

The Book of Jonah

The Book of Jonah, found in the Old Testament of the Bible, is a captivating narrative that tells the story of the prophet Jonah's reluctant mission to the city of Nineveh and God's compassionate response to both Jonah and the people of Nineveh. Here's an introduction to the Book of Jonah:

- **Authorship and Date:** The Book of Jonah does not explicitly identify its author, but tradition attributes it to the prophet Jonah himself. The precise date of its composition is uncertain, but it likely dates to the post-exilic period, around the 4th or 5th century BCE.
- **Historical Context:** The story of Jonah takes place during the time of the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah. Jonah is called to prophesy to the Assyrian city of Nineveh, a powerful and oppressive nation that posed a threat to Israel and Judah. The book reflects tensions between Israel and its neighbors and explores themes of divine mercy and human obedience.

Content

- **The Call of Jonah:** The book begins with God's call to Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and preach against its wickedness. However, Jonah, feeling reluctant and perhaps fearing for his safety, attempts to flee from God's presence by boarding a ship bound for Tarshish.
- **Jonah's Flight and Divine Intervention:** During his sea voyage, Jonah encounters a great storm sent by God. Fearing for their lives, the sailors cast lots to determine the cause of the storm, which falls on Jonah. Jonah confesses to the sailors that he is fleeing from God, and they reluctantly throw him overboard, resulting in his being swallowed by a great fish sent by God.
- **Jonah's Prayer and Deliverance:** In the belly of the fish, Jonah prays to God for deliverance. He acknowledges God's sovereignty and mercy, expressing repentance for his disobedience. In response, God commands the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land, and Jonah is given a second chance to fulfill his mission.
- **Jonah's Preaching in Nineveh:** Jonah obeys God's command and preaches a message of impending judgment to the people of Nineveh. To his surprise, the people of Nineveh respond to Jonah's message with repentance and fasting, from the king to the common citizens. God sees their repentance and relents from the disaster He had planned for the city.
- **Jonah's Displeasure and God's Compassion:** Despite the success of his mission, Jonah is displeased with God's mercy toward Nineveh. He becomes angry and bitter, lamenting the perceived loss of his credibility as a prophet. In response, God teaches Jonah a lesson about compassion and mercy, using the example of a plant to illustrate His concern for all people.

Key Themes

- **Divine Mercy and Compassion:** The Book of Jonah highlights God's boundless mercy and compassion toward both the repentant people of Nineveh and the reluctant prophet Jonah. God's willingness to extend forgiveness and grace to the Ninevites demonstrates His concern for all people, regardless of their nationality or background.
- **Human Obedience and Disobedience:** Jonah's story serves as a cautionary tale about the consequences of human disobedience and reluctance to follow God's commands. Despite his initial disobedience and attempts to flee from God, Jonah ultimately learns the importance of surrendering to God's will and trusting in His sovereignty.

- **Repentance and Forgiveness:** The book underscores the transformative power of repentance and forgiveness. The people of Nineveh's genuine repentance leads to their salvation and the withholding of divine judgment. Jonah's own journey toward repentance and acceptance of God's will serves as a reminder of God's grace and the opportunity for reconciliation.
- **Universal Scope of God's Salvation:** The story of Jonah challenges narrow conceptions of God's salvation and reveals God's desire for the redemption of all people, including those outside of Israel. The inclusion of the Ninevites in God's plan reflects His universal love and concern for humanity.

Literary Style: The Book of Jonah is characterized by its narrative style, vivid imagery, and rhetorical devices. The story unfolds with dramatic flair, drawing readers into the experiences of Jonah and the people of Nineveh. The use of repetition, irony, and dialogue enhances the storytelling and conveys the book's themes with clarity and depth.

In summary, the Book of Jonah offers a compelling narrative of divine mercy, human obedience, and the universal scope of God's salvation. Through its vivid storytelling and profound insights, Jonah's story challenges readers to examine their own attitudes toward obedience, repentance, and compassion, and to embrace God's call to participate in His redemptive work in the world.

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CHAPTER 1

Jonah Runs from the Lord; The Storm at Sea; A Great Fish Swallows Jonah

Jonah Runs from the Lord

1 Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

3 But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

The Storm at Sea

4 But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

5 Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.

6 So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

7 And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

8 Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?

9 And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.

10 Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him. Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.

A Great Fish Swallows Jonah

11 Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.

12 And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

14 Wherefore they cried unto the Lord, and said, We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee.

15 So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.

16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows.

17 Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

CHAPTER 2

Jonah's Prayer and Deliverance

Jonah's Prayer and Deliverance

- 1 Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly,
- 2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.
- 3 For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.
- 4 Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.
- 5 The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.
- 6 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.
- 7 When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.
- 8 They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.
- 9 But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.
- 10 And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

CHAPTER 3

Nineveh Hears the Word and Repent

Nineveh Hears the Word and Repent

- 1 And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying,
- 2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.
- 3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.
- 4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.
- 5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.
- 6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.
- 7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:
- 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.
- 9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

CHAPTER 4

Jonah Gets Angry with the Lord's Kindness

Jonah Gets Angry with the Lord's Kindness

1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

2 And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

3 Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

4 Then said the Lord, Doest thou well to be angry?

5 So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

6 And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

7 But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

8 And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

9 And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

10 Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:

11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?