



Jonah Runs from God

Jonah 1 - 2

Many times in the Bible, we read that God spoke to His prophets. What is not so common is a prophet who refuses to obey God's command. When Jonah heard God's call to go to Nineveh, he ran in the opposite direction. But God pursued Jonah because God loves people.



Day #1: Sin in Nineveh

What are some famous cities that you can name today? Why are these cities famous? (Because they are so big, because they have so many people living there.) Back in Jonah's day, one of the most famous cities was Nineveh. The people in this huge city did not know about the one true God. They worshipped many false gods, and sinned very much. (Parents' note: Even today, there are cities known for their sin.)

One day, God sent a message to His prophet, Jonah. God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and tell the Ninevites that their sins were really terrible. God wanted these people to turn from their sin and follow Him (2 Peter 3:9).

God could have chosen anyone to proclaim the good news to the Ninevites, but by His grace, God chose Jonah. It is a great privilege to tell people about the Lord.

† For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." But how can they call on Him to save them unless they believe in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them? - Romans 10:13-14 NLT

* God chose Jonah to tell the Ninevites about the seriousness of their sin and the forgiveness of God. Has God called you to tell someone in your life? How will they know if no one tells them?

Day #2: About-Face

When God spoke to Jonah, Jonah was in a city called Joppa. To get to Nineveh, he would have had to travel **Northeast**. (Stand up and face one direction. We'll call this Northeast.) But what did Jonah do?

Day #2 continued:

† *Jonah ran away from the Lord. He headed for Tarshish.* - Jonah 1:3a

Jonah jumped on a ship headed **West** across the ocean. (Turn and face the other direction.) Jonah did the opposite of what God commanded! Jonah refused to go to Nineveh because he didn't like the Ninevites.

The Bible tells us that Jonah knew how wonderfully forgiving God is. He knew that when the people of Nineveh heard the good news that God loved them and wanted them to turn from their sin, they just might do it! Then God would certainly forgive them. Jonah simply did not want God to forgive the Ninevites! (Jonah 4:2)

Jonah was foolish to think that he could stop God's plan to save the Ninevites.

A man may have many plans in his heart. But the Lord's purpose wins out in the end. - Proverbs 19:21

Of course, no man can stop the plan of the almighty God of the universe! And Jonah's disobedience was about to bring a boat-load of trouble into his life! Discuss what Jonah should have done when God gave him these clear instructions.

* God always wants what is best for His people. He wanted to bless Jonah, and He wants to bless you. It is ALWAYS right to obey God right away!

Day #3: Respect for God

Jonah boarded a boat, climbed down below deck, and went to sleep. Jonah probably thought that he had outsmarted God, but that was certainly NOT the case! Jonah may have run away from Nineveh, but he could never run away from God.

† *But the Lord sent a strong wind over the Mediterranean Sea. A wild storm came up. It was so wild that the ship was in danger of breaking apart.* - Jonah 1:4

Who sent the wind? (God did!) All of the sailors were terrified. The sailors tossed everything they could find overboard to keep from sinking. Desperately, they called out to all of their false gods for help. But their false gods could do nothing for them (1 Samuel 12:21). So the captain ran to wake up Jonah. He told Jonah to call out to his God for help. But Jonah was silent.

Day #3 continued:

Finally, the sailors found out that it was Jonah's fault. Jonah admitted he was running from God. He explained who he was. They wanted to know what god he served. Jonah told them that his God was the one true God, the Creator of the sea and the land. This terrified the sailors.

The Bible says that the fear, or great respect, of the Lord is the beginning of true wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). For the first time, these sailors saw just how powerful and mighty the Creator God was. At this moment, they truly respected Him. This was the beginning of truth for them. This storm, brought by God, caused these ungodly sailors to turn their eyes to the one true God.

* Sometimes God uses very difficult situations to get people to turn to Him (Exodus 9:16, 10:1-2). If you have a non-believing friend who is going through a tough time, pray for him or her. Pray that he or she will respect God and turn to Him.

Day #4: Silent Sea

We left Jonah and the sailors when they were about to sink in a wild storm at sea. Fill your kitchen sink with a few inches of water. Toss in a plastic lid from a small plastic container. This lid will represent the ship that Jonah was in. How can you recreate the storm? (Splash in the water.) Give it a try!

Knowing that the one true God had caused the storm, and knowing that Jonah was God's prophet, the sailors asked Jonah what they should do to stop the storm. Imagine their surprise when Jonah said:

+ *"Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied. "Then it will become calm. I know it's my fault that this terrible storm has come on you."* - Jonah 1: 12

The sailors couldn't make themselves throw a man overboard. They tried with all their might to row back to land, but they couldn't do it. They were powerless against the will of God (Proverbs 19:21). Remember, Jonah spoke God's message, and God's message was that Jonah had to go into the sea!

The waves were crashing. (Splash away!) The sailors finally realized that they could not save themselves; they had to trust God's plan. So, they prayed to Jonah's God, and then they threw Jonah overboard. Splash!

(Now, stop splashing.) Instantly, the sea was calm. The men were saved! They began praising God and offered a sacrifice to Him. Not only were the sailors saved physically, but they were also saved spiritually when they trusted God (Romans 4:5).

Day #4 continued:

* You are saved in the same way as the sailors - by putting your complete trust in God. When you accept God's saving plan (that Jesus died to take away your sin), you are saved.

God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn't come from anything you do. It is God's gift. - Ephesians 2:8

Day #5: Jonah's Rescue

What is something that must be "prepared"? Your mother might prepare your Christmas meal. She may make turkey and dressing, vegetable casseroles, and pies and cakes for dessert. Then the table is set, and everyone sits down to savor the delicious food. Now, this meal doesn't just "happen." It takes days of shopping, chopping, making, and baking. She took loving care to prepare this special meal.

When Jonah was sinking to the depths of the ocean, God had prepared something special for Jonah.

+ *Now the Lord had **prepared** a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.* - Jonah 1:17

God had prepared a rescue plan for Jonah! There was no depth that Jonah could sink to that was out of God's reach. God sent a huge fish to swallow Jonah. The fish swallowed Jonah whole (as most fish do). And even though the belly of a fish must have been a really STINKY place to be, God protected Jonah there. God allowed enough air for Jonah to breathe for three days.

While Jonah was inside the great big fish, he prayed to the Lord:

I had almost drowned in the waves. The deep waters were all around me... I thought I had died and gone down into the grave forever. But You brought my life up from the very edge of the pit. You are the Lord my God. - Jonah 2:5-6

This was a beautiful prayer, but it was not a prayer of repentance. Jonah was very thankful that God had saved him, but Jonah had not changed his mind about his sin. But God is so full of grace! God commanded the fish to spit Jonah out on the shore to give Jonah another chance to obey. When God commanded the big fish, the big fish obeyed! Now, would Jonah be as obedient?

* God pursues people because He loves them. Therefore, you should not grow tired of sharing the truth of Jesus with someone, even if they do not seem to accept it right away. Pray for wisdom and the right words to say. God may be using you to give that person another opportunity to follow Him.