

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 20, Session 22, Jonah Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 20, Session 22, Jonah, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Robert Vannoy's lecture on Jonah explores the book's authorship and whether it should be understood as historical or non-historical. Vannoy cites 2 Kings 14:25 to support Jonah being a real prophet during Jeroboam II's reign. **He then examines various interpretations, including fiction, legend, allegory, and parable, highlighting that many scholars debate its genre.** The lecture presents arguments against non-historical readings, emphasizing the book's own claims, Jesus' references in Matthew 12:38-41, and the book's inclusion in the canon. **Vannoy critiques the idea that multiple miracles invalidate historicity, noting similar accounts in 2 Kings.** He further discusses how the non-historical views often stem from a disbelief in miracles or an assumption that the fish story originates in other myths.

2. 15 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 20, Session 22– Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Foundations).



**Vannoy_FoundProp
hecy_Session22.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 20, Session 22, Jonah

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Robert Vannoy's lecture on the Book of Jonah.

Briefing Document: Robert Vannoy on the Book of Jonah

Main Themes:

- **Authorship and Historical Context:** The lecture explores the traditional view that Jonah, son of Amittai, is the author of the Book of Jonah. It connects him to 2 Kings 14:25, where a prophet of the same name is mentioned as being from Gath Hopher and prophesying during the reign of Jeroboam II.
- "The book derives its name from Jonah son of Amittai. If you look at Jonah 1:1 you read there, 'The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai.'"
- "So, Jeroboam II extended Israel's borders way to the North and down to the Sea of Arabah, the Dead Sea, in accordance with a prophecy of Jonah. It seems quite clear that Jonah son of Amittai during the time of Jeroboam II is the same as the author the book of Jonah."
- **The Central Question: Historical or Non-Historical?:** A significant portion of the lecture is dedicated to examining the different interpretations of the Book of Jonah, particularly whether it should be understood as a historical account or as a non-historical narrative (fiction, legend, allegory, or parable). Vannoy acknowledges the wide range of views on this.
- "The book distinguishes itself much from the other minor prophets. Its content is not just a record of Jonah's prophecies, but it is a narrative in which the prophet is a central figure."
- "There is wide diversity of viewpoint with respect of the character of the narrative. Its religious value is recognized by almost everyone, while its historical value is often considered lacking."
- "...even the partial survey reveals a wide variety of proposals, and he footnotes each of these labels. Some say it is history, some allegory, some midrash, some a parable, some prophetic parable, some legend, some prophetic legend, some novel, some didactic fiction, some satirical, some short story, and the list goes on."

- **Critique of Non-Historical Approaches:** Vannoy presents several arguments against interpreting the book as fiction, legend, allegory, or parable. He believes there is insufficient basis to validate these views and strong reasons to reject them, primarily because:
- **The Book Alleges Historicity:** The book presents itself as historical, and unless the presence of miracles is considered evidence against it, there is no inherent reason to view it otherwise.
- "The book itself gives is no good reason for taking it as anything other than historical, unless the presence of the miraculous is considered as evidence against that."
- **Jesus' Interpretation in Matthew 12:** Jesus refers to the story of Jonah in Matthew 12:38-41, and Vannoy argues that Jesus treats Jonah's experience and the Ninevites' repentance as historical realities, drawing an analogy between them and the response (or lack thereof) of his own generation. The historical analogy would fall flat if these things did not happen.
- "Jesus places Jonah's historicity on the same plane as that of the Queen of the Sheba. He places the response of the Ninevites on the same plane as that of the people of his own time."
- "If the people of Nineveh did not repent historically at the preaching of Jonah, the analogy falls flat. It's assumed that these things happened."
- "Our Lord could not have made such a serious pronouncement unless he was firmly convinced that the Ninevites actually repented at the preaching of Jonah. A parabolic interpretation of this repentance is absolutely impossible in the light of this emphatic warning of Christ."
- **Inclusion in the Canon:** The inclusion of Jonah in the biblical canon and its historical interpretation in Jewish tradition suggest it was consistently understood as historical.
- "It is abundantly clear that its literal truth was never questioned in Jewish tradition."
- "Those then who deny the book's factual truth must bear the onus of explaining how a book so very different from the other prophetic books ever came to be included in the prophetic canon, how it was forgotten that it was symbolic or

didactic fiction, and above all how our Lord was incapable of realizing its true nature."

