

How To Know When You Are Running From God

Jonah

How do you explain stories to people like Jonah to nonChristians?

Do you shy away from the story of Jonah, or do you embrace it?

What Does The Bible Say?

38 One day some teachers of religious law and Pharisees came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove your authority.”

39 But Jesus replied, “Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign; but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

(Matthew 12:38–40 NLT)

Jesus taught that Jonah was a natural person that had an authentic experience.

Also, the Bible does not say whale, but a great fish.

If Jesus died and was dead for three days and then came back to life, then all other miracles in Scripture pale in comparison.

What Does The Bible Say?

3 But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the Lord. He went down to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, hoping to escape from the Lord by sailing to Tarshish.

(Jonah 1:3 NLT)

Jonah thought he could run from God.

What are ways people try to run from God's presence?

5 Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship.

But all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold. 6 So the captain went down after him. "How can you sleep at a time like this?" he shouted. "Get up and pray to your god! Maybe he will pay attention to us and spare our lives." (Jonah 1:5-6 NLT)

1. We are running from God when we use our feelings to justify our actions.

Listen to your heart, but don't follow it if it contradicts God's Word.

9 Jonah answered, "I am a Hebrew, and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." (Jonah 1:9 NLT)

2. We are running from God when our words and actions don't match.

What Does The Bible Say?

10 When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened.

4:1 This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. 2 So he complained to the Lord about it: “Didn’t I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people. 3 Just kill me now, Lord! I’d rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen.” (Jonah 3:9 - 4:3 NLT)

Jonah is upset because God is merciful to the Ninevites.

3. We are running from God when our hearts do not match God's.

How Can You Obey?

Jesus taught us what to pray for in this life:

9 Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. 10 May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9–10 NLT)

Then Jesus gave us this example before he was crucified:

39 He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, “My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.” (Matthew 26:39 NLT)

Are you praying for your heart to match God's?

Additional Notes:

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at www.crosswaveschurch.com/host. Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

Explore:

KEY TRUTHS:

1. God Disciplines Believers Who Disobey Him (Jonah 1:1-17)
2. God Does Great Things Through Believers Who Obey Him (Jonah 3:1-10)

HOW IT FITS: Where This Lesson Fits in the Story of the

Bible: Jonah prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II who ruled the northern kingdom of Israel from 782 to 753 BC. The

book of Jonah demonstrates that God has compassion for all people, not just the Jews, and wants all to repent and be saved.

Explore:

The book of Jonah contains one of the most interesting and debated events of the Old Testament. The author is not given, but many scholars believe it was Jonah himself. Jonah was a contemporary of Hosea and Amos and the events recorded would have occurred sometime between 793 BC and 753 BC. God used a storm, a large fish, and a plant to teach Jonah that God loves all people and wants all to repent and be saved.

God Disciplines Believers Who Disobey Him

(Jonah 1:1-17)

Chapter 1 opens by indicating that God spoke to the prophet Jonah. Jonah was from a small village near Nazareth and was the son of Amittai (see 2 Kings 14:25). Jonah's time as prophet coincided with the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel.

Previously, Jonah had delivered news from God that Israel's borders would expand (2 Kings 14:25). Jonah was one of four Old Testament prophets whose ministries were referred to by Christ (Matthew 12:38-41).

God's desire that all come to repentance caused Him to direct Jonah to preach to the wicked people of Nineveh (verse 2).

Nineveh is described as a great city, an expression that likely referred to its size and power. It was a wicked city. Nineveh was

one of four major cities of Assyria, which was polytheistic with numerous “chief deities” that they worshiped. The Assyrians were also known for their violence and brutality.

Jonah’s apparent hatred for the people of Nineveh caused him to disobey and try to flee on a ship bound for Tarshish (verse 3). He must have thought he could resist the call of God by fleeing and that God would then choose someone else for this task. God didn’t choose someone else, however, and used a severe storm to get Jonah’s attention (verse 4).

This storm endangered the crew and other passengers on the ship. They began crying out to their false gods for help, but to no avail (verse 5). They then began throwing the cargo overboard in an effort to save their lives. Interestingly, Jonah was below decks asleep. Apparently, his conscience was not bothered even though it was his disobedience that had caused the entire dilemma. In a last-ditch effort, the captain woke Jonah and begged him to cry

out to his God in hopes that He would spare their lives (verse 6).

The reader is left to wonder whether Jonah did so or not.

Regardless, the storm continued and the mariners tried a different approach.

In verse 7, they cast lots in an attempt to discover who had caused the terrible circumstances they were experiencing.

Casting lots was a common practice in the East to try and determine the will of the “gods.” It was also a practice that occurs throughout Scripture from the episode of choosing the scapegoat in the Old Testament to replacing Judas Iscariot in the New Testament. Here, the lot fell on Jonah, communicating to the seamen that Jonah was the reason for the catastrophic storm.

In verse 8, the sailors asked Jonah a series of questions in an attempt to understand their dilemma. The questions must have pricked Jonah’s conscience, especially when asked, what is your

occupation? He was a prophet who was running from God's plan for his life.

