

# Jonah

## Setting the Scene:

In Jonah's life, the city of Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire and an enemy to Israel. The Assyrians would often raid cities and many of their battles are recorded in the bible. Jonah's vision of Assyria would be that of a horrible enemy and he was sent to give them a message that if they didn't repent God would destroy them. Jonah could likely have wanted their destruction and feared that they would repent; though the reputation of cruelty could easily make a man think twice before entering such a place.

Also, during Jonah's time, the tradition of putting on sackcloth (very rough clothing) and sitting in ashes or putting them over one's head was a sign of great mourning or sadness.

## The Story:

One day, the LORD called to Jonah, the son of Amittai and told him to go down to Nineveh, a place filled with criminals who did terrible things; and to preach against their wickedness because they had become too evil. But Jonah ran away from God to Joppa and got on a ship to go to Tarshish (a place in the opposite direction from Nineveh).

While Jonah slept on the ship, a terrible storm came up and the sailors were afraid that they would die. They came to Jonah and told him to call on his God before they all drowned as each man had called on his own god.

The sailors came together to find out why the storm was upon them and they found that it was because of Jonah. Jonah told them that he had fled from God and that the only way to calm the sea was to throw him overboard.

At first the sailors wouldn't throw Jonah overboard and tried to row to land, but the rowing didn't work. So they picked up Jonah and threw Jonah into the water and suddenly, the storm stopped. Because of this, the men feared God and offered sacrifices and made vows to God.

As Jonah splashed into the water, the LORD sent a great fish to meet Jonah. This fish swallowed Jonah up and Jonah stayed in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God:

"I called out to the LORD because of my trouble, and he heard me; I cried from the belly of the grave, and you heard my voice. You have thrown me into the deep, into the heart of the sea; and the waters surrounded me. All your billows and waves passed over me. Then I said: I am sent away from your sight; but I will look again toward your holy temple.

"The waters surrounded me to my very breath. The abyss closed around me; the weeds wrapped around my head. I fell to the bottoms of mountains. The earth imprisoned me forever. But you have brought my life back from destruction, O LORD me God.

“When my life was slipping away, I remembered the LORD and my prayer came to you, to your holy temple. Those who cling to worthless idols, have given up their only hope. But I will sacrifice in thanksgiving; and I will do as I vowed. Salvation comes from the LORD.”

The LORD spoke to the fish and it released Jonah onto the dry land. Then the LORD spoke to Jonah again and told him to go to Nineveh and to preach what the LORD had told him to say. So Jonah went to Nineveh, a 500 mile journey, just as he was told. And when he entered Nineveh, it took three days to walk through the city. Jonah stood before all the people and told them Nineveh would be destroyed in forty days.

The people of Nineveh believed God and called for a fast, to keep from eating and drinking; and everyone from the richest and most powerful to the poorest put on sackcloth. Even the king who heard the words took off his royal robes and put on sackcloth and sat in ashes. Then the king commanded that neither man or animal should eat or drink anything but cry to God. And, he said, “let everyone stop doing bad and violent things. And maybe God will have mercy on us and change his mind.”

The LORD saw how they changed and stopped doing evil things and He had mercy on them.

Jonah didn’t like this. He became very angry. He prayed, saying: “Didn’t I say this when I was in my country and so I fled to Tarshish. I knew you were a gracious God—merciful, slow to anger, full of kindness, and would change your mind. Please kill me now. It’s better if I die!”

Then the Lord said: “Do you have a right to be angry?”

But Jonah didn’t answer. He left the city and sat on its east side. He made a booth there and sat under a shadow to wait and see what would happen to the city. As he sat there God made a gourd, or a vine with very large leaves, grow up over Jonah’s head to comfort him and give him shade from the sun. Jonah was happy to have the gourd. But God sent a worm the next morning that killed the gourd and made it wither. Then when the sun rose, God sent a rough east wind with the sun to beat on Jonah’s head until he fainted and wished he were dead.

“Better to die than live,” Jonah said.

And God said to Jonah: “Do you have a right to be angry?”

“I do,” said Jonah in frustration. “Even to death.”

“You had pity for the gourd,” the LORD said, “even though you didn’t labor to plant it and make it grow. It came up in a night and was gone in a night. But Nineveh? Shouldn’t I spare the great city where there are more than 120,000 people who don’t know the difference between right and wrong? And all their cattle too?”

### **Ezekiel 18:23:**

“Do you think I take pleasure in the death of wicked men?” says the LORD Jehovah.  
“Aren’t I more pleased when they turn from their wicked ways?”