
יונה • JONAH

INTRODUCTION

The short *Book of Jonah* is unique among the prophetic books. It contains no collection of oracles in verse against Israel and foreign nations but presents a prose narrative about the prophet himself. Instead of portraying a prophet who is an obedient servant of Yahweh, calling his people to repentance, it features a recalcitrant prophet who flees from his mission and sulks when his hearers repent. The book is a didactic narrative that has taken older material from the realm of popular legend and put it to new, more consequential use.

With skill and finesse, this little book calls Israel to repentance and reminds it of its mission to preach to all the nations the wideness of God's mercy and forgiveness (Gn 12:1–3, Is 42:6–7, 49:6). In spirit, therefore, the book remains truly prophetic and justifies its place in the Book of the Twelve Prophets. Rejecting the narrow racialism into which the post-Exilic community was tempted to withdraw, the book proclaims an astonishingly broadminded catholicity: all the characters in the book are likeable except the only Israelite on the stage – and he is a prophet!

In the *Masoretic Text*, the *Book of Jonah* is 5th among the 12 'Minor Prophets' but, in the *Septuagint*, it is 6th (Micah appears earlier in the order of the *LXX*). Three of the *Qumran MSS* bear witness to parts of the text: 4QXII^a, 4QXII^f & 4QXII^g.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATES

The principal figure of this artful story is an obscure Galilean prophet from Gath-Hepher who counselled Jeroboam II (786–746 BCE) in a successful conflict with the Syrians (2K 14:25) and with whom some of the earlier traditional material was probably associated. But its author probably lived in the post-Exilic period, because he shows the influence of Jeremiah and 'Second' Isaiah and opposes narrow sectarianism and exclusivity. Although the linguistic evidence is indecisive, a date sometime in the 5th or 4th Century BCE seems indicated: the 'great city' of Nineveh (destroyed in 612 BCE) is no more than a distant memory and the thought and phraseology of the book are borrowed from Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The poetic section (2:3–10) has no connexion either with the plight of Jonah or with the doctrine of the book and was most probably added later.

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יונה פרק א

א וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יוֹנָה בֶן־אֲמִתַּי לֵאמֹר: ב קוּם
לֵךְ אֶל־נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וּקְרָא עֲלֵיהָ כִּי־עָלְתָה
רַעְתָּם לִפְנֵי: ג וַיֵּקֶם יוֹנָה לִבְרַח תַּרְשִׁישָׁה מִלִּפְנֵי
יְהוָה וַיֵּרֶד יָפוֹ וַיִּמָּצֵא אֹנִיָּה | בָּאָה תַרְשִׁישׁ וַיִּתֵּן
שְׂכָרָהּ וַיֵּרֶד בָּהּ לָבוֹא עִמָּהֶם תַּרְשִׁישָׁה מִלִּפְנֵי
יְהוָה:

ד וַיְהִי הַטֵּיל רוּחַ־גְּדוֹלָה אֶל־הַיָּם וַיְהִי סַעֲר־גְּדוֹל
בַּיָּם וְהָאֹנִיָּה חֲשָׁבָה לְהִשָּׁבֵר: ה וַיִּירָאוּ הַמֵּלָחִים
וַיִּזְעְקוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אֱלֹהָיו וַיִּטְלוּ אֶת־הַכֵּלִים אֲשֶׁר
בָּאֹנִיָּה אֶל־הַיָּם לְהַקֵּל מֵעֲלֵיהֶם וַיּוֹנֶה יָרֵד אֶל־
יַרְכֵּתִי הַסְּפִינָה וַיִּשְׁכַּב וַיֵּרָדֶם: ו וַיִּקְרַב אֵלָיו רֶב
הַחִבְלִ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מֶה־לָּךְ נֹרָדָם קוּם קְרָא אֶל־
אֱלֹהֶיךָ אוֹלֵי יִתְעַשֶׂת הָאֱלֹהִים לָנוּ וְלֹא נֹאבֵד:
ז וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ לָכוּ וְנַפְּיֵלָה גּוֹרְלוֹת

¹ The word of Yahweh came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying ² “Up! Go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim to them that their wickedness has come before me.” ³ Jonah set about escaping from Yahweh and going to Tarshish. He went down to Joppa and found a ship bound for Tarshish; he paid his fare and boarded, to go with them to Tarshish, to escape from Yahweh.

