

Running from the Will of God

1. The Book of Jonah opens by saying, "Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah." This phrase literally means the word of the Lord "was" or "became" to Jonah. We are not told how it came to the prophet, nor is this important; God's message is what's important.
 - a. What did God command Jonah to do (v. 2)?
 - b. How did Jonah respond (v. 3)?
 2. Jonah's attempt to flee from the presence of the Lord seems surprising since he had been a faithful prophet of God. Many New Testament believers are amazed that the prophet Jonah could blatantly ignore the direct command of God; however, there is a striking parallel in God's relationship with the church today.
 - a. What direct command has God given every church and every believer that is also ignored by thousands of believers every day (Matt 28:19,20; Acts 1:8)?
 - b. If you are a Christian, how are you doing in obediently following God's revealed will?
 3. As you read the beginning verses of chapter one, it is easy to focus on the prophet's defection rather than what God was doing. Take a minute to consider what God is doing in these opening verses. List at least five things that the Text teaches us about God and His nature (v. 1-7).
 4. When God's people turn away from His commands, they sin and others are hurt in the process. Tragically, the erring believer is often oblivious, asleep like Jonah (v. 4-6).
 - a. Name at least four individuals or groups who were adversely affected by Jonah's rebellion and how they were affected (v. 4-6).
 - b. What spiritual lessons can you learn from this experience?
 5. God could have rejected Jonah (or killed him) and chosen another prophet to serve Him. Nevertheless, God pursued His wayward servant with great patience and love.
 - a. What three things did God cause to happen to Jonah in an attempt to restore him to spiritual fellowship and service (v. 4-8)?
 - b. What should believers do when another Christian falls into sin (Jn. 5:16b; Gal. 6:1; Matt. 18:15-17)?
 6. Sometimes backslidden believers deceive themselves into thinking that they are not out of fellowship with God because they can still talk openly about God to others. However, it is not saying the words of God but submitting to the will of God that distinguishes those who are true disciples of Jesus Christ. Is there anything in your life that is keeping you from being a more committed follower of Christ?
 7. Jonah's rebellion caused God to unleash a storm that threatened to take his life and the lives of his fellow mariners (v. 4). Jonah's original rebellion had advanced from mere indifference and apathy to a blatant disregard for the lives of his fellow man.
 - a. How did the unsaved sailors respond when Jonah told them to throw him overboard (v. 11-13)?
 - b. Throughout the centuries churches have often led the way in charitable work (the construction of hospitals, orphanages and countless other acts of benevolence); however, there have been times when the compassion of the lost has surpassed that of the church. If you can, give some examples (past or present) of when this has happened.
 - c. Are there any dangers in getting involved in charitable work?
 - d. Are there any dangers in not taking the physical needs of people seriously?
 - e. Can charitable work be tied into the Church's main mission of spreading the gospel?
 8. The storm increased and the mariners quickly realized that it was impossible for them to row to land. They consented to Jonah's plan, prayed and threw him overboard (v. 14-16). What two things happened when Jonah was thrown overboard (v. 15-17)?
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Read: Jonah 2 & 3

Monday

2:1,2 — God went to great lengths to show Jonah that he could not go his own way. How long did Jonah wrestle with God (1:17)? How does Jonah describe his experience in verses 1-2? I get the impression that Jonah did not have a fun time in the belly of the fish (the Hebrew word “Sheol” means hell). Do you think Jonah would have experienced greater suffering if he had submitted to God’s will to begin with? Looking back on his experience, do you think Jonah would run from God again?

Tuesday

2:3-6 — How does Jonah describe his time in the great fish? Notice how many times Jonah says, “you and your.” Jonah understood that God was fully in control, and he accepted his “affliction” as from God. Why would God allow one of His dear children to suffer (Deut. 8:5; Heb. 12:6). Sometimes God brings trials and suffering into the lives of His children to discipline them, such is the case with Jonah. God mercifully spared Jonah’s life, but He also mercifully brought affliction into Jonah’s life. Hebrews 12:11 says, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” God’s discipline usually isn’t pleasant, but we can say with complete certainty that God loves us and He always has our best in mind.

Wednesday

2:7-10 — When Jonah got to rock bottom, then he turned to the Lord. Many people down through the ages have that same testimony. God will very often use hard circumstances to draw both believers and unbelievers to Himself. Why is it that some people will not turn to God until they are “at the end of their rope”? I think the answer is found at the end of verse 9: “Salvation is of the Lord.” When life is easy people tend to see themselves as self-sufficient, and pride keeps them from seeing their need for a Savior; but when all hope is lost and you can’t see any other way out than the hope in Christ is a beautiful thing. “*Salvation is of the Lord.*” Take great comfort in that knowledge today. Life can be hard and sin can seem oppressive, but Jesus Christ is an all-sufficient Savior.

Thursday

3:1 — The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. God often has to repeat even His most basic commands to His servants. It is like God is saying, *Okay, now that I have your attention, let’s try this thing again.* Notice that God’s second command to Jonah was nearly identical to the first. A story is told of an elderly preacher who preached the same message four Sundays in a row. A man in the church gently confronted the preacher and told him they had noticed he was preaching the same message over and over again. His reply was: “And I am going to keep on preaching same message until you people apply it!” How often have you heard a sermon or read a Bible verse and become convicted of sin yet never do anything about it? James says that thinking is self deception (Js. 1:22).

Friday

3:1-4 — Jonah arose and went to Nineveh—this time without delay. The three days and nights in the belly of the fish would have left Jonah a frightening figure to look at, his hair would likely have been bleached completely white and his skin would have been blotchy, leaving him with a ghostly appearance. When Jonah reached Nineveh he entered the city and began to preach. It has been said that there has never been a shorter message that produced greater results. Jonah’s message seems abrupt, unloving and woefully lacking in theological content. Do you think Jonah really cared for the people of Nineveh or was he obedient because he didn’t want any further chastening?

Saturday

3:5-10 — The king issued a decree for a fast that was published throughout the city. The inclusion of the animals (likely sheep, goats, cows and horses), not understanding why food and water was temporarily withheld from them, would have made a dreadful sound throughout the city as the fast continued. The king also called the people to repentance (v. 8) as a prerequisite to the expectation of God’s mercy (v. 9). Repentance means to agree with God about your sin; it is a change of mind, which always leads to a change in actions. Is there a particular sin that you need to repent of? Take some time, confess and repent of that sin today.
