

Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the Twelve, Session 16, Jonah, Historicity Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Yates, Book of the Twelve, Session 16, Jonah, Historicity, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Gary Yates introduces session 16 of his "Book of the 12" series, focusing on the **Book of Jonah and its historicity**. The session explores the question of whether Jonah should be interpreted as a parable or a historical account, considering the plausibility of its events and the historical context. **Yates examines Old Testament references in Hosea, including the Exodus, Jacob's life, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, highlighting literary artistry in prophetic books.** He considers the plausibility of God sending a prophet to Nineveh and addresses historical issues like the absence of a specific king mentioned. **Yates ultimately argues for reading Jonah as a historical account, supported by Jonah's existence as a real prophet and New Testament references.** The study suggests that the cultural and economic conditions in Nineveh at the time may have made the Assyrians more receptive to Jonah's message, though the extent of their repentance might be overstated.

2. 24 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Yates, Book of the Twelve, Session 16 – 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 → Book of the Twelve [Minor Prophets]).



**Yates_Book12_Sessi
on16.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Yates, Book of the Twelve, Session 16, Jonah, Historicity

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. Gary Yates' lecture on the Book of Jonah:

Briefing Document: Dr. Gary Yates on Jonah - Historicity

Main Themes:

- **The Historicity vs. Parable Debate:** The central focus of this session is addressing the long-standing debate over whether the Book of Jonah should be interpreted as a literal historical account, a parable, or a combination of both. Yates acknowledges the complexity of the issue and the range of views, even among evangelical scholars. He states, *"even evangelical scholars today are going to discuss whether we should read Jonah as a historical or parable or as a combination of both in some way?"*
- **Literary Artistry and Historicity:** Yates emphasizes that the presence of literary artistry and sophisticated storytelling in the Book of Jonah does not automatically negate its potential historicity. He draws a parallel with the Gospels, stating, *"The Gospels are very artistic literary creations in presentations of the life of Jesus that does not argue against their historicity."*
- **Old Testament Allusions in Hosea:** The lecture begins with a discussion of Hosea, highlighting how the prophet interweaves references to earlier Old Testament traditions (Exodus, the patriarch Jacob, Sodom and Gomorrah, Gibeah, Baal Peor). This serves as a lead-in to understanding how the New Testament also uses typology and allusions, and how a deep understanding of the Old Testament is essential for interpreting later texts.
- **Supernatural Elements and Biblical Authority:** Yates argues against dismissing the historicity of Jonah solely based on the presence of supernatural events. He contends that doing so would create problems with interpreting other narratives throughout the Bible, including those of Elijah, Elisha, and Jesus. He asserts, *"If we have a problem with God doing supernatural events in connection with the life of a prophet, then what do we do with the stories of Elijah and Elisha that are filled with miracles...?"*

- **Contextual and Historical Plausibility:** Yates delves into the historical context of Jonah's ministry, suggesting a plausible setting during a period of Assyrian decline in the 8th century BC (specifically, 772-760 BC). He points to evidence of famines, uprisings, economic crises, and even a solar eclipse that may have predisposed the people of Nineveh to be receptive to Jonah's message.
- **New Testament Confirmation and Traditional Interpretation:** Yates highlights that Jesus references the story of Jonah in the Gospels (Matthew 12:39-41), seemingly confirming its historicity. He also notes the longstanding tradition within Jewish and Christian interpretations of reading Jonah as a historical account. He uses the example of Jesus referencing to the story of the queen of Sheba: *"He integrates it, he includes it with the story of the queen of Sheba, which is found in a historical narrative in the book of Kings. Jesus seems here to provide confirmation for the story of Jesus."*
- **The Purpose of Prophetic Messages to Foreign Nations:** Yates addresses the question of why God would send a prophet to a foreign nation like Assyria when prophetic messages were typically delivered to Israel and Judah. He suggests that while oracles against other nations were often for the benefit of God's people, the unique circumstances of Jonah's time and the potential openness of the Ninevites to the message might explain this.

Most Important Ideas/Facts:

- **Jonah as a Historical Figure:** 2 Kings 14:23-25 identifies Jonah as a real historical figure, a prophet during the reign of Jeroboam II, who prophesied the expansion of Israel's territory. Yates believes this supports the idea of the events in the Book of Jonah being a real historical narrative. He mentions, *"We do know from 2 Kings chapter 14 verses 23 to 25, we do know that Jonah was an historical figure and he was a prophet during the days of the reign of Jeroboam II."*
- **Potential Historical Accuracy:** Yates argues for the historical plausibility of certain details in the book, such as the size of Nineveh (population of around 120,000), and the possible use of Nineveh as a royal residence, even if it wasn't the primary capital at the time.
- **Nineveh's Response:** Yates points out that the Ninevites' repentance might not have been a full conversion to monotheism, but rather a pragmatic response to avert disaster.

