

10 And YHWH said, "You had compassion for the *qiqayon* over which you did not labor and you did not cause it to grow, that a son of a night it was and a son of a night it perished.  
11 And as for me, should I not pity Nineveh the great city that in her there are multitudes more than 120,000 people that do not know his right hand from his left and many herd animals?"

—translation by the Rev. Frank Logue

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**4:10** Unlike Jonah, who did not labor to create the plant, God appointed the plant to grow, just as God is involved in all creation. In the theology of Jonah, God is involved in many "acts of nature" from the storm on the sea, to the great fish, the plant and the stifling wind.

**4:11** God notes that the people of Nineveh don't know their right hand from their left and loves them anyway. The Book of Jonah ends with this unanswered question, causing the camera to pan to you the reader. These answer is for you to supply as you consider to whom God should show mercy and compassion.

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# THE BOOK OF JONAH



## CHAPTER 1

1 Now the word of YHWH came to Jonah son of Amittai (saying), 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against her for their evil has risen up to my face."

3 But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the face of YHWH and he went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish and he paid its fare, and he went aboard to go with them to Tarshish from the face of YHWH.

4 Then YHWH hurled a great wind upon the sea and a great storm came on the sea and the ship considered being broken to pieces. 5 Then the mariners were afraid and they cried out each to his god and they cast out the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. Jonah went down to the recesses of the ship and he lay down and fell into a heavy sleep. 6 Then the captain of the mariners went to him and he said to him, "What are you doing sleeping? Arise! Call to your god, perhaps the god will take notice of us and we will not perish."

7 And they said, each to his neighbor, "Come let us throw down lots to find out on whose account this evil has happened to us." And they cast lots and the lot fell to Jonah. 8 Then they said to him, "Tell us, because of who is this evil on us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country and of which people are you?"

9 And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew. And YHWH God of the heavens I fear, who made the sea and the dry land." 10

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1:1 Though "YHWH" is usually translated as "the LORD," YHWH is used here. The use of divine names in Jonah offers insight into both the narrator and the character of Jonah, so it is important to leave the translation clear as to which divine name is being used.

1:5 Jonah goes below decks as the mariners start to cast lots. This defies expectation, as Jonah often does in this book.

1:9 Jonah teaches the mariners the personal name of the God of Israel, YHWH, and they address God using this name.

what I said while I was still on my own soil? Therefore I went ahead to flee to Tarshish, for I know that you are a God gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in covenant loyalty and changing your mind concerning evil 3 And now YHWH, take my soul from me as my death is better than my life.

4 But YHWH said, "So, to do good angers you?"

5 And Jonah went out of the city, and he sat east of the city, and he made himself there a booth and he sat under it in the shade, until he might see what would happen to the city. 6 And YHWH-God appointed a *qiqayon* and it grew up over Jonah to be shade over his head to save him from his evil. And Jonah rejoiced about the plant a great joy.

7 And God appointed a worm, the rising of the dawn on the next morning, and it attacked the plant and it withered. 8 Then the sun rose and God appointed a stifling east wind, and the sun struck the head of Jonah and he felt faint and he asked his soul to die. And he said, "Better is my death than my life."

9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it good for you to burn (with anger) about the *qiqayon*?" And he said, "It is good that I am angry to death."

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4:2 This is a common refrain in the Old Testament to say that "God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in covenant loyalty." Here Jonah turns these words into an indictment against God. The Hebrew for "slow to anger" means literally, "long of nose." God is routinely referred to in the Hebrew as being long of nose, which is a way of describing God's patience and mercy. This is because in Hebrew thought, anger burned in your nostrils. To have a long nose, would be like having a long fuse. God is routinely referred to in the Hebrew as being long of nose, which is a way of describing God's patience and mercy.

4:6 *qiqayon* is the Hebrew word for the plant, the exact species of which is uncertain. When the plant grows over Jonah, he feels like he is finally getting the kind of care a prophet deserves. God will turn this against him at the end of the book.

cloth from the greatest to the least.

6 And the word reached the King of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne and removed his cloak from on him and he covered himself with sackcloth and he sat in ashes. 7 Then he caused to be proclaimed in Nineveh and he said by decree of the king and his elders (saying), "Man and beast, herd and flock shall not taste anything, they shall not eat and they shall not drink water. 8 And let them cover themselves in sackcloth, man and herd animals, and they shall cry out mightily to God and they shall turn back each from his evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. 9 Who knows? The God may turn back and change his mind, and turn back from his burning [anger] so that we do not perish."

10 When God saw their deeds, how they turned from their evil ways then (the) God changed his mind concerning the evil, which he said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

## CHAPTER 4

1 But it was evil to Jonah a great evil and he burned with anger. 2 And he prayed to YHWH, and he said, "Ah YHWH! Is this not

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**3:6** King of Nineveh is an odd term as the king was the King of the Assyrian Empire of which Nineveh was the capital. A slight could be intended, by referring to him as king of the city alone. In any case, the king extends to fast and sackcloth to the animals as well as the people, lending a comic element as we picture herd animals walking through the streets in sackcloth with ash on their heads.

