

# Jonah

## Who, When, Where

Written by Jonah. Jonah was a prophet of Yahweh sent to a foreign capital with a message of repentance.

During the reign of Jeroboam, one of the kings of the divided kingdom. This story took place around 765BC.

Jonah was in Jerusalem, (in the presence of Yahweh), and (eventually) obediently went to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, (in what is now northern Iraq), and which at the time was one of the largest cities in the world.

He originally set out for Tarshish. We don't know where that was, but of course there are a lot of theories, all the way from a port in Spain to somewhere in Persia. But one thing is for sure... it's nowhere near Nineveh which is about as far inland as you can get.

## Summary

Jonah, a prophet of Yahweh is given the job of going to the foreign capital of Nineveh and preaching repentance to them. Jonah decides he has a better idea and heads off by boat to Tarshish instead. As expected there is a huge storm which threatens the boat but they throw him overboard where he is swallowed by a huge fish.

Jonah repents and calls out to Yahweh who rescues him and sends him again to Nineveh. This time Jonah obeys and the Ninevites are cut to the heart by his message and they repent of their ways to such an extent that Yahweh relents on his plan to destroy them.

The amazing thing about the story of Jonah is that his act of rebellion caused him to spend 3 days and nights in a fish. But this is the one sign that Yeshua said was given to show the Jews about him. That he would spend 3 days and nights in the earth.

## Before You Read

So the Ninevites are not God's people. They worship idols. Their lifestyle is an abomination. What do you think Yahweh should have done with them? Would you go and preach to them?

What if Yahweh spoke to you directly and told you to go?

Do you think it is amazing that Yahweh even uses our rebellion for his purposes?

## Key Verses

### Jonah 1:1-2

*Now Yahweh's word came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach against it, for their wickedness has come up before me."*

We always remember Jonah for what he is about to do next, (spoiler alert), running away from God. But Yahweh spoke directly to him, like Moshe, Elijah, people like that. Jonah wasn't some random, he was clearly a very godly man. He was a gifted prophet of God.

### Jonah 1:3

*But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh...*

I think a lot of Christians disobey God. Most often not even consciously, we just don't think about it much and end up not doing things he created for us.

Some, like Jonah, deliberately choose not to do something they are very aware that Yahweh has commanded. And in his case, even worse, he tried to run away from Yahweh. As far as possible from him.

(I have no idea how a preacher of Yahweh ever thought that would work!)

### Jonah 1:7

*They all said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know who is responsible for this evil that is on us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.*

This seems to happen a bit in the Bible. If they're not sure about something they cast lots. Toss a coin. Draw straws. But it always turns out correct.

How does that happen? Why don't we do more of that today?

I kind of get it if you ask God to direct the lot for you. But these guys all prayed to other gods, and then cast a lot, and it was still spot on.

Sometimes if I'm wondering what God is thinking I'll pray and ask him to show me.

Then in my Bible app "Not Just Words" I search for "random chapter" or just "rc" to get a random chapter presented. Sometimes it does feel like it came from God. Sometimes its enough to make me realise what I'm thinking/feeling about the issue anyway, enough for me to make a decision and feel better about it.

### Jonah 1:5

*Then the mariners were afraid, and every man cried to his god.*

It's hard to imagine this today. That something bad happens and everyone cries out to their god. These days I'd expect everyone to grab their phones, and loud cries of "Hey Siri, what to do if there is a storm destroying your ship." (She'll direct you to

oceansafety.com by the way 😊). But isn't it sad, that one of the big changes in the world since then, is that most people have no god anymore. Except themselves. They are their own god.

### Jonah 1:14, 16

*they cried to Yahweh, and said, "We beg you, Yahweh, we beg you, don't let us die for this man's life... Then the men feared Yahweh exceedingly; and they offered a sacrifice to Yahweh, and made vows.*

So no complex, word crafted sermon. Just having their lives threatened by a storm, (must have been huge, these guys were sailors), and seeing that it was because the god Yahweh was angry with a passenger on your boat. And suddenly they're all believers.

Do you think we overestimate our own role in evangelism? We forget that the Holy Spirit is the one actually doing the work, and sometimes all we need to do is be thrown into the sea?

### Jonah 1:17

*Yahweh prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

Jonah's act of rebellion saw him end up in a fish for 3 days and nights. And yet this was an amazing prophecy that Yeshua, son of Yahweh, would spend 3 days and nights in the belly of the Earth.

Jonah was rebelling. But God even turned that to his glory. I would be, "OK Jonah, I'm wiping you from the planet and nobody will ever know your name."

Yahweh is so gracious.

What is he going to do with you?

### Jonah 2:1

*Then Jonah prayed to Yahweh, his god, out of the fish's belly.*

"Hey Siri, what should you do if you're stuck in the belly of a fish"... really didn't return any useful advice.

Are we (modern humans) relying on the wrong advisors?

Are you?

Jonah knows why he's there. But even then, it looks like he took 3 days to repent. Are you in a situation you don't like? Have you been holding off repenting of something?

You know what to do right?

### Jonah 3:4

*Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried out, and said, "In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!"*

Can you imagine a modern big city. Like Tokyo, or New York. (Tokyo has 35million people). And some foreigner stands on some street corner and says, "This city will be overthrown in 40 days". Passers by would be laughing to themselves. "Who is this bozo!". But this was no ordinary city. This was no ordinary bozo. This actually was a message from Yahweh to a city he cared about.

### Jonah 3:5

*The people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from their greatest even to their least.*

When God's word comes to people. They change.

Nobody there worshipped Yahweh, but the whole city recognised that this was a message from a real god. Not the useless ones they worshipped. And unlike Jonah they repented straight away. Even their king humbled himself.

And, by the way, how come fasting isn't something modern Christians do regularly? Read the Bible. Anytime anyone has anything really serious to pray about - they fast.

Let me recommend "Celebration of Discipline" by Foster. It has a great chapter on how to learn to fast. It will be life changing for you.

### Jonah 3:10

*God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. God relented of the disaster which he said he would do to them, and he didn't do it.*

Fasting shows that you're serious about your prayer. God sees it.

Yahweh doesn't want to punish evil. He wants it to stop. He is about love not judgement. (Fortunately for us Christians, or we'd be lost with no chance of redemption.)

### Jonah 4:1

*But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.*

We do that don't we. We're totally OK with God forgiving us and saving us... but these other people are evil and they deserve to suffer.

If you think like that, you need to read this chapter. Many times. And fast for a day or two while you do it.

Stop kidding yourself. You're evil too. You're just better at hiding it.

## After You Read

What verses really stood out to you?

How would you summarize this book in a sentence or two? What is it about? What is God trying to say to us?

Jonah reveals at the end that the reason he didn't want to go because he knew they would repent and then they wouldn't get the punishment from Yahweh that he knew they deserved.

How do you feel about that?

How do you feel about drug addicts? Do they deserve to be saved?

If you had the opportunity to witness to Hitler moments before he died... would you do it?

What does the story of the vine tell you about God's heart for people?

And about your right to judge who hears of his salvation and who doesn't?

What does it tell you about your heart for people?