



eLesson 015

Text: Jonah 1:1-17

Subject: Running away from God

Jonah – Part 1

Jonah was a real man. The book of Jonah has always been one of my favorites. I read it as a young boy. It was the first full book of the Bible that I ever read. I chose it for obvious reasons ... it was short, and I knew the story. However, Jonah is much more than an interesting short story for children. It contains important teaching for all of us today. The prophet Jonah is not a fictional character. He was a real man. He is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25. Jesus spoke about Jonah as a real prophet who was a real sign to the real people of the real city of Nineveh. Jesus compared His own three days and nights in the tomb to Jonah's time in the sea creature, Matthew 12:39-41, Luke 11:29-32. Since Jesus said that the account of Jonah was real ... then it is real. The book of Jonah is about repentance and second chances ... and about second chances. It is about God's love for the sailors, for the evil Ninevites, and for disobedient Jonah. Interestingly, there are 12 miracles in just 48 verses ... an average of one in every four verses. Nineveh was the evil capital city of ancient Assyria ... located just east of the Tigris River. The excavated ruins of Nineveh are in the suburbs of Mosul, Iraq (~200 miles or ~320 km north of Baghdad).

You are somewhere in this book. Which Jonah are you? Are you the Jonah in chapter one? Or are you the Jonah in chapter two ... in three ... or in four? My goal is to help you become the Jonah of chapter three (actually the Jonah of chapter 3 with a better attitude). Maybe you are like the men of the ship. Or you might be like the people of the city of Nineveh. Open your Bible to the book of Jonah ... it is near the end of the Old Testament just past Obadiah. Read all four chapters before you continue in this lesson. Add your own title to each chapter.

Welcome back. How did you do adding your titles to the four chapters? I have several title suggestions for them: "In the ship ... in the fish ... in the city ... in the suburbs", or "I won't obey ... I will obey ... I obey ... I wish I hadn't obeyed", or "Jonah runs ... he prays ... he preaches ... he complains", or "The prodigal prophet ... praying prophet ... preaching prophet ... pouting prophet", or "Sleeping Jonah ... wet Jonah ... walking Jonah ... sweating Jonah", or "In bed ... in the stomach ... in the streets ... in school", or "Thrown-overboard Jonah ... vomited Jonah ... listened-to Jonah ... chastened Jonah". Outlining Jonah is easy and fun. As you study the book of Jonah, think and pray about which chapter describes you. Chapter 1 is about Jonah's disobedience and God's disciplining him back into obedience.

Jonah's commission. God told Jonah to "*cry against*" the great and wicked city of Nineveh, Jonah 1:2. God gave him a clear commission. Jonah knew exactly what God wanted him to do. He, a Jew, was to go inland about 500 miles (800 km) to a notoriously wicked, evil, dangerous, violent, Gentile city. He was to cry against them. They were probably much more dangerous than your neighbors, friends, and family who need to hear your message about Jesus. Did fear cause Jonah to run away? I do not think so. Jonah had other reasons for ignoring and disobeying the

Word of the Lord. In disobedience, he did not go inland to Nineveh. Jonah went out to sea. He did not go east as he should have ... he went west. He went down to the seaport of Joppa. He paid the fare and boarded a ship to sail to Tarshish (possibly modern Spain). Jonah made a major mistake in doing that ... he tried to flee from the presence of God, 1:3. However, he could not escape God's presence any more than you could or I could. *"Can a man hide himself in hiding places, so I do not see him?" declares the Lord. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the Lord*", Jeremiah 23:24. David wrote, *"Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Thy hand will lead me, and Thy right hand will lay hold of me."* Psalm 139:7-10. Jonah should have known better than to try to run away from God. Why did he try to do something so foolish? Moreover, why do we? Why do we sometimes act as if God does not, or cannot, see us? Are you guilty of some so-called secret-sin that you would never commit in front of a pastor, priest, or Christian friend? Don't you know that you do it in full sight of the all-seeing God? Do you act as if the all-knowing God does not know? Do you think that you are not in the presence of the all-present God? Even the unsaved sailors on the ship thought that Jonah was foolish, 1:10. The same thing is true today ... the hypocrisy of a believer seems wrong even to the unsaved. They measure us by a higher standard than they measure themselves. Aren't they right to do so?

