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Jonah

God Calls and Jonah Runs

1 The Lord spoke to Jonah* son of Amittai. The Lord said, **2**“Nineveh* is a big city. I have heard about the many evil things people are doing there. So go to that city and tell the people to stop doing those bad things.”

3Jonah did not want to obey God, so Jonah tried to run away from the Lord. Jonah went to Joppa.* Jonah found a boat that was going to the faraway city of Tarshish.* Jonah paid money for the trip and went on the boat. Jonah wanted to travel with the people on this boat to Tarshish and run away from the Lord.

The Great Storm

4But the Lord brought a great storm on the sea. The wind made the sea very rough. The storm was very strong and the boat was ready to break apart. **5**The men wanted to make the boat lighter to stop it from sinking. So they began throwing the cargo* into the sea. The sailors were very scared. Each man began praying to his god.

Jonah had gone down into the boat to lie down. Jonah was sleeping. **6**The captain of the boat saw Jonah and said, “Wake up! Why are you sleeping? Pray to your god! Maybe your god will hear your prayer and save us!”

Jonah This is probably the same prophet mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25.

Nineveh The capital of Assyria. The Assyrian army destroyed north Israel in 723–721 B.C.

Joppa A town on the coast of Israel by the Mediterranean Sea.

Tarshish This is probably a city in Spain. This was as far west as Jonah could travel. Nineveh was east of Israel.

cargo The Hebrew word can mean “dishes, jars, or tools.” Here this could mean all the jars and boxes the boat carried on its way to Tarshish or the rigging and other heavy tools on the boat.

What Caused This Storm?

7Then the men said to each other, “We should throw lots* to learn why these troubles are happening to us.”

So the men threw lots. The lots showed that the trouble happened because of Jonah. **8**Then the men said to Jonah, “It is your fault that this terrible thing is happening to us! So tell us what you have done? What is your job? Where are you coming from? What is your country? Who are your people?”

9Jonah said to the men, “I am a Hebrew (Jew). And I worship the Lord, the God of heaven. He is the God who made the sea and the land.”

10Jonah told the men he was running away from the Lord. The men became very scared when they learned this. The men asked Jonah, “What terrible thing did you do against your God?”

11The wind and the waves of the sea were becoming stronger and stronger. So the men said to Jonah, “What should we do to save ourselves? What should we do to you to make the sea calm?”

12Jonah said to the men, “I know I did wrong—that is why the storm came on the sea. So throw me into the sea, and the sea will become calm.”

13But the men did not want to throw Jonah into the sea. The men tried to row the ship back to the shore, but they were not able to. The wind and the waves of the sea were too strong—and they were becoming stronger and stronger!

lots Small rocks, sticks, or pieces of bone used like dice. Lots were used for making a choice or decision. See Proverbs 16:33.

Jonah's Punishment

¹⁴So the men cried to the Lord, “Lord, [we are throwing this man into the sea because of the bad things he did]. Please don’t say we are guilty of killing an innocent man. Please don’t make us die for killing him. We know you are the Lord, and you will do whatever you want. [But please be kind to us.]”

¹⁵So the men threw Jonah into the sea. The storm stopped—the sea became calm! ¹⁶When the men saw this, they began to fear and respect the Lord. The men offered a sacrifice* and made special promises to the Lord.

¹⁷When Jonah fell into the sea, the Lord chose a very big fish to go and swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the fish’s stomach for three days and three nights.

2 While Jonah was in the fish’s stomach, he prayed to the Lord his God. Jonah said,

² “I was in very bad trouble.
I called to the Lord for help,
and he answered me!
I was deep in the grave.*
I cried to you, Lord,
and you heard my voice!

³ “You threw me into the sea.
Your powerful waves splashed over me.
I went down, down into the deep sea.
The water was all around me.

⁴ Then I thought,
‘Now I must go where you cannot see me.’
But I continued looking to your holy
temple* for help.

⁵ “The seawater closed over me.
The water covered my mouth,
and I could not breathe.*
I went down, down into the deep sea.
Seaweed wrapped around my head.

