

JONAH 1 – JONAH RUNS FROM GOD

A. Jonah's attempted escape.

1. (1-2) God's call to Jonah.

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me."

a. **The word of the LORD came to Jonah:** God spoke to Jonah in His own unique and powerful way and He told Jonah to do two things. First, **go to Nineveh**; second, **cry out against it** – that is, to rebuke them for their sin and call them to repentance.

b. **Go to Nineveh:** The city of **Nineveh** was the capital of the Assyrian Empire and was a large and prominent city in its day. It was not a city of Israel at all; God called Jonah to go to a pagan, Gentile city and call *them* to repentance.

i. Ancient historians say that Nineveh was the largest city in the world at that time. It was the large, important capital of a dominating empire – surely an intimidating place to go.

c. **For their wickedness has come up before Me:** God wanted Jonah to go because He saw their **wickedness**. None of man's wickedness is hidden before God. He sees it all, and it may come to a point where it demands the specific warning and judgment of God.

2. (3) Jonah's attempt to flee from God's call.

But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

a. **But Jonah arose to flee:** Jonah was a reluctant prophet. He didn't want to do what God told him to do. Several reasons for this have been suggested.

i. It may have been because he was given a *difficult job to do*. Nahum 3:1-4 gives us a good idea of how wicked the people of Nineveh were. Jonah had every reason to expect that at the very best, he would be mocked and treated as a fool. He might be attacked and killed if he did what the LORD told him to do.

ii. It was also because Jonah didn't *want* the Assyrians in Nineveh to escape God's judgment. Imagine a Jewish man in New York during World War II hearing God say, "I'm going to bring terrible judgment on Germany. I want you to go to Berlin and tell Nazi Germany to repent." Instead of doing it, the man heads for San Francisco and then hops on a boat for Hong Kong.

iii. We may speculate on why Jonah did not want to do what God told him to do, but it is even better to think about why we don't do what God tells *us* to do. God told Jonah to *go* and preach; every Christian has the same command in Matthew 28:19-20. With Jonah's example before us, we have *even less reason than Jonah* for our disobedience.

b. **To flee to Tarshish:** The distant city of **Tarshish** was thought to be towards the end of the earth, and is always associated with ships in the Bible. Jonah wanted to go as far as he could to escape God's presence, but this was a futile attempt.

i. Nineveh was to the east of Israel and **Tarshish** was about as far as you could go west, on the coast of what is today Spain, past the straits of Gibraltar. In heading

for **Tarshish**, Jonah intended to get as far away from Nineveh and the calling of God to go there as he possibly could.

c. **Found a ship going to Tarshish:** We don't doubt that Jonah *felt* like going to **Tarshish**. There was an impulse within him driving him there, but it was a dangerous impulse. We may take Jonah as an example of the danger of doing things solely under impulse or feelings.

i. "Now, I very commonly meet with persons who say, 'I felt that I must do so and so. It came upon me that I must do so and so.' I am afraid of these impulses – very greatly afraid of them. People may do right under their power, but they will spoil what they do by doing it out of mere impulse, and not because the action was right in itself." (Spurgeon)

- An impulse may be very brave, yet wrong (Jonah was very brave in embarking on such a long sea-journey).
- An impulse may appear to be self-denying, yet wrong (it cost Jonah much in money and comfort to go on this long sea-journey).
- An impulse may lay claim to freedom, yet be wrong (wasn't Jonah free to go to Tarshish?).
- An impulse may lead someone to do something that they would condemn in others (what would Jonah say to another prophet disobeying God?).
- An impulse can make us do to God or others what we would never want to be done to our self.

ii. Many people take their inner impulses and say, "The LORD told me this or that." This is dangerous even when it doesn't seem so immediately. "What have you to do with the devices and desires of your own hearts? Are these to be a law to you? I pray you, be not among the foolish ones who will be carried about with every wind of fancy and perversity. 'To the law and to the testimony,' should be your cry, and you may not appeal to inward movements and impulses" (Spurgeon).

d. **So he paid the fare:** It seemed easy enough. Perhaps even Jonah felt that the LORD provided the money for **the fare**! This shows the danger of being guided by *circumstances*.

