicity of Jonah's experience.
- b. To question the historicity of Jonah is to malign Jesus Christ.

III. Overview of the book of Jonah: The Diary of Disobedience.

A. Jonah was an AWOL prophet. At the beginning, he is absent without leave. At the end, he is angry without love.

B. The first two chapters provide the first commission. The last two chapters provide the second commission.

C. The first commission begins in disobedience and ends in obedience. The second commission begins in obedience and ends in disobedience.

D. Chapter 1: Jonah runs away from God.

E. Chapter 2: Jonah runs back to God.

F. Chapter 3: Jonah runs with God.

G. Chapter 4: Jonah runs ahead of God.

H. The plot is based on the interweaving of Yahweh and Jonah.

I. God reveals His will and Jonah responds. The moment God says something you are obligated to do something.

J. Jonah is the:

1. Prodigal prophet. (Jonah 1)
2. Praying prophet. (Jonah 2)

3. Preaching prophet. (Jonah 3)

4. Pouting prophet. (Jonah 4)

III. Application: 5 statements regarding the will of God from Jonah:

A. God will always reveal His will to the believing heart.

1. God never asks us to give anything to Him until He gives the greatest gift to us. (Romans 12:1-2)

2. Do not lean on your understanding but trust God and He will direct your path.

(Proverbs 3:5-6)

3. God is far more interested in revealing His will than we are in doing it.

4. The will of God is not what I want, but asking God what He wants.

B. The will of God is found in the Word of God.

1. Saturate your mind with Scriptures. (Romans 12:1-2)

C. Ultimately, the issue is not His will but my will.

1. It is not the revelation but the response that matters.

2. If any man wills to do God's will, he will know the teaching. (John 7:17)

D. The will of God is always an expression of the love of God.

E. Disobedience to the will of God is always costly.

1. It is a waste of time, as the Israelites found at Kadesh Barnea when they decided not to invade the land. (Numbers 13)

2. The greatest regret in Christian experience is not doing the will of God.