⁴ However, Yahweh threw a hurricane at the sea, and there was such a great storm at sea that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ The sailors took fright and each of them called on his own god and, to lighten the ship, they threw the cargo overboard. Jonah, however, had gone below, had lain down in the hold and was fast asleep, ⁶ when the boatswain went up to him and said, “What do you mean by sleeping? Get up! Call on your god! Perhaps he will spare us a thought and not leave us to die.” ⁷ Then they said to each other, “Come on: let us draw lots to find out

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¹ The infinitive לֵאמֹר (*‘saying’*) introduces direct discourse.

² ‘Nineveh’ was the capital of the Assyrians, who destroyed Samaria in 722–721 BCE. The phrase הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה (*‘the great city’*) may designate a city that is: **1** large in size (Jos 10:2, Ne 4:7), **2** a powerful important city-state (Gn 10:12) or **3** a prominent capital city (Jr 22:8).

³ The phrase לִבְרַח ... וַיֵּקֶם (*‘set about escaping’*) is a wordplay on Yahweh’s command (קוּם) in v. 2. By repeating the first verb, the narrator sets up the reader to expect that Jonah was intending to obey God; but Jonah did not go to Nineveh – he fled to Tarshish.

⁴ The use of the Piel form חֲשָׁבָה (*‘threatened’* – literally, ‘to think about’) personifies the ship to emphasise the ferocity of the storm.

⁵ The plural word rendered ‘cargo’ (כֵּלִים) is variously translated ‘articles’, ‘vessels’, ‘objects’, ‘baggage’ or ‘instruments’.

⁶ The Niphal participle נֹרָדָם functions here not as a vocative use of the noun (NKJV: ‘O sleeper’) but as a verb depicting uninterrupted sleep.

⁷ The author emphasises the piety of the gentile sailors: they are shocked that Jonah should have disobeyed Yahweh (v. 10).

וַיִּדְעוּהָ בַשְּׁלָמִי הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ וַיִּפְּלוּ גִזְרֹת
וַיִּפֹּל הַגּוֹרֵל עַל־יוֹנָה:

ח וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו הַגִּידָה־נָא לָנוּ בַּאֲשֶׁר לְמִי־הָרָעָה
הַזֹּאת לָנוּ מִה־מְלָאכְתָּךְ וּמֵאֵין תָּבוֹא מָה אֶרֶץְךָ
וְאִי־מָזָה עִם אָתָּה: ט וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם עַבְרִי אָנֹכִי
וְאֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲנִי יֵרָא אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה אֶת־
הַיָּם וְאֶת־הַיַּבֶּשֶׁת: י וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יֵרָאָה גְדוֹלָהּ
וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו מִה־זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ כִּי־יָדְעוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים כִּי־
מִלְפָּנֶיךָ יְהוָה הוּא בָּרַח כִּי הִגִּיד לָהֶם: יא וַיֹּאמְרוּ
אֵלָיו מִה־נַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ וַיִּשְׁתַּק הַיָּם מֵעַלֵּינוּ כִּי הַיָּם
הוֹלֵךְ וְסֹעֵר: יב וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שְׂאוּנִי וְהִטִּילְנִי אֶל־
הַיָּם וַיִּשְׁתַּק הַיָּם מֵעַלֵּיכֶם כִּי יוֹדַע אָנִי כִּי בַשְּׁלִי
הַסֹּעֵר הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה עָלֵיכֶם: יג וַיַּחֲתְרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים
לְהָשִׁיב אֶל־הַיַּבֶּשֶׁת וְלֹא יָכְלוּ כִּי הַיָּם הוֹלֵךְ וְסֹעֵר
עָלֵיהֶם: יד וַיִּקְרָאוּ אֶל־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אָנָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ

who is to blame for bringing us this bad luck.” Therefore, they cast lots and the lot pointed to Jonah.

