

# Jews and jonah s ministry essay



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What is the date of Jonah and what historical situation might it address?

Introduction: story of Jonah. Jonah tells the story of a man who is sent by the lord to instruct a unfamiliar city of non-Jews to regret their sins, otherwise they be destroyed[1]. Jonah personally doesn't want to pass on this message as he doubts that they will repent and will surpass the behaviour of the Jews who don't repent[2]. This would then cause God to destroy the Jews. Jonah eventually makes it to Nineveh and calls on the people to repent, and they do[3]. Jonah becomes miserable at this point and God teaches him a lesson by showing him that even though they were not Jews, God still loves and cares for them because they still are his creations[4]. Date According to most sources the story of Jonah occurs during the first half of the eighth century B.

C. certainly the dates must fall between the times of Jeroboam (793-753 B. C) to the collapse of Nineveh (612 B. C. )[5].

In Jewish perspective the date of the assignment by god of Jonah to Nineveh is not known for it is not mentioned in the text; however it almost certainly took place during the reign of Jeroboam (the second) 646-607 B. C. E. [6] .  
Historical background During the time of Jonah's ministry, king Jeroboam-II had restored most of the northern kingdom of Israel which ended a long conflict between Israel and Damascus.

Nevertheless, the eighth century B. C appeared to be a difficult time for the smaller nations of the Middle East. The powerful force of Assyria (Iraq of the present) was the aggressor nation of the period willing to use force in order to expand its ever growing empire. Internal affairs within Assyria enabled

Israel the re-establishment of its northern borders although remaining the main threat for this period. Jonah had previously predicted this restoration of Israel by Jeroboam. Soon after these events the people of Israel, relieved from foreign strains, began to grow in confidence regarding Gods favour of his chosen nation and distanced from the religious customs. It is during this time that Jonah was assigned to go to Nineveh, while the other ministering prophets Amos and Hosea announced to the Israelites that the lord plans to exile them if they do not repent.

[7] Nineveh was the main city of Assyria and it lay on the eastern side of the Tigris, its population exceeded one hundred and twenty thousand. At first the book of Jonah may seem quite straightforward however; a deep literary analysis reveals themes and symbolic patterns that help uncover the historical situation of the time that Jonah is concerned with. Jonahs ultimate fear is the exile of the people of Israel. As Jonah is asked by the lord to call upon the people of Nineveh, “ Arise go to Nineveh that great city, and cry against her, for their wickedness has ascended before me”[8], he refuses for two reasons. Firstly, Jonah knew that the people of Nineveh could very well be easily motivated to repent and therefore, would accept Gods call and earn his mercy. This would result in the most accusing of fingers towards Israel, as God has many times before warned the people of Israel.

Prophets preceding Jonah had tried and failed in changing the ways of the people. Simply, it would be impossible to justify the northern kingdoms behaviour in the face of Nineveh’s obedience. Jonah felt that he would be the cause of a terrible outcome to his people’s fate and in order to prevent this he chose not to go. Secondly, previously Jonah had been accused of being a

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false prophet . This occurred when he had prophesied against Jerusalem and the people, following his prophecy, had repented.

Jonah had foreseen the destruction of the city which in fact had not been destructed. He had been in a similar situation and had experienced a painful outcome. If he were to go to Nineveh and predict destruction in the case of the people repenting yet again he would face accusations of false prophecy. Finally, Jonah preferred death and asked to be thrown into the sea than to harm Israel. Both the first and the third reasons above prove Jonahs devotion to his people and explain the situation he so fears. However, the second reason for avoiding Gods request raises a question. Why did the accusation of being a false prophet, matter to Jonah to the extent that he would refuse gods will? Jonah did not actually care about this matter, it was not important to him that people from Jerusalem or Nineveh called him a false prophet. His main concern was the future exile of his people, and the fact that he felt that the name of God would be sanctified by the people of Nineveh.

Jonah saw this as a turning point towards the future events that he so dreaded. A further breakdown of certain verses in the book continues to support the idea that Jonah is addressing the issue of exile of Israel. Chapter two reveals the underlying themes (or conflicts) of the book of Jonah and looks to resolving these conflicts, Jonah in conflict with God and justice versus mercy. [9] When the whale spew's out Jonah the word that is used is "vomited".

This word is used in the bible only one time previously and refers to the removal of sinful people out of Israel. The writer which could to some

opinions is Jonah, exposes the reader to the idea of exile of the Jewish people from their land. This term is used to familiarise the reader with the issue Jonah has and his conflicts and to an extent give ration to his actions. In his attempt to escape Gods order to go to Nineveh he has tried to prevent his great fear from actually occurring. If Nineveh does not repent it will be ruined, which will then save Israel from later on destruction. [10] In order to support his claim that Nineveh should not be saved Jonah raises the issue of restricting universal application of mercy. [11]He seeks shelter under a booth, this symbolises the holy temple and the difference of the Jewish nation to the universal man.

Jonah believes in the uniqueness of the Jewish people protected by their covenant this he claims is only for Jewish people. Non Jews have a different frame of guides. Even though the people of Nineveh have repented it is temporary as opposed to the Jewish repentance that last forever. The fact that God is willing to forgive Nineveh for sins they have done and accept a repentance that most probably will not last is .

In addition, Jonah knows this will lead to the exile or destruction of Israel which is not justified or merciful. Jonah was always concerned that God will apply all the levels of mercy and justice to Nineveh as he grants Israel. This clarifies that Jonah very well knew he could not escape God but wanted to emphasise that it is outside of Israel. Applications of God's mercy outside of Israel according to Jonah should be different because there is no holiness there. God's response to Jonah reveals an opposite attitude to the application mercy as explained that in Gods ' eyes' each person deserves a certain level of mercy and forgiveness . Certain issues that arise in the book <https://assignbuster.com/jews-and-jonah-s-ministry-essay/>

and are addressed are justice, mercy, and forgiveness. [12]Jonah mainly argues about the difference between the universal man and the Jewish peoples are in the covenant. As explained previously the verse that mentions Jonah being vomited on to land has proved the theme of the book and motivation for Jonah's actions.

Jonah is mainly concerned with the possibility of exile for Israel and destruction of the northern kingdom. ————— [1] Jonah 1: 2 2] Jonah 1: 3 [3] Jonah 3: 4 [4] Jonah 4: 10-11 [5] Ref 1 [6] David, Malick , ' An introduction to the book of Jonah' [7]Rabbi Meir Zlatowitz, ' JONAH/ a new translation and commentary' Artscroll Tanach series 1969/Brooklyn N. Y and <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txs/jonah.htm> [8] Jonah 1: 2 [9] Kahn, Paul, ' an analysis of the book of Jonah' Judaism;(winter 94 ) Vol. 43 Issue 1, pp. 87ff [10] ibid [11] ibid [12] Kahn, Paul, ' an analysis of the book of Jonah' Judaism;(winter 94 ) Vol. 43 Issue 1, pp. 87ff