

GOD'S GRUMPY MESSENGER

Jonah was a prophet, but he didn't always want to do what God said. Once God told him to go to Nineveh and let the people there know that God was angry at them for their wickedness. Instead, Jonah bought a ticket for a ship going in the totally opposite direction, hoping to escape from God's mission for him. Soon after the ship left the harbor a storm came up, and strong winds and gigantic waves threatened to sink the ship. The sailors threw the cargo overboard to make the ship lighter, and they cried out to their gods to save them. Jonah, though, was asleep in the hold of the ship.

Before long, the sailors noticed he wasn't with them, and the captain went down to wake him up. "How can you sleep at a time like this?!" he demanded. "Get up and pray with us! Maybe your god will help! Where do you come from, anyway, and what god do you worship?"

"I am a Hebrew," Jonah answered. "I worship the God who made the whole world, the sky, and the oceans." Then he went on to tell them how he was running away from God and they were terrified.

"Why did you have to choose *our* ship?!" they cried. "And what do we need to do to save ourselves?"

"Throw me into the sea," Jonah told them. "I know this storm is my fault!" But they couldn't bear to send him to his death. Instead, they kept rowing as hard as they could to get the ship to land. Eventually, though, they had to give up, and, praying to God to not blame them for drowning Jonah, they tossed him over the side. Instantly the sea stopped its raging and grew calm. And the sailors were amazed by God's power.

As for Jonah, he sunk down into the dark water; but he didn't die. God sent a great fish to swallow him up. He was in the fish's belly for three days, and the whole time he prayed to God. Then the fish spit him out onto the beach, and once again God told him to get up and go to Nineveh. This time, he did!

In Nineveh he went to the center of the city and shouted out God's message: "You're all wicked!" he said. "In forty days, your city will be destroyed!" The king of the city heard him and believed him. He came down off his throne, took off his royal robes, and dressed himself in rough sacking. Then he sent word that, to show how sorry they were, no one in the city should eat or drink, and they should pray to God. "Who knows," he said, "maybe God will have a change of heart!" Even the animals were kept from eating and drinking. And God saw that they were sorry and decided not to destroy the city.

Did that make Jonah happy? It did not! And he complained bitterly to God. "I came all this way for nothing!" He told God. "I knew this was going to happen: that's why I ran away! You're too kind and caring and forgiving. And now I look stupid for predicting something that's not going to happen. If the city isn't going to be destroyed I'd rather die!" And he went out to a hillside above the city to watch what was going to happen to it.

God felt bad for him, and made a plant grow up over his head to shade him from the hot sun. That cooled down his temper a little bit. But the next day God sent a worm to burrow into the plant's stem so it died, and once again the sun beat down on Jonah's head until he felt faint and sick. "It would be better for me to die than to live like this!" he cried.

"Are you angry about the plant dying?" God asked him.

"Yes!" Jonah answered. "Angry enough to *die*."

flip over for more!

Then God said, “You feel sorry about the plant, even though you didn’t do anything to put it there. It grew quickly and died quickly. But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn’t I feel sorry for such a great city?”

Wondering Questions

I wonder how much the sailors on the ship knew about God before they met Jonah? How about the people in Nineveh?

I wonder why the king of Nineveh was so quick to believe Jonah and show God the Ninevites were sorry?

I wonder why Jonah was so grumpy?