

Jonah Outline

Introduction: It is also unknown when the Book of Jonah was written, but given the subject matter most scholars agree it comes after the exile and was most probably written during the restoration when the Jews were answering questions about their identity.

The popular understanding of Jonah is fairly unhelpful and misleading. The popular version of the story (beloved by people who feel called to the ministry) is that God calls Jonah to preach to Nineveh, and for unknown reasons (maybe fear or convenience) Jonah refuses to listen to God's voice. In the end, of course, God proves tenacious and loves Jonah into where he needs to be. In reality the story is utterly different. Jonah refuses to answer God's call not because of his uncertainty over what will happen, but precisely because he knows what will happen. He will preach and if the Ninevites listen, God will forgive them. Only Jonah, no fan of political correctness, doesn't want God to forgive the Ninevites. He hates them. Therefore he flees in order that God may not have forgiveness upon them. In the ensuing story, pretty much everyone we encounter is faithful BUT the Hebrew prophet- the pagan sailors pray for Jonah, the Ninevites respond to God, and even the cows and the sheep at the end wind up in sack cloth. In reality it is a story that should elicit PROFOUND humility in religious traditions that see themselves as having a privileged relationship with God compared to others. It is a story for everyone who wants to be faithful in a pluralistic context.

Chapter 1: Jonah's call, his escape, the great fish

Chapter 2: Jonah's prayer in the belly

Chapter 3: Jonah in Nineveh and Nineveh's response

Chapter 4: Jonah's anger and God's response

Stories to know: The faithless Hebrew prophet Jonah and the righteous pagan sailors (Chapter 1); Jonah being swallowed by the fish (Chapter 1-2); The Ninevites' response (Chapter 3)