

## The Book of Jonah Chapter 1

**Verses 1-2:** This book is a story about God and Jonah. God made and loves the world and everyone in it. Jonah knew that God made the world. But he could not understand how God could love even foreign nations who did bad things.

The book begins with God telling Jonah to go to the ‘great city’ of Nineveh. We know from the last verse of the book that a very large number of people were living in Nineveh. God cared about those people. He wanted Jonah to warn them to change their lives. God wants his loving rule to be for the whole world, and not only for Israel. But Israel did not like the idea that God might be good to other nations too. Israel preferred to fight wars against other nations! The idea that God rules over all nations was not new. The very first book of the Bible shows this, in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1-24).

(Many years later, the people of Nineveh had forgotten God’s warning. They went back to doing “evil things”. The book of Nahum tells the story of how God then destroyed Nineveh, in 612 BC. Nobody ever built the city again.)

**Verses 3-6:** Jonah, however, refused to obey God. He knew that the people of Nineveh were bad. And their city was 500 miles (800 kilometres) away! So, Jonah decided to go in the opposite direction, aiming for Tarshish (probably a place in Spain, famous for its ships). Jonah intended to run away from God. Then he would not have to do the job that God had given him.

But God had other plans. He was ready to change the weather to bring about his purpose. So God decided to send a great storm upon the ship. The storm came. Jonah went on sleeping. But when the captain found him, he woke him up. This was a very bad time to be asleep! The captain knew that everyone had a god. He told Jonah to pray to his god for help, as everybody else was doing. Then perhaps they would have a better chance of safety.

**Verse 7:** When things become difficult, people sometimes try strange things to find an explanation. One way in Bible times was to throw lots. We do not know how people did this. They probably used sticks or stones with marks on them (some examples are in Numbers 26:55; Joshua 18:8; 1 Samuel 10:20-22; 1 Chronicles 25:8). This was to find out what God wanted (Proverbs 16:33). God used this method to show the sailors who was to blame for their danger.

**Verse 8:** The sailors first needed to ask Jonah some difficult questions. Above all, they had to find out where he came from. They wanted to know which god he served. (People believed that every god belonged to a particular place or people.) Jonah’s God must be punishing him by sending the storm.

**Verses 9-10:** Jonah told them that his God was the ‘God of heaven’. That was an ancient title (Genesis 24:3). The sailors worshipped idols. But even they knew that this title meant the ‘chief god’. Jonah also told them that his God had made both the land and the sea. The sailors were very much afraid.

Jonah’s God had sent the storm. So he was the only one who could stop it. But how could anyone persuade him to do that? What sacrifice would satisfy such a God?

**Verses 11-12:** Jonah now began to feel sorry for the trouble that he had caused the sailors. He must take all the blame for their situation. Jonah knew that there was only one answer. He himself must die. The sailors must throw him into the wild sea.

**Verses 13-14:** The sailors tried so hard to reach the shore. The Hebrew language uses the word ‘to dig’ (with oars) to describe this. Sails were no use in this storm. The sailors were unwilling to throw Jonah into the sea to save themselves. They were unwilling because they did not want to kill an innocent man they still thought that they could save themselves.

But Jonah had told them that his God had authority over land and sea. So, when the storm became even worse, they decided to pray to the

Lord as the God of the sea. They did not want God to blame them for causing the death of an innocent man.

**Verses 15-16:** Then they threw Jonah into the sea. At once the storm stopped. The sea grew calm. (See Psalm 107:23-30 for a wonderful description of a storm at sea.)

The sailors were even more afraid when the storm stopped so suddenly. (Jesus' companions were afraid on a similar occasion. See Mark 4:41.) The sailors offered a sacrifice to God. They made promises. The bible does not tell us what those promises were. Nor do we hear anything more about the sailors. But God had used them to carry out his purpose.

Jonah had refused to obey God. And what happened to Jonah? He went down and down. First, down to the port of Joppa. Then, down into the ship. Then, down into the sea. Then, down to the deepest part of the sea.

**Verse 17:** God had not finished with Jonah. When Jonah refused to obey God, he tried to

run away. But God prepared a great storm to stop him. Then, when Jonah was sorry, God prepared a great fish to swallow him. God was preparing other things for Jonah (see 2:10; 4:6; 4:7). God is always in control.

Jesus refers to the story about Jonah being inside the fish for three days and three nights. Jesus said that it was a sign of his own death, before he rose to life again (Matthew 12:40).

Jonah saw a city (Nineveh). But he had no love in his heart for the people who lived there. Then a man greater than Jonah (Jesus) came into this world (Matthew 12:41). Jesus saw a city (Jerusalem). And he wept over it (Luke 19:41), because he loved the people who lived there. He did not want them to suffer.

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October 2002

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