- "They did not regard the book of Jonah as a parable, but assumed it to be a record of real historical events."
- **Addressing Objections to Historicity:** Vannoy addresses two primary objections to the historical interpretation:
 - **The Miraculous Events:** The lecture confronts the argument that the miraculous events in Jonah are improbable or impossible, leading some to view the book as non-historical. Vannoy references John Stek's concept of the "analogy of history," suggesting that critics often judge Jonah based on general history rather than the context of redemptive history, where miracles are possible. Vannoy compares Jonah to 2 Kings 4-7.
 - "It's accumulation of eye-popping phenomenon" that makes you begin to wonder if this is really intended to be read historically."
 - "...readers who do this tend to take this out of its own context, in the context of redemptive history in which God is at work, and put it in another context of general history and then conclude it didn't happen."
- **The Fish Story:** The claim that the "fish story" is derived from myths and legends is challenged. Vannoy argues that the parallels are weak and that there's no evidence the author borrowed from those sources.
- "A third argument which must be discarded is that based on the parallels, especially of the fish story. Many scholars have been engaged in collecting parallels from non-Biblical sources. Time and again it has been asserted that the author utilized ancient myths and folk tales to compose his story."
- "There is no reason whatsoever to assume the author borrowed from such sources."
- **Problems with Allegorical and Parable Approaches:** Vannoy points out difficulties in interpreting Jonah as allegory or parable. He argues that the allegorical interpretations struggle with details, and that unlike Old Testament parables, Jonah is lengthy, lacks a clear single point, and involves a real, named historical figure.

Important Ideas/Facts:

- **2 Kings 14:25:** Key text linking the Jonah of the Book of Jonah to a known prophet from the time of Jeroboam II.
- **Matthew 12:38-41:** Jesus' reference to Jonah and the Ninevites is crucial for understanding the historical context.
- **The "Analogy of History":** John Stek's concept explaining how modern readers can misunderstand the text by applying general historical standards.
- **The role of Miracles:** One's worldview and the admission of the possibility of divine intervention is critical to how one approaches interpretation of the book.

Key Quotes:

- "Certainly, there is a strong element of the miraculous. Were the possibility of miracles not an issue the book itself gives no good reason to be taken as anything but historical."
- "The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here."
- "Let us face a simple fact. From Eichhorn onwards the denial of the book's historicity was in the first place the result of the then dominant rationalistic view of the world, in which there was no room for miracle or for Divine interference in things physical."

Conclusion:

Vannoy advocates for a historical reading of the Book of Jonah, while acknowledging the complexities and diverse interpretations surrounding the text. He critically examines the arguments for non-historical readings, highlighting the importance of considering the book within its proper historical and redemptive context, and the impact of presuppositions on interpretations.

4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 20, Session 22, Jonah

Jonah: Exploring History, Allegory, and Divine Purpose

Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to 2 Kings 14:25, what specific prophecy did Jonah deliver during the reign of Jeroboam II?
2. List three genre classifications, other than "historical", that have been assigned to the book of Jonah by various scholars.
3. What three elements within the book of Jonah do some scholars find particularly challenging to accept as historical?
4. Explain the allegorical interpretation of the book of Jonah, particularly regarding Jonah, Nineveh, and Israel's captivity.
5. According to Leslie Allen, what is at stake for some Christians regarding their view on the historicity of Jonah?
6. According to Vannoy, why is Jesus's reference to Jonah and the Ninevites in Matthew 12:41-42 a strong argument for the historical view of Jonah?
7. How does H.L. Ellison argue against non-historical readings of Jonah, referencing Jewish tradition and the inclusion of Jonah in the canon?
8. What is John Stek's critique of the "analogy of history" approach when interpreting Jonah, and what alternative does he propose?
9. What is Vannoy's response to Allen's argument about the improbability of the events within Jonah, and what alternative Old Testament example does he cite?
10. Provide an example from Greek literature of someone being saved from the belly of a sea monster.

