

# Introduction to Jonah

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## Where is it in the Bible?

Jonah is the thirty-second book in the Christian Old Testament and is found between Obadiah and Micah. It is the fifth book of the Minor Prophets; the term “minor” refers to the length of the books, not to their importance. In the Hebrew Bible, the minor prophets follow Ezekiel at the end of the Prophets section and are grouped together in the Book of the Twelve in the same order as found in Christian Bibles

## Who wrote it?

The author of Jonah is anonymous. Although some feel that the prophet himself was the author, others argue that since the book is actually a story about the prophet it is unlikely to have been written by him.

## When was it written?

The date of the book of Jonah is uncertain. Some feel that it was written around the middle of the eighth century B.C. because they identify the main character with the prophet mentioned in 2 Kings 14:23-28. This is not likely, however, since Nineveh was not an important city at that time. Most scholars date the book to the sixth or fifth century B.C., after the Babylonian exile.

## What is it about?

Unlike other books included in the Minor Prophets, Jonah is not a collection oracles delivered by a prophet but a short story about a prophet. Jonah is called by God to preach to the wicked city of Nineveh but tries to escape from his commitment (and God) by running in the opposite direction.

## How is it structured?

- I. Jonah’s Call and Flight (1:1-16)
- II. Jonah in the Fish (1:17-2:10)
- III. Jonah Goes to Nineveh (3:1-10)
- IV. Jonah’s Lesson (4:1-11)

## What are some things to look for?

- **God’s Mercy for All Creation:** This book ends with God asking, “Should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?” (4:11) Jonah demonstrates God’s concern for all of creation, even God’s enemies. This sets the book apart from other prophetic books where Israel, Judah, and their enemies are condemned for their sins. “The basic question with Jonah is whether he can learn to accommodate his own sense of right and wrong to the realities of God’s mercy.”<sup>1</sup> If God is concerned, shouldn’t we be, too?

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<sup>1</sup> Rolf Jacobson at <http://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament.aspx?rid=19>