- **Jonah as the "Anti-Prophet":** Yates highlights the satirical elements in the book, presenting Jonah as the antithesis of what a prophet should be. This adds another layer of complexity to the discussion of historicity vs. parable.
- **Conclusion: Historical Reading Favored:** Despite acknowledging the arguments for a parabolic reading, Yates concludes that the best interpretation of Jonah is as a historical account, primarily due to canonical support. He states, *"I do believe that the best reading of Jonah is to read it as a historical account."*

Quotes:

- *"So, the intimidation factor is what can we say about this book that is new or that might add something to our understanding?"* - Yates expressing the challenge of teaching about such a familiar book.
- *"There's a storm that God all of a sudden dials up as Jonah tries to flee from God."* - Yates describes some of the supernatural events in the book.
- *"If you want to pick the exact opposite example of what a prophet should look like, what a prophet should do, or how a prophet should respond, Jonah is the man."* - Yates describing Jonah as the "anti-prophet."
- *"Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left and also much cattle?"* - Yates quoting Jonah 4:11, questioning the accuracy of the population number.
- *"The preaching of Jonah in Nineveh may not be a great example of a national revival."* - Yates explaining that the people may not have fully converted.

Overall Significance:

Dr. Yates' lecture provides a nuanced and thoughtful exploration of the Book of Jonah, addressing the key interpretive challenges and offering a well-reasoned defense of its historicity. He encourages careful reading of the text, consideration of its historical context, and awareness of the literary artistry involved. He hopes to explore what message the book of Jonah communicates to God's people, then and now.

4. Study Guide: Yates, Book of the Twelve, Session 16, Jonah, Historicity

Jonah: Historicity and Literary Analysis - A Study Guide

Quiz: Short Answer Questions

1. What is the central interpretive question regarding the book of Jonah that scholars debate?
2. According to Dr. Yates, what is the significance of Hosea's interweaving of Old Testament traditions within his message?
3. How does Matthew use Hosea 11:1 in relation to Jesus, and what theological concept does this illustrate?
4. Why is Jonah described as the "anti-prophet" in the lecture?
5. According to Dr. Yates, what makes the historical setting of Jonah's ministry plausible?
6. What were some of the crises occurring during the reign of Ashurdan III that may have led to the Ninevites accepting Jonah's message?
7. What is the connection between the city of Nineveh and fish deities?
8. According to Daniel Timmer, what is the nature of the Ninevites' repentance?
9. What are two possible interpretations of the statement in Jonah 3:3 that Nineveh was a city "three days' journey in breadth"?
10. What are two plausible solutions to the issue that Nineveh was not the royal capital until later in Assyria's history?

Quiz: Answer Key

1. The central question is whether the book of Jonah should be read as a historical account, a parable, or a combination of both. This debate revolves around the plausibility of the events and the presence of literary elements.
2. Hosea's integration of Old Testament traditions enhances the understanding of the Old Testament and emphasizes the power and rhetoric of Hosea's message, and it shows how Old Testament texts do have an ancient history that goes back to the earliest stages of Israel's history.

3. Matthew uses Hosea 11:1 ("Out of Egypt I called my son") as a typology, drawing a parallel between God calling Israel out of Egypt and Joseph taking Jesus to Egypt as a child. This illustrates that Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel's history.
4. Jonah is described as the "anti-prophet" because he actively resists God's call to preach to Nineveh, contrasting with the obedience expected of prophets, and he cares more about a sunburn than the fate of the people in Nineveh.
5. The historical setting is plausible due to the decline of the Assyrian empire during the reign of Jeroboam II, which created a context where Nineveh might have been more receptive to a message of repentance.
6. During Ashurdan III's reign (773-756 BC), there were famines, popular uprisings, economic crisis, an earthquake, and a solar eclipse, possibly leading the Ninevites to believe the gods were displeased.
7. The name of Nineveh is related to the Akkadian word "Nunu", which may mean "fish town," and early references to Nineveh include images of fish. The chief deity of early Nineveh was Nanshi, a fish goddess.
8. According to Daniel Timmer, the Ninevites' repentance may not be a true conversion, but simply a response to a warning of disaster, seeking God's favor without abandoning their polytheism or confessing Yahweh as the only God.
9. One interpretation is that it's a hyperbolic way of expressing the city's greatness. Another interpretation is that it represents how long it would take Jonah to proclaim his message throughout the city.
10. One solution is that the term "king" may refer to the governor of the province rather than the supreme Assyrian king. Another solution is that Nineveh was a royal residence, even if it was not the official capital, especially as it was expanded and enlarged under Shalmaneser I.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the literary devices used in the Book of Jonah, such as satire and irony, and discuss how these devices contribute to the book's message and interpretation.
2. Discuss the arguments for and against the historicity of the Book of Jonah. What evidence supports each side, and how should a reader approach these conflicting perspectives?
3. Explain the significance of the historical context of the Book of Jonah, including the state of the Assyrian Empire and the reign of Jeroboam II. How does this context influence our understanding of the events in the book?
4. Compare and contrast the portrayal of God in the Book of Hosea with the portrayal of God in the Book of Jonah. What similarities and differences exist in how God's character and actions are depicted?
5. How does the Book of Jonah challenge or reinforce the concept of prophetic ministry as presented in other Old Testament prophetic books?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Historicity:** The historical accuracy or authenticity of a narrative or event.
- **Parable:** A simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson.
- **Typology:** A method of biblical interpretation where Old Testament events, persons, or institutions foreshadow New Testament realities.
- **Satire:** The use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices.
- **Anti-Prophet:** A figure who embodies the opposite qualities and behaviors expected of a prophet, often serving as a critique or contrast.
- **Apologetics:** The reasoned defense of religious beliefs.
- **Inerrancy:** The belief that the Bible is without error in its original manuscripts.
- **Genre Markers:** Specific characteristics or conventions that indicate the type or category of a literary work.
- **Royal Residence:** A dwelling place for the king, though it may not be the official capital city.
- **Hyperbolic:** Exaggerated or extravagant.
- **Omens:** Phenomena believed to portend good or evil.
- **Baal Peor:** A location where Israelites participated in idolatrous and immoral practices, as described in Numbers 25.
- **Valley of Achor:** A place of trouble and judgment in Israel's past that, according to Hosea, will become a "door of hope" in the future.
- **Gibeah:** A place associated with a horrific act of violence and moral corruption in Judges 19, often used as a symbol of Israel's depravity.
- **Syncretism:** The merging of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought.