⁸ They said to him, “Tell us why this calamity has come upon us. What is your job? Where do you come from? What is your country, and of what people are you?” ⁹ He replied, “I am a Hebrew and I worship Yahweh, God of Heaven, who made both sea and dry land.” ¹⁰ The sailors were even more afraid at this and said, “Why did you do this?” (They knew he was trying to escape from Yahweh because he had told them so.) ¹¹ They then said, “What are we to do with you, to make the sea calm down for us?” For, the sea was growing rougher and rougher. ¹² He replied, “Take me and throw me into the sea, and then it will calm down for you. I know it is my fault that this great storm has struck you.” ¹³ The sailors rowed hard in an effort to reach the shore but in vain, since the sea was growing rougher and rougher. ¹⁴ Thus, at last, they called on Yahweh and said, “O, Yahweh, do not let us perish for the sake of

⁸ The NJB lacks the sentence, “Tell us why this calamity has come upon us.”

⁹ Compare Jonah’s reply to Ps 65:5–7, 107:23–32, 139:7–12, Mk 4:35–41, Ac 27).

¹⁰ The literal translation of ‘were even more afraid’ is ‘feared a great fear’; the cognate accusative construction using the verb יָרָא (‘to fear’) and the noun יֵרָאָה (‘fear’) from the same root emphasises the sailors’ escalating fright.

¹¹ The literal translation of ‘growing rougher and rougher’ (הוֹלֵךְ וְסֹעֵר) is ‘was walking and storming’; the two participles form an idiom – when the first participle precedes another with *vav*, it often denotes the idea of ‘growing’ or ‘increasing’.

¹² Some English translations omit the final ‘for you’ of the first sentence.

¹³ The word translated ‘rowed’ is used in Ezekiel to describe digging through a wall (Ezk 8:8, 12:5, 7, 12); its use here pictures the sailors digging into the water as hard as they could.

¹⁴ Ps 115:3 & 135:6 also use the verbs חָפַץ (‘to please’) and עָשָׂה (‘to do’) in speaking of Yahweh as doing what he wishes to do.

נֶאֱבָדָה בְּנֶפֶשׁ הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה וְאַל־תִּתֵּן עָלֵינוּ דָם
נִקְיָא כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה כַּאֲשֶׁר חִפַּצְתָּ עֲשִׂיתָ: ^{טו} וַיִּשְׂאוּ
אֶת־יוֹנָה וַיְטַלְהוּ אֱלֹהִים וַיַּעֲמֵד הַיָּם מִזַּעֲפוֹ:
^{טז} וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים יִרְאָה גְדוֹלָה אֶת־יְהוָה וַיִּזְבְּחוּ־
זֶבַח לַיהוָה וַיִּדְּרוּ נְדָרִים:

this man's life, and do not hold us responsible for causing an innocent man's death; for you, Yahweh, have acted as you saw fit." ¹⁵ Taking hold of Jonah, they threw him into the sea; and the sea stopped raging. ¹⁶ At this, dread of Yahweh seized the men even more; they offered a sacrifice to Yahweh and made vows to him.

¹⁵ In place of 'taking hold of Jonah' (here following the NJB), the NRSV has 'so they picked Jonah up'.

¹⁶ Jonah has thus become a missionary of his God in spite of himself.

