

The book is written by Jonah, the son of Amittai. Of his family we have no knowledge but the prophet himself is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 and assigned to the town of Gath-Hepher...which, if the genealogies of the land were still in force, would make him of the tribe of Zebulun. The work is dated in the first half of the 8th century BC (775?) while Jeroboam II was building Israel into its greatest force. An attempt has been made to date the book in the post-exilic period largely on the basis of Aramaisms, etc., in the speech but there is very inconclusive evidence for this... certainly not enough for the result suggested.

Interpretation has been a big problem in Jonah...between literalists, allegorists, spiritualizers and typologists. It is quite a different account from the other Minor Prophets being largely biographical and in this corner we have always thought the literal interpretation to be the best. There are arguments about the fish and the gourd as well...were they specific creations for just this purpose or natural critters such as we might meet otherwise under good circumstances. Many of us lean towards the natural. Jonah is prose except for the moving and difficult poem of 2:3-10.

Outlines are easily had for Jonah

- I. The Call 1
- II. The Prayer 2
- III. The Mission 3
- IV. The Outcome 4

Not very scholarly, I fear, but accurate in the general term of things. Here is a prepositional outline that I picked up from a travelling evangelist a good many years ago.

- I. Jonah runs from God 1
- II. Jonah runs to God 2
- III. Jonah runs with God 3
- IV. Jonah runs ahead of God 4

Well, what impresses one party does not always impress others. The simple facts are these: the book outlines very easily on a one chapter one point basis and it is one of the few books that do this...it is a short book, being smaller in content than Genesis 24 by itself.

In the history of redemption Jonah plays a significant role. The fact is that God has an interest in all people. While the Jews are the chosen ones for covenant and blessing, God does not take the loss of other peoples as if it were nothing and in this case used the reluctant prophet to prove that point. Jonah (the book) is accompanied with what we call an "unexpressed condition"...the message is that the people will be destroyed in forty days. God does not say, unless they repent. But forgiveness is an implicit condition in all judgment prophecies and it is obvious that even Jonah understood this. Thus this book shows the concern of God for lost nations...a concern that is seen in other ways in the Old Testament...and a capacity for forgiveness that encourages us in the Gospel.

Many questions come to our attention in this book. Did the prophet really think he could escape God or did he think a substitute mission was a better cause? What is the resolution to the problem with which we are left at the end of the book? How do we account for the fish and the dramatic deliverance? And how did Jonah eventually get to Ninevah.. a long ways from his own land.