Jonah identified himself as a Hebrew and a believer in the Lord, the God of Heaven who made the sea and the dry land (verse 9).

This implied that this God could control the sea. The response of the mariners in verse 10 was fear. They asked Jonah what he had done. Jonah's disobedience affected those around him. They suffered because of his choice to disobey.

In verse 11, the sailors asked Jonah what they could do to quiet the sea. Jonah realized the storm was his fault. The Lord was disciplining him. The only way to stop the storm was to throw him over- board (verse 12). Jonah was now penitent and willing to endure the necessary punishment, even death, in order to save the lives of the sailors.

His fellow shipmates were noble in trying to avoid throwing Jonah overboard, but it was the only recourse (verse 13). They

tried rowing back to land, but the seas only grew wilder. In verse 14, the sailors cried out to the God of Jonah requesting that they not die because of taking Jonah on as a passenger. It was not their fault that Jonah had disobeyed God. Regardless of Jonah's foolishness, these men did not want Jonah's blood on their hands. They had no other option, however, and they cast him overboard (verse 15). Immediately the sea grew calm.

In verse 16, the pagan sailors feared the Lord, made sacrifices to Him, and vowed to obey Him. The fear spoken of here was reverence (see Psalm 111:10). Having seen God's control of the sea and recognizing that He had heard their prayers, these men were convinced of Jonah's message to them about God (see Jonah 1:9). They offered sacrifices and made vows to the Lord. Just as the Ninevites would later do, these men heard the message of the prophet of God and responded in faith.

The narrative turned back to Jonah in verse 17 as a great fish swallowed him. This expression was a general term for a large fish, and not specifically a whale. Scholars suggest this fish could have been a marine mammal, a whale shark, or a sperm whale, just to name a few. The fact that Jonah survived three days and nights inside this fish was miraculous. God's purposes and sovereignty are highlighted here as He appointed this fish for this cause. This God did, just as He had appointed Jonah to preach to the Ninevites and would later appoint a plant to provide shade for Jonah and then a worm to kill the plant (Jonah 4:6- 8). The three days and nights that Jonah spent in the belly of the fish would also be symbolic of the time Jesus spent in the tomb after His death on the cross (Matthew 12:40). In chapter 2, Jonah humbled himself and thanked God for sending the fish to save him, and God directed the fish to spit Jonah out on dry land.

Explore:

God Does Great Things Through Believers Who Obey Him (Jonah 3:1-10)

Chapter 3 begins with the word of the Lord coming to Jonah a second time. God once again instructed Jonah to travel to Nineveh and preach the judgment of God to the inhabitants (verses 1-2). This time Jonah obeyed the Lord and went to Nineveh (verse 3). He was now prepared to obey God and declare whatever message the Lord gave him to deliver. This is a great reminder that God gives second chances.

Archaeology shows us that Nineveh was surrounded by an inner wall and an outer wall. It is believed that the inner wall was 50 feet wide and nearly 100 feet tall and was about eight miles in circumference. The outer wall encompassed fields and even smaller towns. The greatness of Nineveh is further explained in verse 3 as requiring a three-day journey to travel through it.

Some interpret this to mean that it would require three days to adequately visit. Others view three days as the time it would take for Jo- nah to preach the message in all the public squares.

Regardless of the author's intended meaning, this was a large and powerful city. The message of the Lord, delivered by Jonah, was succinct and powerful too, including the fact that Nineveh would be totally destroyed within 40 days (verse 4).

Commentators see the 40 days as a period of grace in which the people would have the opportunity to turn from their sinful ways.

Verse 5 reports that the Ninevites believed God in response to Jonah's preaching. They outwardly displayed their inner conviction and sorrow over their sins. They fasted and put on sackcloth and sat in ashes, and everyone from greatest to least mourn- ed their sin. Fasting, a time set aside for abstaining from food, was a common practice when people were seeking God's

mercy. Sackcloth was an uncomfortable fabric made of goat or camel hair. Wearing it demonstrated a person's mourning and repentance. By sitting in ashes, the king was expressing deep humiliation and sorrow before God.

Jonah's message and the citizens' response reached the king of Nineveh, believed by some scholars to be Ashurdan III (verse 6). The king called for his people to fast and call out to God for forgiveness. Like the people, he demonstrated his contrition and his belief in Jonah's message by wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes. He also, with the approval of the nobles, issued a proclamation to be announced throughout Nineveh (verse 7).

The decree began with a general fast that was applicable to both humans and animals. This fast included drinking no water.

Along with the fast was a requirement of wearing sackcloth for both man and beast. The people were also to call out to God while turning from the evil and violence that had characterized

Nineveh (verse 8). Even the animals would be “crying out” after a few days of no food or water. The king and the nobles were fully convinced that judgment was headed their way. They urged the people to respond appropriately in the hope that God might be appeased and relent. They were at God’s mercy.

In verse 9, the king acknowledged the possibility that God might turn from His fierce anger and spare the Ninevites. Much like the ship captain in Jonah 1:6, the king understood that the Lord could relent and spare them. At this point, the king and the people were willing to throw themselves at God’s mercy. It was the only response that could possibly keep the nation and the people from destruction.