JONAH 2

יונה פרק ב

- ^א וַיִּמָּן יְהוָה דָּג גָּדוֹל לִבְלַע אֶת-יוֹנָה וַיְהִי יוֹנָה
בְּמִעֵי הַדָּג שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים וּשְׁלֹשָׁה לַיְלֹת: ^ב וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל
יוֹנָה אֶל-יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו מִמִּעֵי הַדָּג:
^ג וַיֹּאמֶר קָרָאתִי מִצָּרָה לִי אֶל-יְהוָה וַיַּעֲנֵנִי
מִבֶּטֶן שְׁאוֹל שׁוֹעֲתִי שָׁמַעְתָּ קוֹלִי:
^ד וַתִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי מִצּוֹלָה בְּלִבְבַּי יָמִים
וַנֶּהָר יִסְבֶּבֵנִי כָּל-מִשְׁבָּרָיָהּ
וַגִּלְיָהּ עָלַי עָבְרוּ:
^ה וָאֲנִי אָמַרְתִּי נִגְרַשְׁתִּי מִנֶּגֶד עֵינֶיךָ
אֵךְ אֹסִיף לְהִבִּיט אֶל-הֵיכַל קִדְשֶׁךָ:
^ו אִפְפוּנֵי מַיִם עַד-נֶפֶשׁ
תָּהוֹם יִסְבֶּבֵנִי סוּף חֲבוּשׁ לְרֹאשִׁי:
- ¹ Now, Yahweh ordained that a great fish should swallow Jonah; and
Jonah remained in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.
² From the belly of the fish, Jonah prayed to Yahweh, his God; he said:
³ Out of my distress, I cried to Yahweh and he answered me,
from the belly of Sheol, I cried out: you heard my voice.
⁴ For, you threw me into the deep, into the heart of the seas,
and the floods closed round me,
all your waves and billows passed over me.
⁵ Then I thought, "I am banished from your sight;
how shall I ever see your holy Temple again?"
⁶ The waters round me rose to my neck,
the deep surrounded me, reeds twining around my head.

JONAH 2

- ¹ The NRSV includes this verse as 1:17, wherein all verse numbers of this chapter are decremented; here, we follow the MT (& NJB) numbers.
² In place of 'belly of the fish', the LXX has 'belly of the whale' (τῆς κοιλίας τοῦ κήτους) but the Greek word can mean, generally, a 'sea monster'.
³ The 1st verse of the prayer summarises the whole.
⁴ Some suggest deleting either מִצּוֹלָה ('into the deep') or בְּלִבְבִּי יָמִים ('into the heart of the seas'); however, the use of an appositional phrase within a poetic colon is not unprecedented in Hebrew poetry and the MT is therefore best retained.
⁵ The literal translation of 'thought' (אָמַרְתִּי) is 'said', as followed by the NIV but the verb can be used to depict inner speech and thoughts; here, we follow NJPS, NJB & NRSV. 'How shall I ever see' is a conjectural translation, following Theodotion (πῶς, reflecting an alternative vocalisation tradition of אֵךְ – a defectively written form of אִיךְ), the NJB and NRSV; the MT has 'yet I shall see'.
⁶ 'Reeds' (סוּף) reflects the MT vocalisation of the consonantal form סוּף; but the LXX (ἐσχάτη – 'end') reflects a vocalisation of סוּף. The Tg interprets this as a reference to the Sea of Reeds (also known as the Red Sea) and a Midrash states that God showed Jonah the way by which the Israelites had passed through the Red Sea. The MT vocalization tradition is preferred.

<p> ז לְקַצְבֵי הַרִים יִרְדְּתִי הָאָרֶץ בְּרַחֲמֶיהָ בְּעַדִי לְעוֹלָם וַתַּעַל מִשַּׁחַת חַיִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי: ח בַּהֲתַעֲטֹף עָלַי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־יְהוָה זָכַרְתִּי וַתָּבוֹא אֵלַיךְ תְּפִלָּתִי אֶל־הֵיכַל קֹדֶשְׁךָ: ט מִשֹּׁמְרִים הַבְּלִי־שׁוּא חֲסִדִּים יַעֲזֹבוּ: י וְאֲנִי בְּקוֹל תּוֹדָה אֶזְבְּחָה־לָּךְ אֲשֶׁר נִדְרָתִי אֶשְׁלֶמָּה יְשׁוּעָתָה לִיהוָה: {ס} </p>	<p> 7 To the roots of the mountains, the gates of the underworld closed round me forever. Yet, you raised my life from the pit, Yahweh, my God! 8 When my soul was growing ever weaker, Yahweh, I remembered you, and my prayer reached you in your holy Temple. 9 Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty, 10 but, with songs of praise, I will sacrifice to you. The vow I have made I will fulfil! Salvation comes from Yahweh! </p>
<p> יא וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְדָג וַיִּקָּא אֶת־יוֹנָה אֶל־ הַיַּבֶּשָׁה: {פ} </p>	<p> 11 And Yahweh spoke to the fish, which then vomited Jonah onto the dry land. </p>