Jonah tried to run away from God. However, that never works. The remainder of the book of Jonah shows God disciplining him back into obedience. To start that discipline, God sent a great wind and storm on the sea, 1:4. That first of 12 miracles almost broke the ship apart. It must have been a frightening time in the storm. Several years ago, I was in a big storm off the New England coast. The sailboat seemed so big and safe before we left the harbor. Days later, we were out of the sight of land when a big storm hit us in the open Atlantic Ocean. The sailboat seemed to have shrunk ... it seemed so small in that storm. Waves were breaking over the bow of the boat. We had to turn back to run for the safety of a sheltered island cove. That was frightening. However, Jonah was in a much larger ship. The crew of that ship was comprised of experienced sailors ... and they were afraid. They threw their cargo overboard to make the ship lighter ... profit from the journey ceased to be a priority. They did all they could to save themselves and their ship. They even prayed to their false gods. Their non-existent gods could not help them. The storm grew more and more powerful. Where was Jonah during all of this? Was he above deck helping the sailors try to save the ship? Was he on his knees praying to the one real God? Was he repenting and confessing? No! He had *"gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down, and fallen sound asleep."* 1:5. How could he do that? How could he sleep through such a storm? How could he ignore his problems and those of everyone on the ship? What foolish escapism! The escapism of others always looks more foolish than our own. What about our own escapism?

Disobedient Jonah. The captain woke Jonah. He asked Jonah why he was not praying. Jonah's answer is not given to us. I wonder what Jonah said. Did he offer some weak excuse? Did he feel any conviction of the Spirit? Was his conscience accusing him ... or was it callused and seared? The sailors talked among themselves and decided to cast lots to find out who had caused this disaster. The lot fell on Jonah. Therefore, the sailors confronted him. *"Tell us, now! On whose account has this calamity struck us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"* 1:8. Jonah answered, *"I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."* 1:9. In the middle of the stormy sea, his speaking of the God who made the sea and dry land must have gotten their attention. Jonah had told them that he was trying to run away from the presence of God. Jonah knew the one who made the sea and land. Why would he try to run away from Him? The sailors did not understand it. Do you understand it? Think about what Jonah had done. He had ignored and disobeyed God's Word. He was not praying. In addition, he was not telling people who (or whose) he was. Doesn't that sound like some Christians today? Chapter 1 of Jonah is a picture of a believer running away from God ... ignoring and disobeying God's Word ... not praying ... and not witnessing. I hope that you are not that Jonah. What should Jonah have done at that point? He should have repented. He should have confessed to God. Then he should have looked for the shortest way to Nineveh. But no, Jonah told the men to throw him overboard. He wanted to die. I

want to go to Heaven ... but not one day before God wants me to be there. Only God should schedule that trip. To try to go early is wrong ... it is sin. Why did Jonah make such a foolish suggestion? Why did he think that one more sin would be the way to correct his previous sins? Don't we sometimes do the same thing? Don't we sometimes try to cover one sin with another? Jonah was wrong in trying to do that ... and so are we when we try it. Repentance and confession are always the right way to respond to our sin. One more sin never corrects the damage caused by previous sins. The sailors did all they could to save Jonah, the ship, and themselves. However, the storm grew worse and worse. Their false gods had failed them. Finally, with no other choice left, the sailors prayed to the one true God. Then they threw Jonah into the sea ... not knowing that a God-appointed sea creature was swimming nearby.

Think about those sailors. Their trip probably started like many other trips. They must have expected a normal sea voyage, making their wages by carrying cargo and passengers east across the Mediterranean Sea. They did not know that a disobedient believer was aboard ship. They did not know that they would be, in a sense, innocent victims suffering because of a believer's sin. They did not know that they would come very close to death. They did not know that their gods would fail them in the storm. They did not know that they would meet the one true God. They did not know that their day of danger was going to be their day of salvation. After they threw Jonah overboard, the sea stopped its raging. The storm miraculously ended. *"Then the men feared the Lord greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows."* 1:16. The sailors were converted. They did not try to negotiate some deal with God during the storm. Their repentance came after the storm had ended. God had used the disobedient prophet to bring them to faith. There is an important lesson here ... evangelistic success does not authenticate the evangelist, method, or program. God accomplishes His will ... sometimes in spite of His sinful servants. The sailors were eternally changed. They had become children of the true God. Their cargo was gone and they had thrown one passenger overboard. It had certainly been their most unusual and most important voyage. They must have thought that the storm would kill them ... but out of the storm came salvation. Do you identify with the sailors in their storm? If you feel lost in your storms at sea ... if you need to find the one true God, then you should visit the Web site www.911GOD.org.