The repentance of the people was graciously accepted by the Lord (verse 10). Just as He had relented and spared Jonah in chapter 2, He spared the Ninevites in chapter 3. Keep in mind that this was not what Jonah was hoping for (see chapter 4).

God, however, wanted Jonah to understand that God loves all people and wants them to turn to Him and be saved (4:11). He allows humans the chance to repent of their sins and avert impending judgment.

Explore:

God's incredible power and work in nature and in Jonah's life demonstrated that God is the Sovereign Lord of all.

Explore:

Casting lots is mentioned 70 times in the Old Testament and seven times in the New Testament. The closest modern practice to the casting of lots would be the flipping of a coin or possibly the rolling of dice. People in both the Old Testament and New Testament believed God would determine the outcome of the lots and that in doing so, He could reveal His purposes or will to them (Proverbs 16:33). Believers today have the completed canon of Scripture for guidance as well as the indwelling Holy Spirit. Believers should be using prayer, the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit for guidance and not the random odds of casting lots or flipping a coin.

Explore:

This record of Jonah's episode and mission to Nineveh was addressed to Israel. The book was written not simply to record a historical narrative; in addition it conveyed a message to the

Northern Kingdom. Also in one sense Jonah is not the principal person in the book; God is. The Lord had the first word (Jonah 1:1–2) and the last (4:11). God commanded the prophet twice (1:2; 3:2); He sent a violent storm on the sea (1:4); He provided a great fish to rescue Jonah (1:17); He commanded the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land (2:10); He threatened Nineveh with judgment and relented in compassion (3:10); He provided a vine to shade His prophet (4:6); He commissioned a worm to destroy the plant (4:7); and He sent a scorching wind to discomfort Jonah (4:8).

What then is the message God was seeking to deliver to Israel through His dealings with Jonah, the Ninevites, and natural phenomena? (i.e., the sea, animal life, plant life, and the wind).

First, one apparent message to Israel is God's concern for Gentile peoples.

Second, the book demonstrates the sovereignty of God in accomplishing His purposes.

Third, the response of the Gentiles served as a message of rebuke to God's sinful nation Israel.

Fourth, Jonah was a symbol to Israel of her disobedience to God and indifference to the religious plight of other nations.

John D. Hannah, "Jonah," in *The Bible Knowledge*

Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, ed. J. F.

Explore:

At least this is true among those scholars who do not submit to Scripture as the very words of God. These scholars find a fish swallowing a man and a man surviving inside of a fish for three days and three nights to be impossible. To these scholars,

Jonah's account is myth—a "tale" or originating in "legendary material" (Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 630). For them,

"Jonah and the Whale" is categorized with other fables involving

interaction with animals, such as “The Boy Who Cried ‘Wolf!’ ” or “The Snake and the Traveler.” In fact, Jonah is considered less moral and less interesting than most children’s cartoon characters.

However, Jesus did not think Jonah’s story was mythical. He said, “For as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights” (Matt 12:40). Jesus could not have said “as Jonah” if Jonah were not real. If He had used a mythical Jonah in His analogy, His audience might have thought the prediction of His own death and resurrection would also be myth rather than fact of history.

Eric Redmond, William Curtis, and Ken Fentress, *Exalting Jesus in Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 4.

Explore:

Christianity is about more than going to church and living a good moral life. Being a Christian is about having a vibrant personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Every Sunday School teacher or Bible study leader should want to see each of his or her learners enter into this relationship—their eternal destiny depends on it. As you work toward this goal, keep the following in mind:

Following Christ is about more than a mere decision; it is about a lifelong relationship. Jesus called us to make disciples, not mere decision-makers. Aim for long-term faith, not momentary emotion.

Salvation is a matter of grace, not works. Our works do not save us (Ephesians 2:8-9), nor do they keep us (Galatians 3:2-6).

Good works are a product of salvation, not a prerequisite to it.

Don't confuse sanctification with salvation. Holiness follows salvation; it doesn't precede it. Don't try to impose "Christian" expectations on men and women who don't know Christ.

- Keep it simple. Being born again is not complicated. Here's a simple way to explain it:

- Acknowledge your sinfulness and your need for a Savior (Romans 3:10, 23).

- Trust in Christ's sacrifice for your sins and in His resurrection (Romans 10:9-10).

Surrender your life to God's transforming power (Romans 12:1-2).

Most of all, remember that your job is to tell the truth in a way others can understand, answer their questions, and give them an opportunity to respond. If you do that faithfully, some will respond and join the band of Christ-followers. When they do, Heaven will rejoice!

Question 1 of 5

Is natural disasters God's judgment on us for our sins?

Question 2 of 5

Why do believers not consistently share their faith with unsaved people within their sphere of influence?

Question 3 of 5

How do you explain miracles in the Bible?

Question 4 of 5

Why are our emotions a gauge but not a guide to following God?

Question 5 of 5

What actions do we take to have a heart like God's?