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- ⁷ The 'roots of the mountains' presumably denote the bottom of the sea (on which the earth was thought to rest). Some suggest an emendation of לְקַצְבֵי ('to the roots') to לְקַצְוֵי ('to the ends'), assuming orthographic confusion between *vav* (ו) and *bet* (ב). However, although the phrase קַצְבֵי appears only here in Canonical Scripture, it occurs also in Si 16:19 and so is not without precedent.
- ⁸ The verb זָכַר ('remember') can also mean 'call out' (e.g. Na 2:6), as in the related Accadian verb *zikaru* (to name, to mention); the idiom here encompasses calling to mind his character and past actions and appealing to him for help (Dt 8:18-19, Ps 42:6-8, Is 64:4-5, Zc 10:9). The Tg glosses the verb as 'I remembered the worship of the Lord', which somewhat misses the point.
- ⁹ The translation here (loosely) follows the NRSV; the NJB reads: "Some abandon their faithful love by worshipping false gods." The genitive construct, הַבְּלִי־שׁוּא ('vain idols'), forms an attributive adjective expression: 'empty worthlessness' or 'worthless vanities'.
- ¹⁰ The literal translation of 'songs of praise' (בְּקוֹל תּוֹדָה) is 'a voice of thanksgiving'. The verbs translated 'I will sacrifice' and 'I will fulfil' are cohortative, expressing Jonah's resolve and firm intention.
- ¹¹ The fish functions as a literary foil to highlight Jonah's hesitancy to obey God up to this point: in contrast to Jonah, who immediately fled when God commanded him, the fish immediately obeyed.

יונה פרק ג

JONAH 3

א וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יוֹנָה שֵׁנִית לֵאמֹר: ב קוּם לֵךְ אֶל־נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה וּקְרָא אֵלֶיהָ אֶת־הַקְּרִיאָה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי דֹבֵר אֵלֶיךָ: ג וַיָּקָם יוֹנָה וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־נִינְוָה כַּדָּבָר יְהוָה וּנִינְוָה הִיְתָה עִיר־גְּדוֹלָה לְאֱלֹהִים מִהֶלֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים: ד וַיַּחֲלֵ יוֹנָה לָבוֹא בָעִיר מִהֶלֶךְ יוֹם אֶחָד וַיִּקְרָא וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אֲרַבְעִים יוֹם וּנִינְוָה נִהְפָּכֶת: ה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲנָשֵׁי נִינְוָה בְּאֱלֹהִים וַיִּקְרְאוּ־צוֹם וַיִּלְבָּשׁוּ שָׂקִים מִגְּדוֹלָם וְעַד־קִטְנָם: ו וַיִּגַּע הַדָּבָר אֶל־מֶלֶךְ נִינְוָה וַיִּקָּם מִכִּסְאוֹ וַיַּעֲבֹר אֲדָרְתּוֹ מֵעָלָיו וַיִּכֶּס שֶׁק וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל־הָאֶפֶר: ז וַיִּזְעַק וַיֹּאמֶר בְּנִינְוָה מִטַּעַם הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּגְדְּלוּ לֵאמֹר הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה הַבֶּקֶר וְהָעֶזְאֵן אֵל־יִטְעֲמוּ מֵאוֹמָה אֵל־

