

## Jonah, the Reluctant Prophet (Jonah 1:1-16)

Intro: Jonah preached against Nineveh during the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23-27). Under Jeroboam II's reign, the Israelites practice idolatry and wickedness. Ironically, it is the evil practices of the Ninevites that rise up before God in heaven. The Lord speaks to the prophet Jonah in his rebellious homeland of Israel. God wants Jonah to preach against Nineveh. This city has a long history of violence against Israel, so Jonah wants no part of God's command. *As Christians we should not run from God's plan unless we want to experience two consequences: 1) God relentlessly pursuing us with disciplinary measures, and 2) Our actions inflicting harm on innocent bystanders.*

Let's look at the first consequence of running from God's plan:

I. God will relentlessly pursue us with disciplinary measures (Jonah 1:1-3).

1. God will allow us to go down before He takes us down in chastisement.

a. Jonah went down to Joppa, down onto the ship deck (Jonah 1:3), and down into the ship (Jonah 1:5). He comes up and the Pagan Sailors throw him overboard (Jonah 1:15). Eventually, a great fish swallows him and takes him down into the depths of the sea (Jonah 2:6).

b. Instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah chose to go down geographically to the different places. He even told the Pagan Sailors to throw him down into the sea. God helped Jonah in his downward spiral by appointing a great fish to swallow him and take him down into the depths of the sea.

c. When we decide to run away from God's plan, we start on a path downward. Our own choices lead us astray, but eventually God will get fed up with our rebellion and take disciplinary actions against us. We may not encounter a great fish, but He will probably bring some life storms our way.

d. God doesn't enjoy our self-inflicted troubles. He wants us to change our attitude. He will send people to speak to us on His behalf.

2. God will pursue us by reminding us of His plan through the mouths of bystanders.

a. God spoke to Jonah at the beginning of the chapter, "Rise...Cry Out" (Jonah 1:2). The prophet is unconcerned about the fierce storm above deck, so he sleeps deeply. The cognate noun of this verb is used in Genesis to describe the deep sleep that God induced upon Adam to take his rib. The Ship Captain repeats the same words that God had spoken to Jonah in 1:2, "Rise...Cry Out!"

b. God ultimately wants us to carry out His plan. He doesn't enjoy disciplining His children. When we step outside of God's will, He will place people in our path who will remind us of the direction we should be going. If we choose to listen to these messengers of God, we will not continue to suffer God's disciplinary measures against us. He will relent and calm our life storms.

c. I fasted and prayed for words to speak to my family in a time of crisis. The Holy Spirit impressed me to say, "Now is not the time to turn away from God. Now is the time to turn toward Him." I found myself in a dark place where I wanted to backslide. My friend came over, sat down next to me, and began to pray. He said, "God wants you to know that now is not the time to turn away from Him. Now is the time to turn towards him." God used my friend to speak clearly to me about my circumstances. Has God ever spoke to you through the words of a bystander when you were running from His plan?

d. Jonah chose not to listen to the Ship Captain. His actions not only made his own life worse, but also brought trouble on those around him.

Now let's look at the second consequence of running from God's plan:

II. Our actions may potentially inflict harm upon innocent bystanders (Jonah 1:4-16).

1. When God disciplines us, we may put at risk the lives of innocent people.

a. God hurls a great wind on the sea. The narrator wants us to know that the storm is so dangerous that the ship fears that it will be broken up (Jonah 1:4). The Sailors hurl their cargo overboard to try and outrun God's disciplinary action against Jonah but to no avail (Jonah 1:5). The storm intensifies further in the story (Jonah 1:11, 13). Jonah eventually tells the Sailors to hurl him into the sea, so the storm will subsist (Jonah 1:12, 15).

b. Jonah's actions bring the storm in the first place. He runs from God's plan for his life. Now danger threatens the lives of the Pagan Sailors. We may not experience God's discipline to this degree, but He will definitely cause circumstances in our lives to drive us to repentance. These disciplinary measures may threaten the lives of individuals around us, even our friends and family.

c. More specifically, when our eyes are on our self-inflicted storms, we are not focused on the welfare of those around us. Our lack of prayer and concern for others inflicts more spiritual damage upon them than any physical calamity could

bring about. The prophet Jonah should have been concerned about the Sailors, but instead his rebellious heart caused them distress.

2. When God disciplines us, we may cause emotional distress for innocent people.

a. Jonah sleeps deeply while the Pagan Sailors earnestly cry out to their gods. They greatly feared for their lives (Jonah 1:5). The Captain tries to get Jonah to cry out to the LORD, but he doesn't comply (Jonah 1:6). Once they discover that Jonah's actions had invoked the great storm, they inquire about his God (Jonah 1:8). Fear grips them when they realize the God of the heavens, sea, and dry land caused the storm (Jonah 1:9-10). The Sailors also cry out to Yahweh begging Him not to issue a charge of murder against them for tossing Jonah overboard (Jonah 1:14).

b. When we run from God's plan, our attitudes fester. We transform into unconcerned Christians while innocent bystanders cry out for our help. If we allow ourselves to descend downward for too long, we may even try to escape God's plan through death. The prophet doesn't want to share his God with Pagan Sailors. We too risk the danger of not sharing our God with people desperate for Him. This only strengthens God's resolve against our stubbornness.

c. In Jonah 2, the prophet will learn that God assists His rebellious people in their downfall. The great fish swallows Jonah and takes him to the bottom of the ocean. Even inside the fish, Jonah tries to manipulate God. Then the fish vomits Jonah out of his mouth onto dry land. Soaked in stomach acid, the prophet Jonah heads toward Nineveh.

In conclusion, *we should not run from God's plan unless we want to experience two consequences: 1) God relentlessly pursuing us with disciplinary measures, and 2) Our actions inflicting harm on innocent bystanders.* God will allow us to walk in rebellion for a period of time, but eventually He will take disciplinary measures to bring us down to our knees in repentance. He will also send messengers to remind us to embrace His plan once again. If we refuse to listen, our actions can potentially harm us and the people around us. God may bring horrible circumstances to pass that threaten our life or the lives of those associated with us. If we yet resist, our attitude will transform into an unconcerned apathetic Christian. It is dangerous to reject God's Word for our lives!