



SERIES: JONAH

JONAH 1:1-17 • 2/13/2022

MAIN POINT

God will go to extreme measures to move His people to obedience.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Growing up, did you ever want to run away from home? Why or why not?

What has made or would make you want to run away from God?

The key question we want to focus on in today's lesson is: Are we running away from God, toward God, or with God? If we're not running with Him every day, then what must happen to change our direction?

The Book of Jonah is not a story about a fish. Neither is it simply a story about a rebellious prophet. The central character in the book is God. The book reflects God's

love for the lost, the tragic failure of His people to share that love, and the extreme measures God may use to move His people to obedience.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ JONAH 1:1-2.

We know very little about the prophet Jonah. He is identified in verse 1 only as the “son of Amittai.” He also is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25. According to the 2 Kings passage, Jonah had experienced past success as a prophet. He had heard and delivered God’s message to King Jeroboam II of Israel. As a result, Israel’s territories had been expanded. Jonah most likely was highly popular and respected among the people of God because of this. God gave a specific command to Jonah: Go to Nineveh and preach against it.

When you struggle to obey God, what are the most common reasons why?

Is there anything you think God is asking you to do that doesn’t make sense to you?

READ JONAH 1:3.

Jonah’s response to God’s call may have been something like: “Lord, You know I love You, but faith has limits. I will go anywhere You send me—just not to Nineveh.” For

some of us our personal Nineveh might actually be a place. For others it may be a task. Our personal Nineveh may be whatever God is requiring us to do right now.

Is there something you would have a hard time doing if God asked it of you? Why?

Contrast Jonah's response to God's call with how other Old Testament prophets responded to His call, by reading 1 Kings 17:1-6; Isaiah 6:8-11; and Jeremiah 1:4-10.

Is your response to God today more like Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Jonah?

People today attempt to run from God in a variety of ways. Being in God's will is not primarily a matter of where we are geographically but has to do with where we are spiritually. We can run from God without ever leaving our geographic location. Jonah's disobedience was an expression of a cold heart, a heart that did not beat in sync with God's. While some believers run from specific tasks God calls them to, many more simply refuse to run with God in everyday life. We fill our lives with so many activities that time for God and ministry to people gets squeezed out.

READ JONAH 1:4-10.

In verse 4, what was the consequence of Jonah's disobedience?

What are some consequences we experience today when we run from God's will?

Any believer attempting to run from God eventually will come to face the consequences of that disobedience in the hope that he or she might turn back to God. Sometimes it may be months or even years before the consequences surface. For Jonah, it was a matter of hours or days. Though it may not happen immediately, we

will always face the consequences when we do not obey God. God does not quickly give up on His people who fail to do His will. In spite of our stubbornness and self-absorption, He still desires to accomplish His purposes through us.

Lead in a discussion of some of the indicators that the church today has fallen asleep in regard to its mission. What “storms” do you think God has sent to awaken His church?

READ JONAH 1:11-17.

What do you think of Jonah’s request to be thrown into the sea (v. 12)? Was it an heroic, selfless act, or was it a reflection of his continuing stubborn refusal to accept God’s purpose for his life?

Jonah had a better theological understanding of God, but he lacked compassion for others, as chapter 4 will make clear. The sailors showed greater concern for one physical life than Jonah displayed for a multitude of spiritual lives. Jonah learned the hard way that you can run, but you can’t hide from God. Jonah also learned that God will spare no expense in pursuing those who run away from Him. God will pursue us to bring Him back to Himself. The greatest evidence of this truth is seen on the cross (Rom. 5:8).

Read Matthew 12:40-41. What is the meaning of Jonah’s entombment for Jesus? How did Jonah compare to Jesus?

Why do you think God didn’t simply raise up someone else to do the task Jonah refused?

Why do you think obeying God is always in our best interest?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

The Bible lets us look at the interaction between God and Jonah so we can understand better our own interaction with God. God still calls people into service and sends them to faraway nations. He also sends His servants to next-door neighbors, to friends and coworkers, to enemies and opponents. So before we condemn Jonah too harshly, let his example remind us of how we have responded or are responding to God's call. The key question each of us must ask ourselves today is this: Am I running away from God, toward God, or with God? If I'm not running with Him, then what must happen to change my direction?