5. FAQs on Yates, Book of the Twelve, Session 16, Jonah, Historicity, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Jonah FAQ

- **Why is the historicity of the Book of Jonah debated?**
- The historicity of Jonah is debated primarily due to the miraculous events described in the book, such as Jonah being swallowed by a large fish and later being released, a sudden storm, a rapidly growing plant, and the repentance of the entire city of Nineveh including animals wearing sackcloth. Some scholars also find it implausible that a prophet would be sent to a foreign nation like Assyria, and that they would repent upon hearing his message. These factors lead some to interpret the book as a parable or a symbolic narrative rather than a literal historical account.
- **What arguments support reading Jonah as a historical account?**
- Several arguments support reading Jonah historically. First, 2 Kings 14:23-25 identifies Jonah as a real prophet who prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II. Second, the book is part of the Book of the Twelve, which generally portrays the ministries of real prophets. Third, Jesus references the story of Jonah in Matthew 12:39-41, seemingly confirming its reality. Finally, a long-standing Jewish and Christian tradition views Jonah as historical. The speaker argues that rejecting the historicity based solely on supernatural elements could lead to problems with other biblical narratives.
- **What is the significance of Hosea's references to Old Testament traditions?**
- Hosea frequently references key Old Testament events and traditions such as the Exodus, the story of Jacob, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and events at Gibeah and Baal Peor. These references serve multiple purposes. They enhance the reader's understanding of the Old Testament, add power and rhetoric to Hosea's message, and underscore the continuity of God's actions throughout Israel's history. They also remind the people of Israel of God's past acts of redemption and judgment, encouraging them to learn from their history.

- **How does Matthew use Hosea 11:1 in the New Testament?**
- Matthew uses Hosea 11:1, "Out of Egypt I called my son," in reference to Jesus's childhood journey to Egypt with Joseph and Mary to escape Herod's persecution. Matthew employs typology, drawing a parallel between God calling his son Israel out of Egypt in the Old Testament and God calling his son Jesus, the ultimate representation of Israel, out of Egypt. This highlights Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel's history and the one who enables Israel to become what God intended.
- **What historical context makes Jonah's mission to Nineveh more plausible?**
- Jonah's ministry likely occurred during a period of Assyrian decline, between 772 and 760 BC, under the reign of Ashurdan III. Assyria faced economic crises, famines, and internal uprisings, creating a sense that the gods were displeased. A solar eclipse in 763 BC may have been seen as an omen of divine anger. Additionally, Nineveh had connections to fish deities, which may have made Jonah's experience of being swallowed by a fish more meaningful to the Ninevites.
- **What is the importance of recognizing literary elements in prophetic books like Hosea and Jonah?**

Recognizing literary elements, such as metaphors, allusions, and satire, enhances the appreciation and understanding of the prophetic message. These elements add depth and nuance to the text, making the message more impactful. However, recognizing the literary artistry does not necessarily negate the possibility of historicity.

- **Why might the Ninevites have responded to Jonah's message even though they didn't worship Yahweh?**
- The Ninevites may have been more receptive to Jonah's message due to a combination of factors, including a period of decline with economic and military crises. As well as that, they may have seen the famine and hardship as signs of divine displeasure which made them more open to seeking divine favor. However, some scholars suggest that the Ninevites' response wasn't a full conversion to Yahweh, but rather a pragmatic repentance to avert disaster, without renouncing their polytheism.

- **How accurate are the descriptions of Nineveh in the Book of Jonah?**
- Some descriptions of Nineveh, such as the "three-day journey" in Jonah 3:3, may be idiomatic expressions rather than literal measurements. The population figure of 120,000, while large, is plausible given historical records of other cities in the region. While Nineveh was not yet the royal capital, it was likely an important city and possibly a royal residence, making the presence of a king in the city understandable.