¹ The word of Yahweh came to Jonah a second time. ² “Up,” he said, “go to Nineveh the great city, and preach to it as I shall tell you.” ³ Jonah set out and went to Nineveh in obedience to the word of Yahweh. Now, Nineveh was a city great beyond compare; to cross it took three days. ⁴ Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city and then proclaimed, “Only forty days more and Nineveh will be overthrown.” ⁵ Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least. ⁶ When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his robe, put on sackcloth and sat down in ashes. ⁷ He then had it proclaimed throughout Nineveh, by decree of the king and his nobles, as follows: “No person or animal, herd or flock, may eat anything; they may not

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- ¹ As in 1:1, the infinitive לֵאמֹר (‘saying’) introduces direct discourse and is not translated in English.
- ² The verb קרא (‘preach’) is repeated from 1:2 but with a significant variation: the phrase in 1:2 was the adversative קרא על (‘proclaim against’), which often designates an announcement of threatened judgment (1K 13:4,32, Jr 49:29, Lm 1:15). However, here the phrase is the more positive קרא אל (‘proclaim to’), which often designates an oracle of deliverance or a call to repentance, with an accompanying offer of deliverance that is either explicit or implied (Dt 20:10, Is 40:2, Zc 1:4).
- ³ The literal translation of ‘beyond compare’ is ‘beyond God’, the strongest form of the superlative in Hebrew; there is a similar hyperbole in the phrase, ‘it took three days to cross it’, to evoke the fabulous size of Nineveh.
- ⁴ The ‘forty days’ suggest the 40 days of the Flood or the 40 years of Israel in the desert; the LXX reads ‘Yet three days’ (Ἔτι τρεῖς ἡμέραι).
- ⁵ The exemplary conversion of the Ninevites was to be recalled in the Gospels: Mt 12:38–41, Lk 11:29–32.
- ⁶ This whole description of repentance and conversion is the antithesis of Jr 36; it is, furthermore, full of phrases characteristic of Jeremiah.
- ⁷ The reaction of the king of Nineveh is modelled on Jr 18:8–9. He sets a better example than Jonah.

יִרְעוּ וּמִים אֲל־יִשְׁתּוּ: ^ח וַיִּתְּכֶסּוּ שָׁקִים הָאָדָם
וְהַבְּהֵמָה וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־אֱלֹהִים בַּחֲזָקָה וַיֵּשְׁבוּ אִישׁ
מִדֶּרֶכּוֹ הָרָעָה וּמִן־הַחֲמָס אֲשֶׁר בְּכַפֵּיהֶם: ^ט מִי־
יֹדַע יָשׁוּב וַיִּנָּחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים וְשָׁב מִחֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ וְלֹא
נֹאבָד: ^י וַיֵּרָא הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי־שָׁבוּ
מִדֶּרֶכָם הָרָעָה וַיִּנָּחֵם הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר־
דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת־לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה:

graze, they may not drink any water. ⁸ All (persons and animals) must put on sackcloth and call on God with all their might; and let everyone renounce his evil ways and violent behaviour. ⁹ Who knows? Perhaps God will change his mind and relent, and renounce his burning wrath, so that we shall not perish.” ¹⁰ God saw their efforts to renounce their evil ways; and God relented about the disaster that he had threatened to bring on them, and did not bring it.

⁸ The NJB (and NRSV) omits ‘persons and animals’, following the MT but to be regarded as repeated in error from the previous verse.

⁹ The king expresses his uncertainty whether Jonah’s message constituted a conditional announcement or an unconditional decree.

¹⁰ The noun רָעָה (‘disaster’) functions as a metonymy of result – the cause being the threatened judgment (cf. Ex 32:12,14, 2S 24:16, Jr 18:8, 26:13,19, 42:10, Jl 2:13, Jon 4:2).

