

2. Jonah

I. Background and Context

- A. The author of the book of Jonah is anonymous, and there are no indicators elsewhere in Scripture identifying who this author may have been. Whoever wrote this book likely relied on Jonah's own retelling after his return from Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian Empire.
- B. Jonah prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II (782-753 B.C.; cf. 2 Kgs. 14-23-28) to the Ninevites.
- C. The dominant theme of the book is God's boundless compassion "not just for 'us' (Jonah and the Israelites) but also for 'them' (the pagan sailors and Ninevites)."¹
- D. Under Jeroboam's grandfather, Jehoahaz, the Israelites committed many transgressions. God thus allowed the Arameans to conquer the Israelites (2 Kgs. 13.3). Nonetheless, Israel was spared destruction and delivered from oppression (2 Kgs. 13.5). God continued to show compassion on Israel during the reign of Jeroboam, though he "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord,"² was still able to expand the borders of Israel, matching those of David and Solomon,³ this "according to the word of the LORD."⁴ "Thus Jonah witnessed firsthand the restorative compassion of God extended to his wayward people."⁵
- E. Jonah (Hebrew for "dove," see Hos. 7.11) himself is the object of God's compassion as the Son of Amittai (Hebrew for "Son of My Faithfulness"; 1.1).
- F. A convergence of historical events in this time period, including conflicts with the Arameans and Urartians, widespread famine, revolts within the Assyrian Empire, and an auspicious eclipse of the sun, may help explain why the Ninevites were "so responsive to Jonah's call to repent."⁶
- G. The city of Nineveh was perhaps "forty-eight miles in compass,"⁷ great in population⁸ and in wealth.⁹
- H. The repentance of the Ninevites is a great rebuke against Israel, as God sent many prophets to Israel, but to Nineveh only one, and at that a stranger, who preached but one sermon unaccompanied by any sign or wonder, with the threat of wrath and ruin and no calls to repentance, and yet Israel remained obstinate. The Ninevites offered no sacrifices but a broken and contrite heart.¹⁰
- I. Other major themes of the book include:
 - 1. God's sovereign control over events on the earth;
 - 2. God's determination to get his message to the nations;
 - 3. The need for repentance from sin in general;
 - 4. The need for repentance from self-centeredness and hypocrisy in particular;
 - 5. The full assurance that God will relent when people repent.¹¹
- J. Jonah is a Christ-type, and his rescue from death provides an analogy for the resurrection of Christ. Christ explicitly references Jonah when foreshadowing his own death and resurrection (Matt. 12.39-40). The repentance of the Ninevites anticipates the wide-scale repentance of the Gentiles (cf. Matt. 28-18-20, Lu. 24.47).

¹ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1229.

² 2 Kgs. 14.24.

³ 2 Kgs. 14.25.

⁴ 2 Kgs. 14.25.

⁵ *ESV Study Bible*, 1683.

⁶ *ESV Study Bible*, 1683.

⁷ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 2014, www.biblestudytools.com.

⁸ Jon. 4.11.

⁹ Nah. 2.9.

¹⁰ Henry.

¹¹ *ESV Study Bible*, 1684.

II. Outline

A. The book of Jonah unfolds over six parallel episodes which climax in a display of God's compassion.

(7) Jonah's lesson about compassion (4.5-11) <i>"Should I not pity Nineveh...?"</i>			
(3) Jonah's grateful prayer (1.17-2.10) <i>How does Jonah respond to God's grace toward him?</i>		(6) Jonah's angry prayer (4.1-4) <i>How does Jonah respond to God's grace toward others?</i>	
(2) Jonah and the pagan sailors (1.4-16) <i>How responsive are the pagan sailors?</i>		(5) Jonah and the pagan Ninevites (3.3b-10) <i>How responsive are the pagan Ninevites?</i>	
(1) Jonah's commissioning and flight (1.1-3) <i>What will happen to Jonah?</i>		(4) Jonah's recommissioning and compliance (3.1-3a) <i>What will happen to the Ninevites?</i>	



Fig. 1. The Neo-Assyrian Empire of Jonah's day, c. 760 B.C.

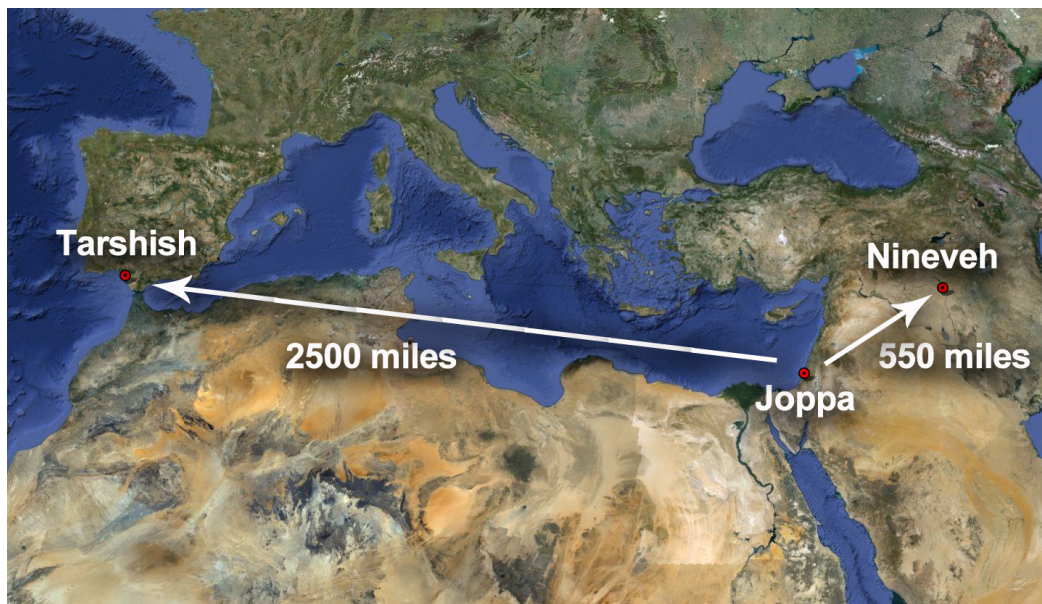


Fig. 2. A map displaying Jonah's commissioned journey to Nineveh, compared to his attempted journey to Tarshish.