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# THE HOLY BIBLE **NKJV** REFERENCE GUIDE

**OLD TESTAMENT**

**BOOK 32**

**JONAH**



**The Prophet Jonah by Michelangelo Buonarroti**

## SUMMARY

The Book of Jonah was likely written between 793 and 758 B.C.

Disobedience and revival are the key themes in this book. Jonah's experience in the belly of the whale provides him with a unique opportunity to seek a unique deliverance, as he repents during this equally unique retreat.

His initial disobedience leads not only to his personal revival, but to that of the Ninevites as well. Many classify the revival which Jonah brings to Nineveh as one of the greatest evangelistic efforts of all time.

Jonah's fear and pride cause him to run from God. He does not wish to go to Nineveh to preach repentance to the people, as God has commanded, because he feels they are his enemies, and he is convinced that God will not carry out his threat to destroy the city.

Instead he boards a ship for Tarshish, which is in the opposite direction. Soon a raging storm causes the crew to cast lots and determine that Jonah is the problem. They throw him overboard, and he is swallowed by a great fish.

In its belly for 3 days and 3 nights, Jonah repents of his sin to God, and the fish vomits him up on dry land. Jonah then makes the 500-mile trip to Nineveh and leads the city in a great revival.

But the prophet is displeased (actually pouts) instead of being thankful when Nineveh repents. Jonah learns his lesson, however, when God uses a wind, a plant and a worm to teach him that He is merciful.

That Jonah is a type of Christ is clear from Jesus' own words. In Matthew 12:40-41, Jesus declares that He will be in the grave the same amount of time Jonah was in the whale's belly. He goes on to say that while the Ninevites repented in the face of Jonah's preaching, the Pharisees and teachers of the Law who rejected Jesus were rejecting One who is far greater than Jonah.

Just as Jonah brought the truth of God regarding repentance and salvation to the Ninevites, so too does Jesus bring the same message of salvation of and through God alone.

We cannot hide from God. What He wishes to accomplish through us will come to pass, despite all our objections and foot-dragging. Ephesians 2:10 reminds us that He has plans for us and will see to it that we conform to those plans. How much easier it would be if we, unlike Jonah, would submit to Him without delay!

God's love manifests itself in His accessibility to all, regardless of our reputation, nationality or race. The free offer of the Gospel is for all people in all times. Our task as Christians is to be the means by which God tells the world of the offer and to rejoice in the salvation of others.

This is an experience God wants us to share with Him, not being jealous or resentful of those who come to Christ in "last-minute conversions" or who come through circumstances dissimilar to our own.

## SUMMARY Continued

**Chapter 1:** Jonah is told to cry against Nineveh. Instead, he flees on a ship going to Tarshish. The Lord sends a tempest. Jonah is asleep. The mariners cast lots to ascertain who it is who is responsible for the tempest, and realize it is Jonah.

Jonah suggests they throw him overboard. The mariners are reluctant to resort to this extreme measure but do so when the tempest does not abate. They pray that they may not perish because of Jonah as they throw him overboard. The sea is calmed, and a great fish swallows up Jonah, who is in its belly for three days.

**Chapter 2:** Jonah prays within the belly of the fish. Psalm-like prayer. 'Out of the belly of hell I cried, and you heard my voice.' Jonah describes the waters compassing him about – an image of distress similar to the psalms' water imagery.

The Lord has brought up Jonah's life from corruption, and Jonah responds with thanksgiving, looking towards God's holy temple. The fish vomits out Jonah onto dry land.

**Chapter 3:** Jonah is again told to cry against Nineveh. He does so, and Nineveh immediately and wholeheartedly repents with ashes and sackcloth. God decides not to destroy Nineveh in the light of this repentance.

**Chapter 4:** Jonah is upset about God choosing to not destroy Nineveh. He leaves the city and sits in the hot sun where God causes a plant to grow to provide shade for Jonah. The next day God sends a worm to kill the plant.

Jonah then says it would be better for him to die. God questions Jonah's anger about the death of the plant. God asks him why he thinks a plant should be spared from destruction but a large city like Nineveh should not be saved.

## NKJV SELECTED SCRIPTURE

- 1:17** Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.
- 2:7** When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; And my prayer went up to You, Into Your holy temple.
- 2:8** Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy.
- 2:9** But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.
- 2:10** So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.
- 3:10** Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.
- 4:6** And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant.
- 4:7** But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered.