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א וַיֵּרַע אֶל-יוֹנָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָה וַיַּחַר לוֹ: ב וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל
אֶל-יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר אָנָּה יְהוָה הֲלוֹא-זֶה דְּבָרִי עַד-
הַיּוֹתִי עַל-אַדְמָתִי עַל-כֵּן קִדְמָתִי לְבָרַח תְּרַשִּׁישָׁה
כִּי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי-חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אַרְךָ אַפִּים
וְרַב-חֶסֶד וְנָחָם עַל-הָרָעָה: ג וַעֲתָה יְהוָה קַח-נָא
אֶת-נַפְשִׁי מִמֶּנִּי כִּי טוֹב מוֹתִי מִחַיִּי: {ס}

ד וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הֲהֵיטֵב חָרָה לָךְ: ה וַיֵּצֵא יוֹנָה מִן-
הָעִיר וַיֵּשֶׁב מִקְדָּם לָעִיר וַיַּעַשׂ לוֹ שֵׁם סֹפָה וַיֵּשֶׁב
תַּחְתֶּיהָ בַּצֵּל עַד אֲשֶׁר יֵרָאֶה מֵה-יְהִיָּה בַּעִיר:
ו וַיִּמָּן יְהוָה-אֱלֹהִים קִיקְיֹון וַיַּעַל מֵעַל לְיוֹנָה לְהַיּוֹת
צֶלַעַר-רֹאשׁוֹ לְהַצִּיל לוֹ מִרְעָתוֹ וַיִּשְׂמַח יוֹנָה עַל-

¹ This made Jonah very indignant; he fell into a rage. ² He prayed to Yahweh and said, "O, Yahweh, isn't this what I said would happen when I was still in my own country? That was why I first tried to flee to Tarshish: I knew you were a tender, compassionate God, slow to anger, rich in mercy, who relents about inflicting disaster. ³ So now, Yahweh, please take my life; for, I might as well be dead as go on living."

⁴ And Yahweh said, "Are you right to be angry?" ⁵ Jonah then left the city and sat down to the east of the city. There, he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, to see what would happen to the city.

⁶ Yahweh God then appointed a little tree to grow up over Jonah, to give shade for his head and soothe his ill humour; Jonah was delighted with

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¹ Jonah is not only disobedient but bigoted; the reason for his flight was that he did not want to see the Ninevites spared by a gracious God.

² The NJB has 'faithful love' in place of 'mercy', here following NETB.

³ The NRSV ends this verse with, "for it is better for me to die than to live;" the literal translation is 'better my death than my life'.

⁴ The literal translation of Yahweh's question is "Rightly does it burn to you?" (This question occurs again in v. 9, there concerning the withered plant.) Others translate "Does it so thoroughly burn to you," "Does it rightly burn to you," or "Does it burn so thoroughly to you?" The Hiphil form of יָטַב ('to do good') may here have one of two meanings: **1** It may mean 'to do (something) rightly' in terms of ethical right and wrong (Gn 4:7, Lv 5:4, Ps 36:4, 119:68, Is 1:17, Jr 4:22, 13:23); this approach is adopted here (following the NJB) and by many translations: "Do you have any right to be angry?" (NIV); "Is it right for you to be angry?" (NRSV); "Do you have good reason to be angry?" (NAB); "Do you do well to be angry?" (NKJV). **2** It may be used as an adverb meaning 'well', 'utterly', or 'thoroughly' (Dt 9:21, 13:15, 17:4, 19:18, 27:8, 1S 16:17, 2K 11:18, Pr 15:2, Is 23:16, Jr 1:12, Ezk 33:32, Mi 7:3); this view is adopted by other translations: "Are you that deeply grieved?" (NJPS); "Are you so angry?" (NEB).

⁵ When used to designate a location, the noun קִדְמָה ('front') may mean 'east' (in Hebrew, the cardinal directions are referred to relative to the east, with 'north' being 'left').

⁶ In place of 'little tree', the NJB has 'castor-oil plant' and the NRSV has 'bush'; the noun קִיקְיֹון ('tree') has the suffix יֹון (denoting a diminutive).

