

# The Twelve Prophets #1

## The Enigmatic Book of Jonah

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### Jerusalem Talmud Makkot 2:6 [31d]

It was asked of wisdom: what is the punishment for a sinner? She replied, *Misfortune pursues sinners* (Prov. 13:21). It was asked of prophecy: what is the punishment for a sinner? She replied, *The person who sins, only he shall die* (Ezek. 18:4, 20). It was asked of God: what is the punishment for a sinner? He replied, let him repent and gain atonement.

### Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup>The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: <sup>2</sup>Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim judgment upon it; for their wickedness has come before Me.

<sup>3</sup>Jonah, however, started out to flee to Tarshish from the LORD's service. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid the fare and went aboard to sail with the others to Tarshish, away from the service of the LORD.

<sup>4</sup>But the LORD cast a mighty wind upon the sea, and such a great tempest came upon the sea that the ship was in danger of breaking up. <sup>5</sup>In their fright, the sailors cried out, each to his own god; and they flung the ship's cargo overboard to make it lighter for them. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the vessel where he lay down and fell asleep. <sup>6</sup>The captain went over to him and cried out, "How can you be sleeping so soundly! Up, call upon your god! Perhaps the god will be kind to us and we will not perish."

<sup>7</sup>The men said to one another, "Let us cast lots and find out on whose account this misfortune has come upon us." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. <sup>8</sup>They said to him, "Tell us, you who have brought this misfortune upon us, what is your business? Where have you come from? What is your country, and of what people are you?" <sup>9</sup>"I am a Hebrew," he replied. "I worship the LORD, the God of Heaven, who made both sea and land." <sup>10</sup>The men were greatly terrified, and they asked him, "What have you done?" And when the men learned that he was fleeing from the service of the LORD—for so he told them—<sup>11</sup>they said to him, "What must we do to you to make the sea calm around us?" For the sea was growing more and more stormy. <sup>12</sup>He answered, "Heave me overboard, and the sea will calm down for you; for I know that this terrible storm came upon you on my account." <sup>13</sup>Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to regain the shore, but they could not, for the sea was growing more and more stormy about them. <sup>14</sup>Then they cried out to the LORD: "Oh, please, LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man's life. Do not hold us guilty of killing an innocent person! For You, O LORD, by Your will, have brought this about." <sup>15</sup>And they heaved Jonah overboard, and the sea stopped raging.

<sup>16</sup>The men feared the LORD greatly; they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and they made vows.

### Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup>The LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah; and Jonah remained in the fish's belly three days and three nights. <sup>2</sup>Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish. <sup>3</sup>He said: In my trouble I called to the LORD, and He answered me; from the belly of Sheol I cried out, and You heard my voice. <sup>4</sup>You cast me into the depths, into the heart of the sea, the floods engulfed me; all Your breakers and billows swept over me. <sup>5</sup>I thought I was driven away out of Your sight: would I ever gaze again upon Your holy Temple? <sup>6</sup>The waters closed in over me, the deep engulfed me. Weeds twined around my head. <sup>7</sup>I sank to the base of the mountains; the bars of the earth closed upon me forever. Yet You brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God! <sup>8</sup>When my life was ebbing away, I called the LORD to mind; and my prayer came before You, into Your holy Temple. <sup>9</sup>They who cling to empty folly forsake their own welfare, <sup>10</sup>But I, with loud thanksgiving, will sacrifice to You; what I have vowed I will perform. Deliverance is the LORD's!

<sup>11</sup>The LORD commanded the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon dry land.

### Chapter 3

<sup>1</sup>The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: <sup>2</sup>“Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it what I tell you.” <sup>3</sup>Jonah went at once to Nineveh in accordance with the LORD's command. Nineveh was an enormously large city a three days' walk across. <sup>4</sup>Jonah started out and made his way into the city the distance of one day's walk, and proclaimed: “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”

<sup>5</sup>The people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast, and great and small alike put on sackcloth. <sup>6</sup>When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his robe, put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes. <sup>7</sup>And he had the word cried through Nineveh: “By decree of the king and his nobles: No man or beast—of flock or herd—shall taste anything! They shall not graze, and they shall not drink water! <sup>8</sup>They shall be covered with sackcloth—man and beast—and shall cry mightily to God. Let everyone turn back from his evil ways and from the injustice of which he is guilty. <sup>9</sup>Who knows but that God may turn and relent? He may turn back from His wrath, so that we do not perish.”

<sup>10</sup>God saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways. And God renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon them, and did not carry it out.

### Chapter 4

<sup>1</sup>This displeased Jonah greatly, and he was grieved. <sup>2</sup>He prayed to the LORD, saying, “O LORD! Isn't this just what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I fled beforehand to Tarshish. For I know that You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment. <sup>3</sup>Please, LORD, take my life, for I would rather die than live.” <sup>4</sup>The LORD replied, “Are you that deeply grieved?”

<sup>5</sup>Now Jonah had left the city and found a place east of the city. He made a booth there and sat under it in the shade, until he should see what happened to the city. <sup>6</sup>The LORD God provided a ricinus plant, which grew up over Jonah, to provide shade for his head and save him from discomfort. Jonah was very happy about the plant. <sup>7</sup>But the next day at dawn God provided a worm, which attacked the plant so that it withered. <sup>8</sup>And when the sun rose, God provided a sultry east wind; the sun beat down on Jonah's head, and he became faint. He begged for death, saying, "I would rather die than live." <sup>9</sup>Then God said to Jonah, "Are you so deeply grieved about the plant?" "Yes," he replied, "so deeply that I want to die."

<sup>10</sup>Then the LORD said: "You cared about the plant, which you did not work for and which you did not grow, which appeared overnight and perished overnight. <sup>11</sup>And should not I care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well!"