Quiz Answer Key

1. Jonah prophesied that Jeroboam II would restore the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath in the north to the Sea of Arabah (Dead Sea) in the south. This prophecy confirmed that Jonah was a prophet during or before Jeroboam II's reign.

2. Other genre classifications include allegory, midrash, parable, legend, novel, and satirical.
3. The fish swallowing Jonah, the plant growing supernaturally, and the mass conversion of the Ninevites are the three elements most often questioned.
4. In the allegorical view, Jonah represents the people of Israel, Nineveh symbolizes the Gentile world, and Jonah being swallowed by the fish represents Israel's captivity. Jonah being cast up represents Israel's return, and their subsequent mission to bring God's word to the Gentiles.
5. Leslie Allen asserts that some Christians believe that the inspiration and authority of the book depend on its historicity. They believe that if Jonah is history, it proves that God seeks to bring all people, including Gentiles, to repentance and pardon those who repent.
6. Vannoy argues that Jesus draws a historical analogy between the Ninevites' repentance at Jonah's preaching and the lack of repentance from the people of His own time. The analogy would fall flat, he argues, if the Ninevites' repentance weren't considered a historical event.
7. Ellison argues that the book was always understood as literal truth and never questioned in Jewish tradition. He believes that it is impossible to account for how Jonah came to be regarded as historically true, since Jewish people would also have to forget its original meaning as fiction or allegory.
8. Stek believes that readers take the events within the book of Jonah out of context, where God is at work through redemptive history. He asserts that readers will, therefore, explain away biblical wonders by adhering to general history, where such miracles do not happen.
9. Vannoy says that a multitude of miraculous events are not specific to Jonah. He cites 2 Kings 4-7, which contains a series of "eye-popping" miracles similar to those in Jonah.
10. In Greek literature, Hesione, the daughter of the Trojan king, was saved from a sea monster by Hercules. Although Hercules saved her, he was not ultimately given the reward.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the various approaches to interpreting the book of Jonah (historical, allegorical, parable, etc.), outlining the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.
2. Analyze the role of miracles in the book of Jonah. How do they contribute to the narrative, and how do different interpretations (historical vs. non-historical) view these miraculous events?
3. Explore the significance of Jonah's mission to Nineveh in the context of Old Testament prophecy and the relationship between Israel and the Gentile nations.
4. Examine Jesus's use of the Jonah story in the New Testament (Matthew 12:38-41) and its implications for understanding the book's historicity and theological message.
5. Compare and contrast the book of Jonah with other prophetic narratives in the Old Testament, particularly those involving Elijah and Elisha, to highlight its unique features and potential genre classifications.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Allegory:** A story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one.
- **Analogy of History:** The principle that an event is more likely to be historical if analogous phenomena can be found in other historical contexts.
- **Apocryphal:** Biblical or related writings not forming part of the accepted canon of Scripture.
- **Canon:** The collection of books recognized as the inspired Word of God and authorized for use in religious services.
- **Didactic:** Intended to teach, particularly in having moral instruction as an ulterior motive.
- **Genre:** A category of artistic composition, as in music or literature, characterized by similarities in form, style, or subject matter.
- **Historicity:** The historical authenticity of a person or event.
- **Midrash:** An ancient commentary on part of the Hebrew scriptures, attached to the biblical text.
- **Parable:** A simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, as told by Jesus in the Gospels.
- **Redemptive History:** The theological concept that history is divinely guided toward the salvation of humanity.
- **Septuagint:** A Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, made for Greek-speaking Jews in Egypt in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC and differing from the Hebrew in several respects.
- **Verisimilitude:** The appearance of being true or real.