## NKJV SCRIPTURE Continued

- 4:8** And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.
- 4:9** *Then God said to Jonah, Is it right for you to be angry about the plant? And he said, It is right for me to be angry, even to death!*
- 4:10** *But the Lord said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night.*
- 4:11** *And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left--and much livestock?*

## BIBLE TIMELINE

760 BC

Jonah Sent to Nineveh

Jonah 1 - 4

## CHARACTER Definitions

**JONAH** - The book of Jonah, written primarily in the third person, does not explicitly name the prophet as the author of his own account, but we have no reason to doubt either the inspiration or the historical veracity of the book.

Identified in verse 1 as the son of Amittai, Jonah came from a town called Gath-hepher, near Nazareth in the area that later came to be known as Galilee. This makes Jonah one of the few prophets who hailed from the northern kingdom of Israel.

During Jonah's years as a prophet, Israel stood tall among the nations, though in a political rather than a spiritual sense. The reign of Jeroboam II (793–753 BC), who was an evil king before the Lord, saw Israel's borders expand to their greatest extent since the time of Solomon.

Increased prosperity resulted in a materialistic culture that thrived on injustice to the poor and oppressed, one of the key messages of Jonah's prophetic contemporary, Amos.

However, rather than direct Jonah to prophesy to his own people, God commissioned him to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. At first unwilling to make the journey northeast to deliver God's message, Jonah turned and aimed for the farthest westward point known to him—Tarshish, located in modern-day Spain.

After God eventually turned Jonah in the right direction, the prophet obediently prophesied to the people of Nineveh while Ashurdan III (772–754 BC) sat on the throne of Assyria.

## CHARACTERS Continued

Though Assyria had been in a politically weakened state for some time, by the time of Jonah their cruelty to captives and other undesirables was well-known in Israel, creating an obvious need for Jonah's message of repentance.

Jonah was one of only four writing prophets that Jesus mentioned by name during His earthly ministry (Isaiah, Daniel, and Zechariah were the others). But Jonah received more than a mere mention.

Jesus actually identified Himself with the prophet's three-day sojourn in the belly of the great fish, noting it as a foreshadowing of His own death, when Jesus would spend three days "in the heart of the earth," before His resurrection (Matthew 12:39-41).

Jesus's identification with the prophet at the lowest point of Jonah's life finds echoes in the book of Hebrews, where it teaches that Jesus "had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest" (Hebrews 2:17).

The book of Jonah stands as an important link in the prophetic chain, giving readers a glimpse of Christ's death and resurrection hundreds of years before they occurred.

When the call of God came to him, Jonah could not see beyond his own selfish desire for God to punish the Assyrians. How could God want him to take a message of mercy to such people? Before Jonah could relay God's message, he had to be broken.

He had to learn something about the mercy of the Lord. Through his flight to Tarshish, his shipwreck, and his time in the great fish, Jonah was convinced in a powerful way that all salvation comes from the Lord. And because of God's supreme power, only God decides where to pour out His salvation and His mercy.

Do you ever find yourself fighting God—your desires pulling you one way, God's desires pulling you another? Jonah found himself in that very position, but his own desire won out over God's for a time. Or so he thought.

As we often see in our own lives, God accomplished His purposes through Jonah even though it meant God doling out a heavy dose of humility on a prideful and unwilling heart.

While Jonah eventually departed and proclaimed God's message, the lesson of his story does not end there. Jonah prophesied to Nineveh but he wasn't happy about it.

Herein we find another touchstone for our lives: aligning our desires with God's is always a process. Just because we go through the motions of following God's will does not mean our hearts are aligned with His. God wanted Jonah's actions and his heart. He wants ours as well.

## MAP REFERENCES

More... Map Satellite Earth

FRANCE

ITALY

SPAIN

TURKEY

ASSYRIA

BABYLONIA

ISRAEL

JUDAH

EGYPT

Mediterranean Sea

Tarshish?

Nineveh

Joppa

Gath-hepher

Jerusalem

**THE FLIGHT**

**THE MISSION**

**C**

**A**

**B**

**The Assyrian king (3:6)**

**The great fish (1:17)**

**The Temple (2:4.7)**

**Nineveh** ☆  
“That great city” (1:2), namely the capital of Assyria and home to 120,000 of Israel’s enemies (as well as many cattle). Also, the mission destination of Jonah.  
Directions Search nearby Save to... move▼

**Tarshish** ☆  
An unknown port city in the Western region of the Mediterranean (1:3), i.e. in the opposite direction to Nineveh.  
Directions Search nearby Save to... move▼

**Joppa** ☆  
A port city in Judah (1:3), where Jonah disobediently boarded a ship for Tarshish.  
Directions Search nearby Save to... move▼