

Introduction to Jonah

Historical Context

Who is the author?

The author is most likely Jonah, the son of Amittai, a prophet of Israel from the tribe of Zebulun who prophesied about the expansion of Israel's territory during the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Ki 14:25).

What genre of literature is the book?

Because of the supernatural elements and repeated irony in the book, many have interpreted Jonah as an allegory or a parable. The book presents itself as a historical narrative, and Jesus interpreted it as such (Mt 12:40; Lk 11:29-32).

There is a strong use of irony in the book: The preacher didn't want to preach; the pagans on the ship prayed, but not God's prophet; everything in Jonah's life (i.e., the storm and the fish) obeyed God except Jonah; Jonah was unhappy about death of a gourd, but not the death of many Ninevites into hell.¹

When was the book written?

The book was written during the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Ki 14:25), who reigned from 786-746 B.C.

What historical situation occasioned this writing?

The Assyrians were the dominant world power at this time, and the city of Nineveh was their capital. They were known as a violent and cruel people. They tortured some people, and they conquered and deported others to be slave laborers. God was prepared to judge them for their sins, but he was also prepared to give one last chance to repent.

What is the author's purpose?

The author's purpose is to teach us about the justice and particularly the mercy of God.

¹ Moseley.

Outline of the Book

1. God's first call to Jonah (1-2)
 - a. Jonah's disobedience (1:1-3)
 - b. God's judgment (1:4-17)
 - c. Jonah's prayer (2:1-9)
 - d. God's deliverance (2:10)
2. God's second call to Jonah (3-4)
 - a. Jonah's obedience (3:1-3)
 - b. Nineveh's repentance (3:4-10)
 - c. Jonah's displeasure (4:1-3)
 - d. God's rebuke (4:4-10)

Primary Theme

Jonah wanted God to employ his justice and mercy as Jonah saw fit: mercy for himself and justice for the Ninevites. But God's attributes don't exist for man's convenience. God is sovereign, his justice is impartial, and his mercy is for everyone.²

² Alexander, 90.

Works Cited

Alexander, Desmond, David Baker, and Bruce Waltke. *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*. Tyndale OT Commentaries.

Moseley, Allan. Notes from Old Testament 2 at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Spring 2007.