Jonah's journey continued. The sailors did not know about the great sea creature that swallowed Jonah. It might have been a whale or even a large shark ... stomach sizes and the Biblical text allow for either. Since I like whales more than sharks, I will refer to this sea creature as a whale for the remaining lessons of this study. Before throwing Jonah overboard, the sailors prayed, *"We earnestly pray, O Lord, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for Thou, O Lord, hast done as Thou hast pleased."* 1:14. What was Jonah thinking when he heard them pray those words? What did he think when they picked him up and carried him to the rail? What were his regrets in mid-air? Did going to Nineveh still seem like such a bad idea? Was the water cold? Did he know how to swim? Did he have any hope of survival? What did it feel like when he was swallowed by the whale? How slimy was it? What did the whale's stomach smell like? Were there any sea creatures in there with him? How dark was it? Was there enough space for him to sit up? Could he get on his knees to pray? Did he have any idea that the devourer would become his deliverer?



Study Questions Answers at end of lesson.

1. What Old Testament book mentions Jonah?

2. What comparison did Jesus make to the prophet Jonah?

3. How many miracles are in the book of Jonah?

4. What modern city's suburbs contain the ruins of Nineveh?

5. What titles did you give to each chapter?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

6. What was Jonah's commission?

7. What attributes of God did Jonah ignore?

8. What was God's first agent of discipline for Jonah?

9. What did the sailors do to try to save themselves?

10. What was Jonah doing when the sailors were doing all of that?

11. What three things was Jonah doing like disobedient believers today?

12. What happened to the sailors?

13. What changed in their prayers from verse 5 to verse 14?

14. How can there be so many study questions on one short chapter?



Personal Reflection

No answers provided for these questions.

1. Do you agree with Jesus that Jonah was real?
2. From what you have learned so far, which chapter of Jonah are you in?
3. In what ways do you act as if God is not all-knowing and all-present?
4. What is your favorite escapism?
5. What is your commission from God?
6. Are you ignoring God's Word, not praying, or not witnessing?
What are you going to do about it? When?
7. Jonah's disobedience offended the unsaved sailors ... what in you offends non-believers?
8. What do you think about the sailors being converted in spite of Jonah's disobedience?
9. Should we evaluate the validity of ministries today by their successes?
10. What do you think it was like inside the whale? How would you feel inside the whale?
11. Should you visit www.911GOD.org?
12. As a believer, are you running away from God? In what way?
13. What storm has God thrown onto your sea?

14. What ship of yours is breaking up?

15. What whale has God sent to devour you? How does it feel?

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Answers to Study Questions

1. What Old Testament book mentions Jonah? **2 Kings 14:25**
2. What comparison did Jesus make to the prophet Jonah? **Jesus compared His own three days and nights in the tomb to Jonah's time in the whale.**
3. How many miracles are in the book of Jonah? **Twelve.**
4. What modern city's suburbs contain the ruins of Nineveh? **Mosul, Iraq.**
5. What titles did you give to each chapter? **No answer is given for this question.**
6. What was Jonah's commission? **To arise ... go to Nineveh ... and cry against it.**
7. What attributes of God did Jonah ignore? **His being all-present and all-knowing.**
8. What was God's first agent of discipline for Jonah? **The Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea causing a great storm that almost destroyed the ship in which he was traveling.**
9. What did the sailors do to try to save themselves? **They prayed to their false gods ... threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship ... they cast lots ... they questioned Jonah ... they rowed even harder ... they prayed to the true God ... and they threw Jonah overboard.**
10. What was Jonah doing when the sailors were doing all of that? **Sleeping in the hold of the ship.**
11. What three things was Jonah doing like disobedient believers today? **He ignored God's Word ... he was not praying ... and he was not telling the perishing people around him about God (not witnessing).**
12. What happened to the sailors? **They were converted in spite of Jonah.**
13. What changed in their prayers from verse 5 to verse 14? **In verse 5, they prayed to their non-existent gods ... in verse 14, they prayed to the one true God.**
14. How can there be so many study questions on one short chapter? **It is filled with so much teaching and so many meaningful examples.**

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