i. "Providence or no providence, the Word of the Lord is to be our guide, and we must not depart from it under pretext of necessity or circumstances. *It is very easy to make up a providence when you want to do so.* If you sit down and try to find in the ways of God to you an excuse for the wrong which you mean to commit, the crafty devil and your deceitful heart together will soon conjure up a plea for providence." (Spurgeon)

ii. Nevertheless, when you run away from the LORD, you never get to where you are going and you always pay your own fare. When you go the LORD's way, you not only get to where you are going, but He provides the fare.

e. **From the presence of the LORD:** Jonah should have read Psalm 139:7-10: *Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.* You can't escape the presence of God.

i. "All the while the ship sailed smoothly over the sea, Jonah forgot his God. You could not have distinguished him from the veriest heathen on board. He was just as bad as they were." (Spurgeon)

JONAH 3 – JONAH PREACHES REPENTANCE IN NINEVEH, THE CITY REPENTS

A. Jonah's ministry in Nineveh.

1. (1-2) The second call to Jonah.

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."

a. Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time: This shows the amazing love of God to His wayward people. Though Jonah did everything he could to resist the first call of God, after Jonah repented God called him again – though God was under no obligation to do it. He did it out of mercy and grace.

i. "By paralleling here the book's opening remarks, almost word for word, the author skillfully conveys the idea that Jonah is being offered a new beginning." (Alexander)

ii. "How many of us who have been called to deliver the word of Jehovah, would still be doing it, if it were not for this patient and perfecting grace of God? Surely not many! How have we failed Him, and broken down in our ministry; and often not on ground so high as that of Jonah's failure." (Morgan)

iii. God was determined to do the work through Jonah, so He did not give up on the reluctant prophet. God is often just this committed to doing His work through a man. "Suppose that the problem had been given to us to solve – how shall this city be moved to repentance? How shall its vice be forsaken and the God of Israel worshipped by all its inhabitants from the highest to the lowest? If we had not been paralyzed with despair, which is the most probable, we should, nevertheless, have sat down carefully to consider our plans. We should have parcelled it out into missionary districts; we should have needed at least several hundreds, if not thousands, of able ministers; at once, expenses would have to be incurred, and we should have considered ourselves bound to contemplate the erection of innumerable structures in which the Word of God might be preached. Our machinery would necessarily become cumbrous; we should find that we, unless we had the full resources of an empire, could not even begin the work. But what saith the Lord concerning this? Putting aside the judgments of reason, and all the plans and schemes which flesh and blood so naturally do follow, he raises up one man. By a singular providence he qualifies that one man for his mission." (Spurgeon)

b. Preach to it the message that I tell you: Instead of telling Jonah to cry out against Nineveh, this time God simply tells Jonah to go there and wait for further instructions. God often works this way, and our flesh often finds it irritating that He does.

i. The story of Jonah demonstrates why God so often leads us one step at a time without telling us more. When God told Jonah what he would say in Nineveh, Jonah rejected the call. God often only tells us what we can handle at the time.

2. (3-4) Jonah preaches in Nineveh.

So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

a. Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD: Having learned the lesson that resisting the will of God is both futile and counter-productive, Jonah now obeys the call and goes to Nineveh.

b. Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent: The idea behind this statement probably refers to how long it would take to walk around the city of "Greater Nineveh" – the metropolitan area around the city.

c. Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown! Jonah emphasized to the people of Nineveh what would happen if they did not repent – the city would be overthrown in judgment. Undoubtedly, this was not Jonah's whole message to the people of Nineveh; but clearly it was his emphasis.

i. "Overthrown" is a word applied to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:25, Lamentations 4:6, and Amos 4:11).

ii. We see that Jonah preached this message with earnestness. "And such earnestness becomes a ministry that has to do with immortal souls, asleep and dead in sin, hanging on the brink of perdition, and insensible of their state. The soft-speaking, gentle-intoned, unmoved preacher, is never likely to awaken souls . . . But this earnestness is widely different from that noisy, blustering, screaming rant, that manifests more of a turbulence of disorderly passions, than of the real inspired influence of the Spirit of God" (Clarke).