5. FAQs on Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 20, Session 22, Jonah, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on the Book of Jonah

- **Q1: Who was Jonah, and is he the author of the Book of Jonah?**
- The Book of Jonah derives its name from Jonah, son of Amittai. 2 Kings 14:25 identifies him as a prophet from Gath Hepher in the Northern Kingdom during the reign of Jeroboam II. This passage indicates that Jonah prophesied Jeroboam II would regain Israel's ancient boundaries, which came to pass. While the author of the Book of Jonah isn't explicitly stated, there's no compelling reason to dismiss Jonah himself as the author. However, even if someone else wrote it, the book's authenticity isn't compromised.
- **Q2: What are the different views regarding the nature of the Book of Jonah (historical vs. non-historical)?**
- There is a wide range of views on whether the Book of Jonah is historical or non-historical. The historical view takes the narrative as a factual account of events. Non-historical approaches include classifying the book as fiction, legend, allegory, or parable. These views often arise from challenges in accepting the miraculous elements of the story. However, it's also argued that the book could be didactic history (history intended to teach something).
- **Q3: What are the main arguments for considering the Book of Jonah as non-historical (fiction, legend, allegory, or parable)?**
- Those who view the book as non-historical often cite the presence of miraculous events, such as the great fish, the rapid conversion of Nineveh, and the quick growth of the plant, as improbable or impossible. Some suggest the story is a prophetic legend embellished over time. Allegorical interpretations see Jonah as representing Israel, Nineveh as the Gentile world, and the fish representing captivity. The parable view sees the story as an invented narrative designed to teach lessons.

- **Q4: What are the main arguments for considering the Book of Jonah as historical?**
- Several arguments support the historical view:
- The book itself presents itself as historical.
- Jesus refers to Jonah and the Ninevites in Matthew 12:38-41, suggesting he understood the events as historical analogies. He places Jonah's historicity on the same plane as the Queen of Sheba.
- The inclusion of Jonah in the canon of Scripture and early Jewish tradition suggests it was understood as historical.
- The Jewish people did not regard it as a parable, but assumed it to be a record of real historical events.
- **Q5: How does Jesus' reference to Jonah in Matthew 12 influence the debate about the book's historicity?**
- Jesus uses Jonah as an analogy. In Matthew 12:41, Jesus contrasts the repentance of the Ninevites at Jonah's preaching with the lack of repentance among his contemporaries. The effectiveness of this analogy rests on the assumption that the Ninevites historically repented in response to Jonah's message. If the Ninevites' repentance was not a real event, the analogy loses its force. Jesus is using a known historical event to prove a point, so if the event is in question the point he is making is in question.
- **Q6: How do views on miracles influence interpretations of the Book of Jonah?**
- A person's worldview regarding the possibility of miracles significantly affects how they interpret the Book of Jonah. Those who believe miracles are impossible or improbable may be inclined to view the book as non-historical. Conversely, those open to the possibility of divine intervention are more likely to accept the historical account, even with its miraculous elements.

- **Q7: What is the problem with using the allegorical approach to reading the Book of Jonah?**
- The allegorical approach to the Book of Jonah encounters challenges when pushed to the details. It is difficult to say that Jonah urging the crew to throw him into the sea is hardly applicable to Israel going into captivity, or that the fish is the divinely ordained means of rescuing Jonah from drowning in death, which is also hardly applicable to the captivity. Additionally, Jonah is much shorter than other texts with allegory, and Jonah does not contain an allegorical character.
- **Q8: What issues arise with the notion of the Book of Jonah as a parable?**
- Unlike typical parables, the Book of Jonah is long, is less simple, is more ambiguous and less pointed, and does not indicate a clear singular point. Also, a real person (Jonah) is the primary personality in the story. The parable genre also does not typically contain miraculous elements.