**3:8** Just as with the mariners, the king hopes that their actions will convince God to change his mind and relent from destroying Nineveh.

**3:10** God changes God's mind about destruction here just as God did in Exodus 32:14 in the incident with the golden calf.

**4:2** The author withheld this information until now. When Jonah first refused to go to Nineveh, he did so telling God that he knew God would relent from punishing the Ninevites.

Then the men feared a great fear, and they said to him, "What is this you have done?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the face of YHWH, because he told them."

11 And they said to him, "What should we do to you so that the sea will become calm from upon us?" For the sea was growing stormier. 12 And he said to them, "Lift me up and throw me down to the sea, so that the sea will be calmed from against you for I know that on account of me this great storm is upon you."

13 Then the men rowed in order to return to the dry land and they were not able to for the sea was growing stormier against them. 14 And they cried out to YHWH and they said, "Ah YHWH let us not die on account of the soul of this man and do not put on us innocent blood, because you are YHWH. What pleased you, you did."

15 Then they lifted up Jonah and they threw him down to the sea and the sea became calm from its raging. 16 And the men feared YHWH with a great fear and they sacrificed a sacrifice to YHWH and they vowed vows.

## CHAPTER 2

1 And YHWH appointed a great fish to swallow down Jonah, and he was in the guts of the fish three days and three nights. 2

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**1:10** We learn that Jonah had already told the mariners that he was fleeing from the face of YHWH. In part that information did not matter to them as it does now in the midst of a storm.

**1:12** Though he had reason to believe that going to Nineveh would also end the storm, Jonah prefers his own death to obeying God by going to Nineveh.

**1:14** The mariners call out to God using the personal name YHWH, which they heard Jonah use. They also come to fear YHWH and offer him sacrifices (vs. 16). This encounter with the prophet converts the mariners to the God of Israel.

**2:1** YHWH appointing the great fish to swallow Jonah is the of four uses of the verb meaning "to appoint."

And Jonah prayed to YHWH his God from the guts of the fish. 3

And he said,

“I called from my trouble

to YHWH and he stooped to me,  
in the belly of Sheol I cried out,  
you heard my voice.”

4 And Deep cast me out in the heart of the seas  
and River enclosed me.

All your breakers and your waves  
on top of me have passed.

5 And as for me I said,

“I am driven out from in front of your eyes.

Ah, I would once again look  
to your holy temple.

6 Waters surrounded me up to the soul,<sup>17</sup>

Deep turns about me

Reeds are bound to my head.

7 To the depths of mountains I went down  
the underworld with her bars [were] behind me  
forever,

but you brought my life from the pit,  
YHWH my God.”

8 As my life was enfeebled,

I remembered YHWH

and my prayer came to you,  
to your holy temple.

9 The ones tending the vapors of emptiness,

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**2:3** Jonah shifts to poetry for his prayer from within the great fish. Some scholars see this as a later addition, but no copies of Jonah exist without this Psalm, which is also essential to the theology of the Book of Jonah. While not quoting any Psalms directly, Jonah's prayer contains many allusions to Psalms including 18:8, 30:4, 31:7,23, 88:7, 116:3,17-18, 120:1, 130:1-2a, 143:4-5.

they have abandoned their loving kindness.

10 But I with a voice of thanksgiving,

let me sacrifice to you

what I vowed, let me make whole,  
salvation belongs to YHWH!

11 And YHWH spoke to the fish and he spewed out Jonah on the dry land.

## CHAPTER 3

1 Then the word of YHWH came to Jonah a second time (saying), 2 “Arise, Go to Nineveh, the great city, and cry out against her, the preaching that I say to you.”

3 And Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of YHWH. And Nineveh was a great city to God, three days walk [across]. 4 And Jonah began to enter the city one day's journey. And he cried out and he said, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” 5 And the people of Nineveh believed in God, and they cried out a fast, and they dressed in sack-

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**2:9** Vapors of emptiness refers to vain idols or faith in nothingness, or gods that do not exist.

**3:3** The idiom translated here as "a great city to God" means from God's perspective. The word God is used as an adjective, so it could be translated "a God-sized city."

**3:4** The word overthrown connects the overthrow of Nineveh with the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, where the same word overthrown is used to describe God's destruction. The word also connotes some ambiguity as it can mean "transform" as well as "destroy." Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, but Nineveh could be seen as being transformed as the people turned from their evil ways. Also note that "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" is the prophet's entire message. With this brief word, all of Nineveh repents in contrast to Israel who did not turn back to God despite the many attempts of prophets such as Hosea and Amos who cried out against the evil in Israel.