

Who Was Jonah?

Jonah 1:1-3

1 Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.” 3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

Jonah the son of Amittai

We know a little about Jonah even before this book. Jonah was mentioned once before in Scripture in 2 Kings 14:25-27:

“He (Jeroboam2) restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher.

The Jews of Jesus day were following the **Torah**, the five books of the law, but along with that there were accompanying expansion and explanation of the laws in the **Talmud**. Beyond the Talmud which contained theological teaching came the **Mishnah**, which contained the oral traditions of rabbis through the ages, and finally came the **Midrash**, which were sermons and commentaries of scores of rabbinical scholars.

Even though he is mentioned very clearly here in **2 Kings 14** many Rabbis taught that he is mentioned in two other places in the Old Testament. They believed and taught...

1) He was the son of the Shunammite widow that Elisha raised to life in 2 Kings 4:8-37.

2) He was a disciple of Elisha among the school of the prophets, and he was the one Elisha sent to anoint Jehu to be the king in 2 Kings 9:1-10.

3) Some rabbis taught that Jonah had given another prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem that did not come true, because they repented, and so he was considered by many to be a false prophet. “One of the greatest prophets during the time of Jeroboam II was Jonah the son of Amittai, who was a disciple of Elisha. He prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem, which did not occur because the people repented, and Jonah thereafter was known as “the false prophet.” This experience offended his pride and caused him to flee the Nineveh mission.” (www.Chabad.org)

This explains why in **John 7:52** the Jews of Jesus’ day claimed no prophet came out of Galilee. Jonah was from Galilee, north of Nazareth, from Gath-Hepher, which was in Zebulun. They could say that because of the teaching of the rabbis that Jonah was not a real prophet because 1) his prophesy concerning Jerusalem did not come true, 2) he went to the Gentiles as a prophet, not to the people of Israel. Although the Book of Jonah was in the Hebrew canon of Scripture they by their traditions rejected Jonah.

The rabbis also taught that Jonah’s voice was so loud he could be heard throughout the city. Rabbinic traditions relate that Jonah returned to Israel after his mission to Nineveh and lived there to a ripe old age of 120 with his wife who was well known and highly regarded as a woman of God. They also taught that the sailors (70 representing all the then-known nations) all made pilgrimages to Jerusalem, made vows, offered sacrifices, and were circumcised.