⁶ I was at the bottom of the sea,
the place where mountains begin.

sacrifice(s) Offerings or gifts to God. Usually these were animals that were killed and burned on an altar.

grave Or, “Sheol,” the place where dead people go.

temple The special building in Jerusalem where God wanted Jews to go to worship him.

mouth, and I could not breathe Or, “The water surrounded me to my soul.” The Hebrew word for soul also means “life, self, appetite,” and “throat or mouth.”

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!

⁷ “My soul gave up all hope.
But then I remembered the Lord.
Lord, I prayed to you.
And you heard my prayers in your
holy temple.*

⁸ “Some people worship useless idols.
But those statues never help them.*

⁹ Salvation comes only from the Lord!
“Lord, I will give sacrifices to you,
and I will praise and thank you.
I will make special promises to you,
and I will do the things I promise.”

¹⁰Then the Lord spoke to the fish. And the fish vomited Jonah out of its stomach onto the dry land.

God Calls and Jonah Obeys

3 Then the Lord spoke to Jonah again. The Lord said, ²“Go to that big city Nineveh, and preach the things that I tell you.”

³So Jonah obeyed the Lord and went to Nineveh. Nineveh was a very big city. A person had to walk for three days to travel through the city.

⁴Jonah went to the center of the city and began preaching to the people. Jonah said, “After 40 days, Nineveh will be destroyed!”

⁵The people of Nineveh believed [the message from] God. The people decided to stop eating for a time [to think about their sins]. The people put on special clothes [to show that they were sorry]. All the people in the city did this—the most important people and the least important people.

⁶The king of Nineveh heard about these things. And the king was also sorry for the bad things he did. So the king left his throne.* The king removed his robe and put on special clothes [to show he was sorry]. Then the king

Some people ... them Or, “People that worship useless things have left the One who is kind to them.”

throne The special chair a king or queen sits on.

sat in ashes.* ⁷The king wrote a special message. The king sent this message through the city:

A command from the king and his great rulers:

For a short time no man or animal should eat anything. No herd or flock will be allowed in the fields. Nothing living in Nineveh will eat or drink water. ⁸But every person and every animal must be covered with a special cloth [to show he is sad]. People must cry loudly to God. Every person must change his life and stop doing bad things. ⁹Then maybe God will change and not do the things he had planned. Maybe God will change and not be angry. Then maybe we will not be punished.

¹⁰God saw the things the people did. God saw that the people stopped doing evil things. So God changed and did not do what he planned. God did not punish the people.

God's Mercy Makes Jonah Angry

4 Jonah was not happy that God saved the city. Jonah became angry. ²Jonah complained to the Lord and said, "I knew this would happen! I was in my own country, and you told me to come here. At that time, I knew that you would forgive the people of this evil city. So I decided to run away to Tarshish. I knew that you are a kind God! I knew that you show mercy and don't want to punish people! I knew that you are full of kindness! I knew that if these people stopped sinning, you would change your plans to destroy them. ³So now I ask you, Lord, please kill me. It is better for me to die than to live!"

⁴Then the Lord said, "Do you think it is right for you to be angry just because I did not destroy those people?"

⁵[Jonah was still angry about all these things.] So he went out of the city. Jonah went to a place near the city on the east side. Jonah made a shelter for himself. Then he sat there in the shade, waiting to see what would happen to the city.

The Gourd Plant and the Worm

⁶The Lord made a gourd plant grow quickly over Jonah. This made a cool place for Jonah to sit. This helped Jonah to be more comfortable. Jonah was very happy because of this plant.

⁷The next morning, God sent a worm to eat part of the plant. The worm began eating the plant and the plant died.

⁸After the sun was high in the sky, God caused a hot east wind to blow. The sun became very hot on Jonah's head and Jonah became very, very weak. Jonah asked God to let him die. Jonah said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

⁹But God said to Jonah, "Do you think it is right for you to be angry just because this plant died?"

Jonah answered, "Yes, it is right for me to be angry! I am angry enough to die!"

¹⁰And 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 sad about that plant. ¹¹If you can be upset about a plant, then surely I can feel sorry for a big city like Nineveh. There are many people and animals in that city. There are more than 120,000 people in that city that did not know they were doing wrong!*"