

Jonah—I Did it My Way!

(...and look what happened)

Background

Jonah actually comes from the area the New Testament calls Galilee and is referred to in II Kings 14:25. The setting for the book is sometime between 780 and 750 BC under the reign of Jeroboam. This period had solidified the Northern Kingdom previously ruled by David and Solomon. The power of Assyria was not yet at its peak and Nineveh was just emerging as a major city in Assyria. There have been a variety of attempts to interpret this book. Some say it is fiction based on a mythical/legendary figure and others that it is a parable about Israel's role in bringing the message of God to the Gentile world and find it similar to an ancient Greek fable about Hercules. Allegory is also a way some would interpret this book with Jonah being a type of Israel. While these positions may be argued, there is sufficient scholarship to believe that this book is certainly historical and Jonah is a real historical character. He demonstrates the call (and failure) of Israel for their missionary task to the nations. Jesus also refers to Jonah as a sign of death and resurrection. (Mt. 12:40, Lk.11:30)

Outline

- I. A Prophet flees from his missionary commission (1:1-17)
- II. A song of thanksgiving for deliverance from drowning (2:1-10)
- III. A reluctant missionary at his task (3:1-10)
- IV. The absurdity of trying to limit God's mercy (4:1-11)

Cardinal Thought

When God, in His love for all humanity, confronts us with His call to serve the people we tend to exclude we, because of our human prejudice, try to flee from His demand. God overtakes us, exposes our pettiness, and calls us to a wider sympathy.

Main Themes

1. God's love and concern for all people: His desire to bring all to repentance and to forgive all.
2. The nature of God's election: not to special privilege but to sacrificial service.
3. The judgment that falls upon those who interpret God's purposes narrowly and selfishly.
4. The absurdity of many of the petty concerns of supposedly religious people.

Bridge to the 21st Century

- God does not perjure Himself. We know Him because he acts in accordance with His character
- God's compassion in spite of our rejection of it
- Obedience may carry reluctance that stifles the power obedience can have in our lives
- Actions speak louder than words