How has this lesson encouraged you? How has this lesson challenged you?

To whom might God be sending you to share the gospel? How can you take advantage of opportunities to share with them this week?

PRAYER

Thank God for loving us enough to send storms and fish. Pray that we will run to Him and not from Him.

COMMENTARY

1:1. Jonah in Hebrew means "dove." His father's name Amittai means "faithful is Yahweh."

1:2. Nineveh on the east bank of the Tigris River became the Assyrian capital after 705 B.C., well after Jonah's day. Its ruins are found in the northern part of modern Iraq, opposite the city of Mosul 220 miles northwest of Baghdad. For Jonah, Nineveh was an arduous journey of over 500 miles to the northeast of Samaria. His probable route—first traveling north and then east—would have made the trip closer to 600 miles. God's holiness is offended by sin. He showed Himself judge of the world by holding these distant pagans accountable for their wickedness, though He also showed His mercy by commanding His prophet to warn them.

1:3. To flee from the Lord's presence is to attempt the impossible since God is everywhere, though people still try. (See 4:2 for why he fled.) Joppa on the Mediterranean coast just south of modern Tel Aviv was one of Israel's few natural seaports. The location of Tarshish is uncertain. Its association with ships (1 Kings 10:22) suggests it was near the sea. The "ships of Tarshish" used by King Jehoshaphat on the Red Sea were probably merchant ships of design similar to those used by sailors from Tarshish on the Mediterranean Sea. Tarshish has sometimes been identified with Paul's home of Tarsus in Cilicia or the city of Tharros on the island of Sardinia west of Italy. But the most probable identification of Tarshish is the Phoenician colony of Tartessus, located on the Guadalquivir River on the southwestern coast of Spain about 2,000 miles west of Palestine. This is about as far in the opposite direction from Nineveh that Jonah could have gone.

1:5-6. Jonah's spiritual decline is depicted in parallel with the descriptions of his response to God's call. He was told to "get up" (v. 2) to go to Nineveh, but instead he "went down to Joppa" (v. 3), "went down" to the ship (v. 3) and finally went down to the lowest part of the vessel. Eventually he will be swallowed by a fish and sink down to the foundations of the mountains at the bottom of the sea (2:6). Only then did he hit bottom and begin to go back up. His deep sleep in the midst of a storm also symbolizes his spiritual condition. It may have been a symptom of depression stemming from his willful disobedience.

1:9. Worship is literally "fear." Fear of God in the Old Testament is the respect that a person has for God, causing him to turn from evil and obey God's commandments (Gen. 22:12; Job 1:8; 28:28; Prov. 8:13). Ironically God's prophet Jonah showed no such fear by his disobedience. It is also ironic that Jonah fled to avoid preaching to Gentiles in Nineveh, but now found himself preaching to Gentiles in the ship. Yahweh means "He is present" and is God's personal name in the Old Testament, ordinarily rendered in translation as LORD (as in vv. 1,3,4,10,16,17). The substitution

in translation of the title LORD for the personal name Yahweh goes back to postexilic Jewish reluctance to pronounce the divine name. Neither Jonah nor these sailors had any qualms about using the term Yahweh at this time.

1:12-15. Rather than submitting to God, Jonah asked these men to kill him by throwing him overboard. Yet despite Jonah's confession of guilt, these pagan Gentiles had moral scruples about sending a man to his death and tried to row ashore instead. Only after they saw no other option and had prayed that Yahweh would not hold them accountable for taking a human life did they throw Jonah into the sea. The integrity and spiritual sensitivity of these Gentiles would have shocked Israelite readers of this book, confronting their belief that non-Hebrews were unworthy of God's mercy. Certainly this is a lesson Jonah himself needed.

1:16. When the sea calmed, these Gentile sailors then feared the Lord in the sense of revering and worshiping Him. Jonah, who was fleeing from a mission to preach to Gentiles, had unintentionally converted an entire crew of Gentile sailors.

1:17. The huge fish that swallowed Jonah was not necessarily a whale. Yarns of a sailor surviving Jonah-like in a whale have been widely repeated in recent centuries, but no account has ever been authenticated. Three days and three nights parallels Christ's resurrection on the third day (Matt. 12:40).