

## **Easy-to-Read Version**

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## Jonah

The book of Jonah is grouped with other Old Testament books of prophecy. But it is not a prophecy. It is a story about the prophet Jonah and the trouble he has doing what God wants him to do. As a prophet, Jonah's job was to speak for God. But Jonah did not want the job that God gave him. The problem was Jonah's hate towards other nations. Jonah represents any Israelite who failed to understand God's love for all people.

God had a message he wanted Jonah to deliver to the city of Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. But Jonah was not willing to do this. Jonah hated the whole nation of Assyria. He hated its rulers, its people and everything about it. That is why Jonah refused to do what God wanted. So God gave Jonah a terrifying experience with a huge fish to make him think again about obeying. Then, after saving him from certain death, God gave Jonah another chance.

Jonah obeyed this time. He went to Nineveh and told God's message to the people there. And the people listened. They showed how sorry they were for the evil they had done. And they prayed to God to save them. But Jonah's feelings about the people of Nineveh did not change. He still hated them. And now he was also angry that God did not destroy the city! So God taught Jonah another lesson. This time, he used a fast-growing plant.

Jonah's story is about his whale-sized hatred for the people of Nineveh. But it is also about God's even bigger love for all his creation. It is about Jonah's pride and refusal to listen to God. It is also about second chances. The book of Jonah tells about God's love for all people. And it teaches us that he continually corrects those he loves.

In this book we read how Jonah...

Rejects God's command and faces certain death (1:1-16)

Is saved from death by God and prays to him (1:17 – 2:10)

Finally obeys God, and the people of Nineveh pray for mercy (3:1-10)

Fails again, and God again corrects him (4:1-11)

### God Calls and Jonah Runs

**1** The LORD spoke to Jonah son of Amittai: <sup>2</sup>“Get ready and go to the big city of Nineveh.\* Tell the people I have heard about the evil things they do. Tell them I am ready to punish them.”

<sup>3</sup>But Jonah did not go to Nineveh. Instead, he went the opposite way to run away from the LORD. He went to Joppa and found a boat that was going to the faraway city of Tarshish. Jonah paid for the trip and got on the boat with those going to Tarshish. He was hoping to escape from the LORD.

### The Great Storm

<sup>4</sup>But the LORD sent a powerful wind down on the sea that caused a terrible storm. The storm was so bad that the boat was ready to break apart. <sup>5</sup>The sailors were very afraid and began praying to their own gods. To make the boat lighter, they began throwing the cargo into the sea.

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\*1:2 *Nineveh* A major city in the country of Assyria, a long-time enemy of Israel.

Jonah had gone down into the boat to lie down, and he was now asleep. <sup>6</sup>When the captain of the boat found Jonah, he said, “This is no time to sleep! Get up! Pray to your god! Maybe your god will hear your prayer and save us!”

### What Caused This Storm?

<sup>7</sup>Then the men said to each other, “We should cast lots and let our gods show us who caused this terrible storm.” So the men cast lots, and the lots pointed to Jonah.

<sup>8</sup>The men said to Jonah, “You must be the one who has caused this terrible storm! Who are you, and what is your business here? Where do you come from? What country? Who are your people?”

<sup>9</sup>Jonah said to them, “I am a Hebrew. I worship<sup>†</sup> the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the land and the sea.”

<sup>10</sup>Jonah told the men he was running away from the LORD. They were really afraid when they heard this. They asked Jonah, “Why did you do such a thing?”

<sup>11</sup>The wind and the waves were getting stronger and stronger. So the men said to Jonah, “How can we save ourselves? What should we do with you to make the sea calm?”

<sup>12</sup>Jonah said, “I know I did wrong! That’s why you were caught in this terrible storm. So throw me into the sea, and the sea will become calm.”

<sup>13</sup>Instead, the men tried to row the ship back to the shore, but they could not do it. The storm was getting even stronger than before.

### Jonah’s Punishment

<sup>14</sup>So the men cried to the LORD: “Please, LORD, don’t punish us for

throwing this man overboard. If he is innocent, please don’t make us pay for taking his life. Of course, you are the LORD, so you always do whatever you want.”

<sup>15</sup>Then the men picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea. The storm stopped, and the sea became calm. <sup>16</sup>When the men saw this, they began to fear the LORD. They offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made promises to him.

<sup>17</sup>As for Jonah, the LORD had a big fish ready in the water to swallow him. And Jonah was in the stomach of the fish for three days and three nights.

### Jonah’s Prayer

**2** While Jonah was in the stomach of the fish, he prayed to the LORD his God:

<sup>2</sup>I cried out to the LORD about my troubles,

and he answered me.

From deep down in the place of death, I screamed for help, and you heard my voice.

