

# JONAH

## Jonah's mission to Nineveh

**1**<sup>1</sup>THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME TO JONAH son of Amittai: <sup>2</sup>'Go to the great city of Nineveh, go now and denounce it, for its wickedness stares me in the face.' <sup>3</sup>But Jonah set out for Tarshish to escape from the LORD. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for Tarshish. He paid his fare and went on board, meaning to travel by it to Tarshish out of reach of the LORD. <sup>4</sup>But the LORD let loose a hurricane, and the sea ran so high in the storm that the ship threatened to break up. <sup>5</sup>The sailors were afraid, and each cried out to his god for help. Then they threw things overboard to lighten the ship. Jonah had gone down into a corner of the ship and was lying sound asleep <sup>6</sup>when the captain came upon him. 'What, sound asleep?' he said. 'Get up, and call on your god; perhaps he will spare us a thought and we shall not perish.'

<sup>7</sup>At last the sailors said to each other, 'Come and let us cast lots to find out who is to blame for this bad luck.' So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. <sup>8</sup>'Now then,' they said to him, 'what is your business? Where do you come from? What is your country? Of what nation are you?' <sup>9</sup>'I am a Hebrew,' he answered, 'and I worship the LORD the God of heaven, who made both sea and land.' <sup>10</sup>At this the sailors were even more afraid. 'What can you have done wrong?' they asked. They already knew that he was trying to escape from the LORD, for he had told them so. <sup>11</sup>'What shall we do with you', they asked, 'to make the sea go down?' For the storm grew worse and worse. <sup>12</sup>'Take me and throw me overboard,' he said, 'and the sea will go down. I know it is my fault that this great storm has struck you.' <sup>13</sup>The crew rowed hard to put back to land but in vain, for the sea ran higher and higher. <sup>14</sup>At last they called on the LORD and said, 'O LORD, do not let us perish at the price of this man's life; do not charge us with the death of an innocent man. All this, O LORD, is thy set purpose.' <sup>15</sup>Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the sea stopped raging. <sup>16</sup>So the crew were filled with the fear of the LORD and offered sacrifice and made vows to him. <sup>17</sup>But the LORD ordained that a great fish should swallow Jonah, and for three days and three nights he remained in its belly.

**2**<sup>1</sup>Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish:

<sup>2</sup>I called to the LORD in my distress,  
and he answered me;

out of the belly of Sheol I cried for help,  
and thou hast heard my cry.

<sup>3</sup>Thou didst cast me into the depths, far out at sea,  
and the flood closed round me;  
all thy waves, all thy billows, passed over me.

<sup>4</sup>I thought I was banished from thy sight  
and should never see thy holy temple again.

<sup>5</sup>The water about me rose up to my neck;  
the ocean was closing over me.

Weeds twined about my head  
in the troughs of the mountains;  
I was sinking into a world  
whose bars would hold me fast for ever.  
But thou didst bring me up alive from the pit, O LORD my God.  
As my senses failed me I remembered the LORD,  
and my prayer reached thee in thy holy temple.  
Men who worship false gods may abandon their loyalty,  
but I will offer thee sacrifice with words of praise;  
I will pay my vows; victory is the LORD's.

Then the LORD spoke to the fish and it spewed Jonah out on to the dry land.

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh, go now and denounce it in the words I give you.' Jonah obeyed at once and went to Nineveh. He began by going a day's journey into the city, a vast city, three days' journey across, and then proclaimed: 'In forty days Nineveh shall be overthrown!' The people of Nineveh believed God's word. They ordered a public fast and put on sackcloth, high and low alike. When the news reached the king of Nineveh he rose from his throne, stripped off his robes of state, put on sackcloth and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: 'This is a decree of the king and his nobles. No man or beast, herd or flock, is to taste food, to graze or to drink water. They are to clothe themselves in sackcloth and call on God with all their might. Let every man abandon his wicked ways and his habitual violence. It may be that God will repent and turn away from his anger: and so we shall not perish.' God saw what they did, and how they abandoned their wicked ways, and he repented and did not bring upon them the disaster he had threatened.

Jonah was greatly displeased and angry, and he prayed to the LORD: 'This, O LORD, is what I feared when I was in my own country, and to forestall it I tried to escape to Tarshish; I knew that thou art "a god gracious and compassionate, long-suffering and ever constant, and always willing to repent of the disaster [a god ... disaster: cp *Exod.* 34.6]". And now, LORD, take my life: I should be better dead than alive.' 'Are you so angry?' said the LORD. Jonah went out and sat down on the east of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat in its shade, waiting to see what would happen in the city. Then the LORD God ordained that a climbing gourd [a climbing gourd: or a castor-oil plant] should grow up over his head to throw its shade over him and relieve his distress, and Jonah was grateful for the gourd. But at dawn the next day God ordained that a worm should attack the gourd, and it withered; and at sunrise God ordained that a scorching wind should blow up from the east. The sun beat down on Jonah's head till he grew faint. Then he prayed for death and said, 'I should be better dead than alive.' At this God said to Jonah, 'Are you so angry over the gourd?' 'Yes,' he answered, 'mortally angry.' The LORD said, 'You are sorry for the gourd, though you did not have the trouble of growing it, a plant which came up in a night and withered in a night. And should not I be sorry for the great city of Nineveh, with its hundred and twenty thousand who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and cattle without number?'