הַקִּיקִיּוֹן שֶׁמָּחָה גְדוּלָּהּ: וַיִּמֶן הָאֱלֹהִים תּוֹלַעַת
בַּעֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר לְמַחֲרַת וַתֵּךְ אֶת־הַקִּיקִיּוֹן וַיִּיבֹשׁ:
וַיְהִי כַּזֶּרֶחַ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיִּמֶן אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ קָדִים
חֲרִישִׁית וַתֵּךְ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ עַל־רֹאשׁ יוֹנָה וַיִּתְּעַלֶּף
וַיִּשְׁאַל אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ לָמוּת וַיֹּאמֶר טוֹב מוֹתִי מַחֲיִי:
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־יוֹנָה הֵיטֵב חָרָה־לְךָ עַל־
הַקִּיקִיּוֹן וַיֹּאמֶר הֵיטֵב חָרָה־לִּי עַד־מוֹת: וַיֹּאמֶר
יְהוָה אַתָּה חֹסֵף עַל־הַקִּיקִיּוֹן אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עֲמַלְתָּ בּוֹ
וְלֹא גִדַּלְתָּ שֶׁבֶן־לַיְלָה הָיָה וּבֶן־לַיְלָה אָבָד: וְאַנִּי
לֹא אֲחוּס עַל־נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבָּהּ
הָרַבָּה מִשְׁתִּים־עֹשֶׂהָ רַבּוֹ אָדָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַע
בֵּין־יְמִינוֹ לְשִׁמְאֹלָו וּבִהְמָה רַבָּה:
{ש}

the little tree. ⁷ But, at dawn the next day, God appointed a worm to attack the little tree – and it withered. ⁸ Next, when the sun rose, God sent a scorching east wind; the sun beat down so hard on Jonah’s head that he was overcome and begged for death, saying, “I might as well be dead as go on living.” ⁹ God said to Jonah, “Are you right to be angry about the little tree?” He replied, “I have every right to be angry, as angry as possible!” ¹⁰ Yahweh replied, “You are concerned for the little tree that has not cost you any effort and that you did not grow, which came up in a night and has perished in a night. ¹¹ So why should I not be concerned for Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, to say nothing of all the animals?”

⁷ The verb מָנָה ('to send') in the Piel stem (יָמַן) means 'appointed' or 'ordained' (Ps 61:8, Jon 2:1, 4:6-8, Dn 1:5,10-11);

⁸ 'Scorching' follows the LXX (καύσωνος) and NJB; the MT (חֲרִישִׁית) is uncertain (possibly 'autumnal' – NRSV has 'sultry') and occurs only here.

⁹ In place of 'as angry as possible', the NJB has 'mortally angry'. The phrase עַד־מוֹת ('unto death') is idiomatic, meaning 'to the extreme' or simply 'extremely (angry)'; the noun מוֹת ('death') is often used as an absolute superlative with a negative sense, similar to the English expression 'bored to death'. Unfortunately, this idiomatic expression has gone undetected by virtually every other major English translation to date (NJB, NRSV, NIV, NJPS, &c). The only (other) translation that comes close to representing the idiom correctly is BBE: "I have a right to be **truly** angry."

¹⁰ The literal translation of the final clause is, "which was a son of a night and perished (as) a son of a night."

¹¹ The emphatic use of the independent pronouns 'you' (אַתָּה) and 'I' (אֲנִי) in vv. 10-11 creates an ironic comparison and highlights the strong contrast between the attitudes of Jonah and Yahweh. Interpreters wonder exactly what deficiency is meant by the phrase 'cannot tell their right hand from their left'. The expression does not appear elsewhere in biblical Hebrew; it probably does not mean, as sometimes suggested, that Nineveh had 120,000 small children and, in any case, it refers to a deficiency in discernment that Jonah and the initial readers of Jonah would no doubt have considered themselves free of. For partial parallels see 2S 19:35, Qo 10:2, Ezk 22:26 44:23.