<sup>3</sup>You threw me into the deepest water, into the bottomless sea.

A flood of water swirled around me.

I was buried under your powerful waves.

<sup>4</sup>I thought, “You don’t want me near you any more!

Will I ever see your holy Temple again?”

<sup>5</sup>The water was up to my neck.

The deep sea surrounded me.

Seaweed was wrapped around my head.

<sup>6</sup>I was at the bottom of the sea, the place where mountains begin.

I thought I was locked in this prison forever,

but the LORD my God took me out of my grave.

God, you gave me life again!

<sup>7</sup>I felt my life slipping away,

<sup>†</sup>1:9 *worship* Or “fear”, meaning “to respect or stand in awe of”, which includes a willingness to obey. See verse 16.

but then I remembered you, LORD,  
and there in your holy Temple you heard  
my prayer.

<sup>8</sup> People who worship helpless idols  
have turned their backs on the One who  
could help them.

<sup>9</sup> But I will offer sacrifices to you  
and lift my voice to thank you.  
I will keep all my promises to you.  
Only the LORD can save!

<sup>10</sup> Then the LORD spoke to the fish,  
and it vomited Jonah out onto dry land.

### God Calls and Jonah Obeys

**3** Then the LORD spoke to Jonah  
again: <sup>2</sup> “Go to that big city of Nin-  
eveh, and tell them what I tell you.”

<sup>3</sup> So this time Jonah obeyed the LORD  
and went to Nineveh. Nineveh was a  
huge city.<sup>‡</sup> It was so big that it took three  
days to walk through it.

<sup>4</sup> Jonah spent his first day there walk-  
ing towards the centre of the city. He an-  
nounced to the people, “In 40 days, Nin-  
eveh will be destroyed!”

<sup>5</sup> The people of Nineveh believed this  
message from God. They decided to go  
without food for a time and wear rags to  
show how sorry they were. All the peo-  
ple in the city did this, from the richest  
to the poorest.

<sup>6</sup> When the king of Nineveh heard  
about this, he left his throne, took off his  
robe, put on rags and sat in the dirt.<sup>7</sup> The  
king sent a message to every part of the  
city:

“A command from the king and his  
officials:

“For a short time no person or an-  
imal should eat anything. No herd  
or flock will be allowed in the  
fields. Nothing living in Nineveh

will eat or drink water. <sup>8</sup> Everyone  
must cover themselves and their an-  
imals with rags to show their sor-  
row. They must cry out to God as  
loud as they can. They must change  
the terrible ways they have acted.  
They must stop being cruel to each  
other. <sup>9</sup> Who knows? Maybe God  
will stop being angry. Maybe he will  
change his mind, and we will not be  
destroyed.”

<sup>10</sup> God saw what the people did. He  
saw that they stopped doing evil. So God  
changed his mind and did not do what  
he had planned. He did not punish the  
people.

### God’s Mercy Makes Jonah Angry

**4** What God did made Jonah very an-  
gry. <sup>2</sup> So he complained to the LORD.  
He prayed, “Listen, LORD! I knew this  
would happen! This is what I said even  
before I left home. That’s why I decided  
to run away to Tarshish. Yes, I knew  
then that you are a God who is kind  
and merciful. You are patient and loving  
and willing to change your mind about  
punishing people. <sup>3</sup> So just kill me now,  
LORD. I’d rather die than live!”

<sup>4</sup> Then the LORD said, “Do you think  
it is right for you to be angry?”

<sup>5</sup> Jonah went out to a place east of the  
city. He made a shelter for himself and  
sat there in its shade, waiting to see what  
would happen to the city.

### The Plant and the Worm

<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD God made a plant  
grow beside Jonah. It grew quickly and  
was soon over his head, shading him  
from the sun’s heat. Jonah was very  
happy to have this plant.

<sup>‡</sup>3:3 *a huge city* Literally, “a great city to god/the gods”. This might mean “a large city dear to God”, “a city big enough for the gods”, “an extremely large city” or possibly, “a very important city”.

<sup>7</sup>But the next morning, God sent a worm that started eating the plant, and it died.

<sup>8</sup>As the sun rose higher, God caused a hot east wind to blow. The sun beat down on Jonah's head, and he was about to pass out. He just wanted to die. He said, "I would rather die than live!"

<sup>9</sup>But God said to Jonah, "Are you really so upset about that plant?"

Jonah answered, "Yes, I would rather die than feel the way I do right now!"

<sup>10</sup>And the LORD said, "You did nothing for that plant. You did not make it grow. It grew up in the night, and the next day it died. And now you are upset about it?" <sup>11</sup>If you can be upset over a plant, surely I can feel sorry for a big city like Nineveh. There are more than 120,000 people there who don't know right from wrong, just like the many animals that are there as well."