

The runaway

Generally speaking, the prophets (the messengers God sent to his people) did as God said. But there was one exception: Jonah.

God spoke to Jonah.

‘Go to Nineveh,’ he said, ‘and tell the people I know all about their wickedness. In forty days Nineveh shall be destroyed.’

Now Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. And the Assyrians were the enemies of God’s people. So Jonah did not mind telling the people of Nineveh that God was about to destroy them!

‘But God is loving,’ he thought. ‘He forgives people and lets them have a second chance. He won’t destroy Nineveh. And I shall look silly.’

So Jonah set off—not for Nineveh, but for the port of Jaffa, where he caught a boat that was bound for Spain.

As soon as the ship was out at sea, God sent a great storm. The captain and crew were terrified.

‘Pray to your gods,’ they cried to the passengers. ‘Pray for your lives.’

Jonah was fast asleep. The captain shook him hard.

‘Pray, like everyone else,’ he said.

‘I can’t ask God for help’, Jonah said. ‘I’ve been running away from him. It’s God who has sent this storm. Throw me overboard. Then the sea will be calm.’

At first the captain refused. But the storm got worse and worse. In the end he did as Jonah said.

As Jonah plunged down, down into the water, the sea grew calm. And on board ship the men gave thanks to Jonah’s God.

Jonah thought he would drown. As the waves closed over his head he called out to God for help. And God sent a huge fish, that swallowed him alive.